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Basle, Cambridge and openness

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at choir pitch but transposed to a more convenient form of it.

I apologize to Professor Wulstan for misrepresenting his mode of expression. But his letter does not entirely dispel the impression that he is apt to proclaim rather than argue his views. Perhaps I should explain that I used 'Chinese whispers' as a metaphor for the uncritical and increasingly distorted repetitions that have occurred in the literature on early Anglican pitch, transforming an ill-founded theory into an exaggerated academic doctrine. The reason why some choir directors have recently been performing early Anglican works at $a' = 440$ is that, mistrustful of the uncritical repetitions, they have rejected the doctrine. Now, thanks to the Early English Organ Project, better-informed approaches will be able to take its place.

Performing pitch

If my most recent Christmas preparations were even more inadequate than usual, *Early music* is at least partly to blame: the November 2003 issue held far too many items of particular interest to me. There was Johnstone on pre-Commonwealth church pitch (a central aspect of my post-graduate research many moons ago), Geck and Rifkin on Bach's Leipzig forces (a more recent preoccupation of mine, as some readers may recall) and Bowers on transposition in Monteverdi (reacting after some 20 years to an article of mine in these pages).

Andrew Johnstone's thorough explanation of the pitch standards of early Anglican organs (pp.506–25) is especially welcome, since it bears directly on the common acceptance that English church music from that period is best performed a minor 3rd above modern pitch. I have long advocated a smaller pitch difference, roughly a semitone above $a' = 440$ —virtually the same as Johnstone. This was partly from a recognition that written references to organ pipe lengths were being overinterpreted, but equally because it appeared that approval for the higher pitch was too often motivated by a desire to accommodate the falsetto countertenor—whose place in this repertoire seemed to owe more to enthusiasm than historical evidence.

As it happens, similar preconceptions of vocal scoring underlie Bowers's 'fresh evaluation of the evidence' relating to transposition in Monteverdi. But that is a longer story, which is told elsewhere in this issue.

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In his review of Daniel Leech-Wilkinson's *The modern invention of medieval music* (EM, xxxii/1 (Feb 2004), pp.135–8), Jeremy Llewellyn says nothing unkind about the ensemble Gothic Voices or its work, and I feel I can therefore make the following remarks without too much personal bias. Llewellyn concludes that some readers may find Leech-Wilkinson's approach 'deeply disingenuous'. Let it be said, with no disrespect to Leech-Wilkinson, that on the surface of things this may not be a very contentious judgement. Since it is now an axiom in the Humanities that we always have a vested interest when we speak, it follows that scholars who try to expose such undeclared interests, as Leech-Wilkinson has done, will always be open to criticism of this order (if not necessarily of this severity). They can only scrutinize the unspoken interests of others from their own standpoint, and once they begin to scrutinize their positions they have already begun to vacate them for others. It is impossible to be disingenuous.

One might be tempted to let it go at that, but there is a deeper issue in this case. Leech-Wilkinson tries to be very open—and in a sometimes unguarded way, which I admire—about his involvement in the British early-music scene during recent decades. He reveals whom he knew, whom he esteemed and what he did, all with a degree of detail that inevitably suggests there must be gaps and silences somewhere. I would have welcomed a little more candour of this kind, despite its risks, from Llewellyn. He censures Leech-Wilkinson for generally passing over the influence and importance of the Schola Cantorum at Basle, and there may be some justice in that criticism. But should we not have been told that a relatively recent student at Basle, with its 'cosmopolitan' roster of ensembles, was a certain Jeremy Llewellyn? Dr Llewellyn has every right to champion a school where he studied, no doubt with great profit, and it is always good to hear about of the work of the Basle Schola. And yet, in a review of a book like *The modern invention of medieval music*, concerned with personalities, hidden commitments and the genealogy of influences, one might argue that a reviewer would favour the reader with an unusual degree of openness. Where is Llewellyn coming from? Part of the answer is 'Basle'.

Then there is Cambridge (England), and thereby hangs a tale ...

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