

# Lovely music playing

## REVIEWS

By IFAN PAYNE

**THE MUSIC** of the mostly self-taught Estonian composer Arvo Part has undergone a considerable change during his creative career.

But the past couple of years has been a time of increasing visibility through recordings — on the ECM label — and broadcasts and his music has attained a cult, if not a popular, status in this country as well as in the United States.

Willfred Mellers has written that Part's music, though modern, sounds somehow "immemorally ancient".

Of heart-aching beauty, it is in a sense passive. It bids us enter a musical world that is radiant with a child-like innocence. Even some of his simplest instrumental works, like the violin *Spiegel Im Spiegl* can reduce the listener to tears.

Part's setting of the *St John Passion* utilises small forces, comprising four instruments, two vocal soloists and a small vocal ensemble.

The Hilliard Ensemble performed this passion in St David's Cathedral on Tuesday evening.

I first heard them perform the work at the Almeida Festival in 1986, so the performers are very much inside the music, playing and singing the crystalline harmonies with devastating purity.

Individually, Michael George's *Christ* was particularly impressively sung.