

Early-music group delivers tunes, lore

By CHRISTOPHER HYDE

If there had been a blaze in the granite fireplace of Bowdoin's Moulton Union, it would have been a perfect Elizabethan evening – viola da gamba, lute, soprano voice and wooden transverse flute, delivering authentic music from Shakespeare's plays.

The Ensemble Chaconne is known not only for meticulous musicology, but also for its ability to bring Renaissance and Baroque music to life.

Its erudition is worn lightly. The Lady Greensleeves, to whom the famous song is addressed, seems to have been a lady of easy virtue. The sardonic march "Fortune My Foe," mentioned in "The Merry Wives of Windsor," was sung by the crowd to condemned felons on their way the gallows, rather like "Did You Ever Think When the Hearse Goes By..."

CONCERT REVIEW

Ensemble Chaconne

Where: Moulton Union, Bowdoin College, Brunswick

When: Saturday, Sept. 27

The viola da gamba is not an "underhanded" instrument, even though the grip on the bow is upside-down.

What is surprising about Elizabethan music is the subtlety, and technical difficulty, of popular songs. If they were really sung by ordinary people (who also understood the language of Shakespeare's plays), the people must have been much more sophisticated than we are. Ensemble Chaconne played one "courtly" song, "Take, O Take Those Lips Away," from "Measure for Measure." Its

primary differences from the common fare were its more obviously risqué words and the multiplicity of vocal trills or "shakes" in the setting.

The Elizabethans chose musical instruments for their expressive qualities, members of the ensemble pointed out. The transverse flute, the ancestor of our modern version, supplanted the recorder because it had greater dynamic range. The viola da gamba, literally "leg viol" since it is held between the knees, has a mellow and resonant tone that made it the rival of the cello until the latter won the battle because of the volume necessary in a symphony orchestra. The lute, thought to be the heir to the ancient Greek musical tradition, can be played with the rapidity of a harpsichord, in the right hands, but also enables the musician to control dynamics and accompany the voice.

The ensemble consists of Peter H.

Bloom, Renaissance flute, Carol Lewis, viola da gamba, and Olav Chris Henriksen, Renaissance lute. They were joined on Saturday by mezzo-soprano Pamela Dellal, who is equally adept at interpreting Elizabethan music.

Each player was given an opportunity to show off his or her virtuosity. Of particular note was the lute solo by John Dowland that followed "If Music and Sweet Poetry Agree;" a viola da gamba piece by William Corkine; and the flute calls that accompanied "Hark, Hark! The Lark" from "Cymbeline."

The entire evening was characterized by balance and charm, not without cries and alarms off-stage, like the Elizabethan era itself.

Christopher Hyde's Classical Beat column appears in the Maine Sunday Telegram.