

payment. It is not clear if it was actually dissolved, but it reappeared a few years later in a purely charitable guise, running the hospital. The second half of the book is taken up with reproductions of the documents relating to the Abbey. The analysis and the documents together provide a very useful addition to the body of knowledge of festive societies in a French-speaking area.

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Wilson, Blake. *Music and Merchants. The Laudesi Companies of Republican Florence*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992. xv, 298 pp., 12 b/w plates, 7 figures, 11 musical examples.

As Wilson points out in the introduction to this insightful book, "merchants" is used in a general sense to indicate the merchant culture which emerged from feudalism in the late Middle Ages. Accordingly, it is his purpose to examine the constitution and activities of laudesi companies, that is, confraternities with musical devotions, as reflections of social, political, and economic change. Specifically, he sees their advent and development as a result of the confrontation of an inherited mendicant spirituality with a new mercantile society. Archival research on Florentine laudesi companies which flourished between ca. 1270 and 1494 constitutes the foundation for the investigation but, quite reasonably, Wilson moves beyond these temporal and geographical limits to make his point.

Wilson develops the argument for his thesis in a straightforward structure which moves from the general to the specific, with a slight tendency to repeat basic ideas. He begins with the social context and presents a far ranging analysis of trends in both secular and sacred spheres which fostered the use of laude in confraternities. Then he looks at laudesi companies in general, sketching a historical overview of their formation and of the development of the lauda, before surveying their institutional structures and activities. This is followed immediately by an extensive account of each of the companies in Florence with particular emphasis on documentary records pertaining to musical life. Finally, he focuses on the singers and on matters of musical repertoire and performance practice. The rough periodization which Wilson suggests here (and elsewhere) is to the point in so far as it reflects changes in musical practices beginning with the genesis of

laudesi confraternities in the late 13th century, when monophonic laude were sung by members, followed by a more stable period extending to the end of the 15th century, when professional musicians were at first hired to perform monophonic and then polyphonic laude. The book concludes quite logically with a brief account of the demise and transformation of the traditions of the laudesi companies in the 16th century.

The clarity of the explanation is momentarily obscured in the penultimate chapter, entitled "Ritual Space and Imagination." The difficulty in the chapter stems from the absence of a coherent argument connecting Wilson's observations on the perception of music with the meaning of ritual and with the characteristics of the physical space employed for ritual. Given the structure of the book, it would have been advantageous to introduce the themes of this chapter with the discussion of the social context because they add further depth to the understanding of the conditions which led to the growth of laudesi companies.

Very little of the book depends on the reader having training in music or music history. The opening paragraphs of the introduction require familiarity with specialized musicological literature to temper Wilson's oversimplified characterization of traditional and modern conceptions of the use of polyphony in society, but this is a minor point. Also, brief passages in the chapter on musical repertoire verge on technical analysis, but they can be passed over without sacrificing the train of thought.

Thus, given the pervasive concern for placing the laudesi confraternities in their social context, this book is of considerable importance for anyone involved in research on confraternities. The reader is rewarded not only by Wilson's insights into the interaction of laudesi companies with their social, political, and economic setting, but also by his inclusion of documents and extensive references to primary resources.

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