



Carolina Pro Musica: Lessons & Carols

by Richard Parsons

December 9, 2006, Charlotte, NC: The Carolina Pro Musica Christmas concert this year was an interesting take on the traditional Nine Lessons and Carols first sung at Truro in 1880 and cast in stone by the singers of King's College, Cambridge, beginning in 1918. All of the "carols" could well be heard at King's College; the "lessons" depart from the canonical series by including several secular creations, including "Adam Lay Y-bounden"; William Ballett's "Sweet Was The Song"; and T. S. Eliot's "Journey Of The Magi." First the church dropped the honorific "saint" for poor ole John — Carolina Pro Musica bumped the organ-like prose of his Gospel from traditional pride of place as the final lesson, following it with Ben Jonson's Carol.

Lou Dalessandro read the lessons for the first time this year. While the usual Anglican reading style is an uninflected, dry discourse, with the reader expected to make his own decisions about validity and emphasis, Dalessandro struck a perfect compromise between dry and dramatic. He greatly elevated the whole procedure with his talent and judgment.

All of the music was adjusted, in supposed best Renaissance tradition, to fit the resources of four performers — Edward Ferrell, Karen Hite Jacob, Holly Wright Maurer, and Rebecca Miller Saunders — and a toy box of instruments. There was a harpsichord, of course, half a dozen recorders, a small Celtic-type harp, viols, psaltery, guitar, mandolin, drums and the bells of Sarna. In addition, all of the performers sang at one point or another.

The intimacy of the hall and the timbres of the arrangements made the evening seem very much in the spirit of *Haus-Musik*, what with audience participation, broken consorts, and the extremely open harmonies of many of the arrangements. Giving the audience music with parts and not just the words would quite likely enhance future events. There are still a few old geezers like your reviewer who can manage simple sight singing. The program was otherwise useful and complete.

The heat was on in St. Mary's Chapel this year, which was pleasant for the almost-full-house crowd of about 100 at the first of two performances. As the audience from the first performance was leaving, many more were arriving for the second concert. The heat and dryness apparently gave the performers some difficulty, based on their ad-lib remarks while tuning. The harpsichord broke a string while being tuned just before the concert. In spite of Jacob's best efforts it had stretched severely flat by the time that particular string was needed. She was a trooper about it and fixed it as soon as she could. Otherwise, the group's intonation was acceptable.

Artistic Director Jacobs also played harpsichord, harp, psaltery, recorder, drum, and bells (though not all a once). Holly Wright Maurer spent most of the evening playing one or another of her viols. She makes lovely music. She also played recorder a little. Edward Ferrell played recorder, guitar, and mandolin and did a fair amount of singing. His solo guitar introduction to "Greensleeves" was truly elegant, severely simple. This was very nice music. Rebecca Miller Saunders is a lovely soprano. Her voice is clean and clear, her singing unforced, and her intonation excellent.

The program included music by Praetorius, Hildegard of Bingen, Caspar Othmayr, and a number of anonymous composers and arrangers. Some of the anonymous music was transcribed by members of the consort from original manuscript sources while on tour in England.

Carolina Pro Musica is a valuable addition to the regional early music scene.