

Lovely sound from period strings

By IFAN PAYNE

SHORTLY after leaving the concert given by Extempore String Ensemble and Danserye in St Donat's on Saturday evening I joined a local village dance where the theme was the 1950s.

There, in a crowded school hall, over a hundred assorted friends, neighbours and hangers-on filled the room with laughter and the boisterous pleasure of attempting to re-live the dances—jive and twist—of 30 years ago.

The experience was relevant to the earlier concert at St Donat's in which Danserye, in period dress, and Extempore, on period instruments, presented a re-creation of the dance and music of baroque England and Spain.

Such attempts at historical authenticity in music and dance are beset with specialist problems of performance practice concerning instrumentation, tempi, embellishment and so on. But even more important, I think, is the ability to capture the spirit of the time and the occasion.

Midway through the second half of the concert, dancers Mary Collins and Steven Player did indeed find the spark of exuberance which was necessary to make one believe that 17th century courtly rockers did indeed dally the nights away in dancing the Zarabanda and the Follias.

STARS

The Extempore String Ensemble consists of five instrumentalists who between them play more than a dozen 17th century string instruments.

The group play with a consistent sense of craftsmanship and good taste. There was considerable fascination in the lavish variations with which it filled out so much of the music of Dowland, Byrd and their contemporaries.

The sound which the group produced from the period instruments was unfailingly lovely and well-balanced.

I particularly liked the stop-time feel of George Weigand's variations on the mandolino during Dowland's *John Smith's Almaine* and the anonymous *Go From My Window*, for duelling lutes.

But listening to Chuck Berry, Elvis and Duane Eddy an hour or so later heightened the feeling that too many of the performances by Extempore lacked the exuberance and high spirit with which the pop stars of the 17th century must surely have imbued their music.