

from lesser known works to the favourites, from the playful to the dramatic and from crazy to almost Eurovision-like catchiness!

Tarquinio Merula's *Canzonetta Spirituale Sopra la Nanna* requires a great deal of the singer. The sole accompaniment consists of the continuo playing the same two chords for nearly ten minutes. The packed cathedral was held in awed silence as Mameli guided the listeners through an astonishing array of emotions while the ostinato bass created a feeling of timelessness. No two phrases were the same; she employed her entire arsenal of colours and dynamics, all the time maintaining the shape of the piece to perfection. When she finished, it was up to the instrumentalists to break the spell with a *sinfonia* from Monteverdi's *Ritorno di Ulisse in Patria*.

But this great concert was not only about its singer. The whole ensemble contributed. The strings blended beautifully with Mameli, while taking every opportunity to shine with relish. The rather large continuo section, consisting of violone, theorbo, harp and harpsichord offered Cavina the chance to orchestrate, and this



he did very effectively and tastefully – the instrumentation and the playing itself mirroring Mameli's many nuances in expression and sound. There was some particularly ravishing continuo work by harpist Chiara Granata and theorbist Gabriele Palomba.

It seemed a shame that Cavina felt the need to conduct some of the *sinfonias* with such talented musicians at his disposal, but this was a very minor point in a near-perfect concert where musicians, programme and venue combined to make it the aural, visual and spiritual experience a concert of early 17th-century Italian music should be.

Jadran Duncumb



Soprano Robert Mameli - photo by Kohei Take