

Review: Music of the Capilla Flamenca in Spain
with Graham Coatman, 12th March 2016

On a sunny, almost-Spring Saturday singers gathered in St Leonard's Church, Yarpole, for a day exploring the music of the 16th century 'Flemish Chapel' in Spain. Our tutor, Graham Coatman, is Senior Lecturer at Leeds College of Music and includes among his credentials expertise in this area of music and in training a wide variety of choirs, both very positive recommendations.

A series of invigorating and tongue-twisting warm-ups saw us suitably prepared, helpless laughter proving its worth in relaxing the vocal cords. Our programme for the day, selected and edited by Graham with due regard to modern-day vocal ranges, took us in approximately chronological order through music by composers from the Netherlands working in Spain between the death of Josquin and the end of the 16th century: Crecquillon, Canis, Payen, Manchicourt and Rogier. Naturally most pieces were settings of sacred texts for use in the chapel, but we tackled a couple of definitely secular chansons too, written no doubt to while away the composers' off-duty hours. Personal favourites were Payen's 'theme-and-variations' funeral motet for the Empress Isabella, and Rogier's double-choir *Regina Caeli*.

As we went Graham made us aware of various structural features that helped create the impact of each piece: textural variation, movement from polyphony to homophony and back, section breaks corresponding to text underlay, the word-painting so prominent in Crecquillon's 'Jacob's ladder'. He conveyed to us too a sense of progress through the century, from the close-packed polyphony of the Josquin era to the polychoral works at its close, from mode to key. There was time for musings on the addition of accidentals: *ficta* or not? Finally, and not least, Graham fed in background information about the life of the itinerant singer/composers themselves, recruited in the Hapsburg-held Netherlands, based in Spain but accompanying the imperial court as the emperors travelled through their dominions. With excellent good humour Graham contrived to inform and illuminate us as well as introducing us to some superb and little-known music.

A word on the venue: this light, recently refurbished church now hosts a post office and a volunteer community shop and cafe and is well worth a visit in itself. The hospitality provided by BMEMF members was second to none, with endless tea and coffee, chocolate biscuits and the legendary tea-time cake. As a visitor from another forum I was made to feel most welcome. Altogether an excellent day out!