

The rise and fall of John Merbecke

In 1550, John Merbecke went straight to the top of the Church Hit Parade, with his musical, “The Book of Common Prayer Noted” – *words*, the newly translated Mass; *music*, contemporary Tudor melodies. In most parish churches he has stayed there, unjustifiably, ever since.

In his day, Merbecke was a bit of a wizz-kid. Whilst he was organist at St. George’s Chapel, Windsor, he wrote a series of controversial books, for which Henry VIII condemned him to be burned as a heretic – it was either, that or he didn’t like *Greensleeves* being forced into second place! Anyway, Merbecke was retained by popular demand; and all this after he had knocked off the first concordance of the complete bible!

But that was 400 years ago, since when almost every major composer, and scores of minor church organists have written settings of the Mass. Why don’t we use them? We have new words in the Mass series 2, and for two weeks we had new music (Wilson in D). The choir rehearsed for months and the congregation attended at voluntary practice. But Quinquagesima saw an end of all that.

The consensus of opinion, is that we are in favour of the gradual introduction of other settings. When can we hear some more?

Howard Brayton
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