

**Early Music, May 2007**  
Ivan Moody, "Renaissances"

Those irritating stylistic boundaries, the 'medieval' and the 'Renaissance' are, I believe, finally beginning to disappear except as catch-all terms to indicate vaguely a stylistic area. Certainly, as far as questions of performance are concerned, they have often hindered rather than helped. The music in this batch of recordings puts this point squarely in focus, in that the forcedly stark approach to music from before the 15th century that used to be commonplace is now so far from the sheer lushness - which bespeaks familiarity and comprehension - of the recordings by Ensemble Belladonna and La Reverdie as to make it difficult to believe that it ever existed; and in that music by Dunstable and Dufay, who were never quite admitted to the full stature of 'Renaissance composer', is now being performed by groups who not only give it its full value, but who rejoice in it and thus transmit it with the conviction they would music by Tallis or Victoria....

... Equally captivating is a disc of English medieval music entitled **Melodious melancholye** from the Ensemble **Belladonna** (Raumklang RK 2003, rec 2005, 55') - two female voices with fiddle, rebec and harp, and yet another group to come out of the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis. It has some extremely fine things, including a performance with all the verses of *Worldes blis*, movingly and dramatically sung by the two unaccompanied voices, a Celticly lilting *Miri it is*, a wonderfully sensual *Bryd one breere* and utterly beautiful renditions of two songs by Frye (another figure straddling what is left of the lines between 'medieval' and 'Renaissance'), *Alas, alas is my chief song* and *So ys emprentid*. The intercalation of instrumental versions of some pieces helps avoid monotony, though the performances are so full of life (and, in fact, the stylistic variety is surprisingly great) that I can hardly imagine that being much of a risk with this group. If I have a complaint, it is that full translations are not given for the longer texts, but only summary paraphrases: an unnecessary economy in a such a magnificent release. But this should prevent no one from purchasing what can only be described as an essential recording of English music.