

St. Faith's Church Choir

NEWSLETTER

FRIDAY 8TH MAY 2020

Happy VE Day! Welcome to another edition of ramblings from the organist! This morning, St. Faith's should, I'm sure, have been very busy for a special service to mark the 75th anniversary of VE Day. Various factors have meant that we're not able to do this today and on that note, I'm sure you will join me in praying and hoping that Canon Tom feels better soon. As I'm writing this on VE Day, I haven't yet watched any online services that have taken place to mark VE Day, so I'll try to point you in the direction of some next Friday. Or better still, if you happen to come across any VE Day services that you particularly enjoyed, then let me know and I'll give it a mention next week. I hope you've had a good week. Mine has been eventful, but I'm not here to talk about that, I'm here to talk about music, so here goes. Comments, improvements, suggestions always welcome.

Online singing opportunities

Quick reminders this week that William Saunders continues his hymn practices on Saturday mornings, this week is a VE Day special...

<https://www.facebook.com/musicianwilliam>

... and Richard McVeigh continues to upload organ music and hymns to sing along with. I really liked his virtual video of Jesu, joy of man's desiring:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCkdRXZZXDmLJM6XBnUpIooq>

Lastly, the usual nod in the direction of the Royal School of Church Music.

<https://www.rscm.org.uk/online-resources/>

In particular, you might like to keep an eye and ear out for further resources for a Big Sing event, which is being scheduled for RSCM Music Sunday (14th June). John Rutter explains more:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7yg_NAWj7Lk

Live streamed services

My "sabbatical" from attending public worship has taken me a bit further than normal this week!

Too late for inclusion last week sadly, was this excellent short service to celebrate May Day from Magdalen College, Oxford:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEBsmxAfGiY>

An accompanying video about how they put it together is worth watching too:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XI6iebIHKhQ>

I enjoyed the music on this Sunday morning service from St. Michael and all Angels, Bassett (Southampton) ...

<https://www.facebook.com/1451579128237701/videos/2583216661946404/>

... and from much further afield, I liked the layout of the online service from St. Catherine's Anglican Church in Stuttgart, Germany ...

<https://stcatherines-stuttgart.de/services/home-office-home-church/home-church-resources-easter-4-sunday-3rd-may/>

From what I can work out, the director of music at the church has been inviting singers from anywhere and everywhere to provide the singing for the services. Clever idea!

I mentioned previously an online choral evensong compilation from Christ Church, Southgate (North London). They've done another one here, which is lovely ...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qgOYO49PJfQ>

Finally, a strong recommendation to try out the superb "Great Sacred Music" service from St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London (by Trafalgar Square). The latest one celebrates the psalms, including some fascinating information about Parry's I was glad which I didn't know:

<https://www.facebook.com/173712669321008/videos/274749650219608/>

To be honest, I really can't recommend this highly enough. If you ever happen to be near Trafalgar Square on a Thursday lunchtime, do try it. Yes, it is very well attended! I'd love to do something similar at St. Faith's!

Anthem of the week

The anthem for this Sunday would have been "A Clare Benediction" by John Rutter (sorry to mention JR again!)

John Rutter has a long association with Clare College Cambridge. He read music there in the 1960s and was a member of the chapel choir and was director of music from 1975 - 1979.

In 2000, his son Christopher became a student at the college, studying computer science and became a member of the chapel choir. Tragically, Christopher died in a road accident in March 2001.

Although Christopher was only in the choir for a few months, he sang several of his father's anthems, including some given as a musical legacy to the college. One of those anthems is "A Clare Benediction" composed in 1998.

Here is a recording of Clare College choir singing it:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jt9exsXPg6O>

Guest interview!

Last week, I promised you an interview with a Cathedral organist. So this week, we hear from **Claudia Grinnell** who has been **Assistant Organist of Winchester Cathedral** since 2017. Prior to this, Claudia was Organ Scholar at Salisbury Cathedral.



