

to accompany the songs further enhances the performances. Particularly fascinating is the skilful ornamentation and elaboration of melodies in instrumental preludes and interludes, and the contrasting colours of winds, strings (bowed and plucked), and percussion.

The quality of the performance (dating from 1988) is well preserved in the AAD recording and attractively packaged with texts and translations. The notes by Blake Wilson are useful and, for the more ambitious reader, are nicely complimented by chapter 4 of his book, *Music and Merchants: The Laudesi Companies of Republican Florence* (Oxford, 1992).

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Niccolai, Foresto. *Le più antiche Misericordie d'Italia. 1244-1899*. Firenze: Confederazione Nazionale Misericordie d'Italia, 1993. xxii, 239 pp., illustrations.

The confraternities of the Misericordia enjoy a long tradition in Italy. As Foresto Niccolai reports, they date from the thirteenth-century struggle between the Guelfs and Ghibellines. The first Misericordia was founded by St. Peter Martyr in 1244 in Florence to turn men's minds away from internecine warfare and towards the charity of God. The Florentine Misericordia is thus the first of over five hundred such confraternities to be established over the course of the following centuries. The aim of these organizations was to offer social assistance to their communities, especially by way of the traditional Works of Spiritual and Corporal Mercy. As Niccolai points out, the confraternities assisted the old and the poor, buried the dead, looked after the sick, and collected those afflicted with infectious diseases. *Confratelli* visited prisoners, paid for the release of prisoners for debt, comforted the condemned, managed dowry funds for poor girls, and rescued abandoned children. Because service was to be carried out anonymously, members wore hooded habits that concealed their identity.

This book is a pleasant general introduction to the subject of the Confraternities of Mercy. It notes important details about the Misericordie—date of foundation, location within the city/town, dates when they moved locations, links with other organizations, etc. It does not try, however, to explore the nature of membership or the broader social implications of these organizations. Instead, it outlines the particular

history of each such institution in Italy, giving a short description of every commune where one was found. In 1899 all confraternities of the Misericordia in Italy joined into a federation to facilitate the dispensation of charity throughout the country. The history of the federation is briefly sketched out in the volume. An address by Pope John Paul II attests to the continued social and spiritual value of the organization in contemporary Italy.

Some questions of interest to historians remain unanswered. For example, why did confraternities of the Misericordia spring up in centres as diverse as Florence, Venice and Arezzo, but not in centres such as Bologna or Rome? What were the patterns of membership? What was the long-term or perhaps even the immediate impact of such organizations on the political and social fibre of their cities and towns? What were their financial and economic resources? How did they manage them? Such questions are, of course, more appropriate to formal scholarly inquiry and not to a commemorative volume published by the organization itself. Given this, Niccolai's book is an interesting popular introduction to Italy's confraternities of the Misericordia.

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Polizzotto, Lorenzo. *The Elect Nation. The Savonarolan Movement in Florence 1494-1545*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994. 488 pp.

The volume is a fascinating and exhaustive study of the Savonarolan movement and in particular of his followers, popularly known as the *Piagnoni*, who sought to effect a social, political and spiritual renewal of Florence in accordance with Savonarolan doctrine. Among the *Piagnoni* there were some of the most influential minds of the later Italian Renaissance—men such as Lorenzo Lorenzi, Domenico Benivieni, and Jacopo Salutati. After the expulsion of the Medici in 1494, the *Piagnoni* sought to implement a thorough reform of city polity. Though some measures gained the consent of the current government, antagonism to Savonarola's influence grew and ultimately brought about his execution in 1498.

The Dominican friar's influence on civic reform, however, survived long after his death. Polizzotto argues convincingly that, with few exceptions, the *Piagnoni* remained loyal to Savonarola's concept of a renewed polity and worked towards such a renewal over a period of several