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A performer's guide to medieval music, ed. Ross W. Duffin (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2002), £25.95

Ross Duffin's book is over 600 pages long, a far cry from the little handbook by Thurston Dart, *The interpretation of music*, which started the line of performers' guides in 1954. Dart was rightly concerned not to commit argument-overload on a non-academic readership that knew very little about early music. His 154-page guide was intended only to open up efficient communications between scholars and the interested public, and he therefore took a problem-solving line from scholarly enquiry to performance: What are the problems and how do we solve them? and What are the pitfalls and how do we avoid them?

Almost 50 years later, and following the early-music revolution initiated by Dart and others, this line of approach is still fruitful, as witnessed by Timothy J. McGee's *Medieval and Renaissance music: a performer's guide* (1985) and by much of Tess Knighton and David Fallows's *Companion to medieval and Renaissance music* (1992). Essentially this is an approach that starts with the materials—sources, editions—and examines the historical evidence concerning genres, styles, instruments and so on, in order to compile a body of information and advice that will inform performance of the music. The Knighton-Fallows book in fact draws on both this tradition and a close relation to it, a largely parallel line that presents the evidence, carefully assessed, as a contribution to knowledge and understanding, but with the emphasis on the research rather than the way the research might be applied—not because the application is unimportant, but because the performers concerned are mainly professionals, not amateurs. This line is represented by the work of Dolmetsch, Donington, Neumann and others.

Duffin's book, too, borrows something from both lines. Beginning with the repertory itself, rather than the sources, it explores the implications for performance of what we know of different types and styles of music, using historical, documentary, iconographic, notational and other evidence. The discussions are wide-ranging but compact. There is a great deal of information in a relatively

small space, but this is achieved without the feeling that argument and alternative possibilities have been avoided. There is a difficult balancing act here between certainty and exploration, with the emphasis on making use of what we can be reasonably sure of. This does not make for easy reading, but then this is far from being a 'quick-fix' book: most of those who will read this with any benefit are already knowledgeable in the field and probably early-music performers at some level. The book assumes basic knowledge (of notation, for example) but it does not make excessive demands on the reader in the more specialized areas.

The discussion of repertories—sacred and secular, monophonic and polyphonic, and including the music of sung and spoken drama—is the longest section of the book. The second section, only marginally shorter, looks at the instruments associated with medieval music, and considers what these are and how they can or should be used in the service of the music. Again, this is a multifaceted discussion in each case, with the authors bringing all available evidence to bear on the relevant histories, techniques and repertories. There is not space here to discuss in any detail individual contributions by the 29 authors (of 40 chapters), and perhaps it would be invidious to try: but I must mention the contribution of the late Barbara Thornton on the human voice, which in this book is properly counted as an instrument. At first sight her chapter seems out of place among these pithy scholarly discourses, by reason of both its format (an interview in which Lawrence Rosenwald asks the very perceptive questions) and its apparently linear construction. Reading it soon shows, however, that this appearance is misleading: first, because Thornton had an astonishing knowledge and understanding of medieval vocal music; second, because the very wide-ranging discussion is in fact clearly structured; and third, because the interview has been edited in such a way as to make it both readable and of a concentration of material that matches the rest of the book.

The third and shortest section, on Theory and Practice, consists of a single chapter entitled 'Essential theory for performers'. Probably the majority of readers will be tempted to ignore this section as unnecessary to their practice and enjoyment of medieval music, for the matters discussed are difficult to assimilate and highly problematic when one tries to apply them in performance. But avoiding them would certainly be a mistake. The fact is that

these matters are as central to the business of performing, if one takes that business at all seriously, as are questions of repertory, instrumentation and interpretation. Throughout the book the authors have considered questions of theory, embracing them as potentially necessary evidence. To test this, I looked up in the index several theoretical topics (such as mode and tuning): and sure enough, the reader is directed to many places throughout the book, not just to Part 3.

This highlights one of the book's greatest strengths, the wide-ranging nature of the evidence presented and its careful assessment for the purpose in hand. It can be read and used, in consequence, at various levels, from the position of superficial interest to that of intense and concentrated need to inform one's performance in detail. This is a book for those with considerable expertise, being very knowledgeable without being doctrinaire; but it is also supportive of those with less knowledge, although never condescending. Duffin's team is not only a collection of scholars of exceptional quality, but a group who write engagingly and very much to the point.

The book is well presented, with figures and illustrations generally placed where the reader needs them to be. The quality of reproduction of the photographs is a little

variable, though always acceptable, and the size of the figures tends not to match that of the text. But the text itself is rather compressed (although perfectly legible), and the figures are often relatively larger and consequently easy on the eyes. Each section includes extensive notes (some with a detailed bibliography), and at the end of the book are a discography (by section), a select bibliography and an index that seems to do its job well.

This is not a book to read through sequentially, but one to dip into and to use for reference. The first sentence of Duffin's preface seems initially to be a little far-fetched, even immodest: but it is actually true, and I would recommend this book to all who have an interest in medieval music, thought and culture. 'There has never been a book about the Middle Ages quite like this one.' No, indeed.

Richard Pinnell

The guitar in its fullness

James Tyler and Paul Sparks, *The guitar and its music from the Renaissance to the Classical era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), £60.

James Tyler and Paul Sparks have produced an authoritative book on the fretted instruments. Tyler's contribution replaces and supersedes his own *The early guitar* (Oxford, 1980), while the section by Sparks on the guitar of the Classical era completes the text. Between them, the authors lead us on an adventurous Grand Tour of European guitar literature, with some gratis stops in the Americas. We begin in Renaissance Spain, then visit France and Italy, where the repertory developed further with song and dance accompaniments, and with solo literature based on continuous variations on the Spanish formats (e.g. the *passacaglia* and *chaconne*). The authors also explore the guitar's relationship to monody. Then we head further north, as members of the royalty take up the instrument and employ virtuoso players who eventually introduce the *galant* style. Finally the instrument reaches the limits of its geographical diffusion: north to Scandinavia, west to the New World, and east to the Austrian Empire and Bohemia. As the Baroque style begins to wane, so does the double-strung instrument. The Classical guitar, with six single strings, replaced it, and gave rise to another diffusion emanating from southern Europe. It is a complex story and the authors elucidate it in a concise, focused and informed book.

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