Where did you study music?

"I started learning the piano when I was 7, then was coerced into learning to play the organ when I joined the village church choir! I had my lessons at St Peter's Collegiate Church in Wolverhampton, and also studied for a while with Andrew Fletcher in Birmingham. In 2013, I started my music degree at Cambridge, where I was Organ Scholar at Peterhouse, the smallest and oldest college in the university. My organ teacher there was William Whitehead. I'm using lockdown to try to relearn the piano pieces I used to be able to play before I chose to be an organist!"

Who are your greatest musical inspirations?

"They change every day depending on what I'm playing and who's on the radio! But for today... Leonard Bernstein - not only was he a hugely expressive and energetic conductor, but he had an extraordinary feeling for tempo. As he got older, his interpretations of pieces he had previously recorded changed dramatically, and later recordings are much much slower (compare, for example, his two cycles of Mahler's symphonies). He also made a famous recording of Shostakovich's 5th Symphony in 1959 in which he took sections of the fourth movement twice as fast as the composer's instructions - and it's brilliant! I love the fact that his approach to tempo was to choose one which felt right at the time, and he didn't feel constrained by his earlier decisions later in his life.

Angela Hewitt - her Bach and Beethoven is played with such a beautiful touch, and she rounds off the end of every phrase with such delicacy.

Olivier Messiaen - he played the organ for services at the Eglise de la Sainte-Trinité in Paris every week for more than 60 years and, despite his composing, teaching and travelling, was completely dedicated above all else to his role as a church musician".

As organists, we're often hidden away from sight! Are you still able to feel a sense of communication with the congregation?

"Being up in the organ loft can be lonely, especially during services which are largely unaccompanied. However, lots of people stay to say hello after the services or to mark our voluntaries out of 10! And if the congregation thinks you're playing a hymn at the wrong speed, you certainly won't be able to forget they're there once they start singing at their own speed!"

As a director of music, are you still able to play the organ for services or are you always conducting and choir training?

"I see the probationer choristers several times each week. When they join the choir, they don't go straight into the full rehearsals but instead rehearse separately with the organists. Psalms and singing in Latin can be very daunting at any age, but especially so when you're only 8! During services, I'm usually playing the organ (I play for at least four choral services each week), but I also conduct the Cathedral Choirs on a regular basis. I have to stand on an extra tall box so that people can see me, which is a bit embarrassing! I also conduct the Cathedral Nave Choir, which isn't auditioned and meets for one service a term."

Which choral pieces would you take to a desert island?

"I hope I'm allowed to take 8, just like on Radio 4!

William Harris: Bring us, O Lord God - 4 minutes of unbelievable tranquillity in the world's best key (D flat major). The shift of chord from "there shall be no" to "darkness" is just magical, as is the end of the first phrase when the first sopranos are left on the top F on the word "heaven". When this happens again at the end of the piece for "world without end", you've almost forgotten about that moment at the beginning, so it's twice as beautiful.

John Blow: Salvator mundi - the music works itself up to "qui per crucem", followed by the best chord of the piece before "et sanguinem redemisti nos" rounds off the section. I could listen to that phrase over and over again.

Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck: Hodie Christus natus est - I sang this whilst in the choir at St Peter's and we had so much fun singing all the "Noe"s, which just felt so silly every time!

Herbert Howells: Collegium Regale Evening Service - no self-respecting cathedral musician could leave this behind. The Gloria is so uplifting, and at Winchester Cathedral Andy Lumsden squeezes every last drop out of the final "Amen"!

Louis Vierne: Kyrie from Messe Solennelle - it's lucky I've never had to accompany this, because I always spend the apocalyptic organ introduction imagining the west doors of the Cathedral flying open and me processing down the nave in a massive black cape surrounded by ravens - I think I see myself as Maleficent from *Sleeping Beauty*!

Ralph Vaughan Williams: A Sea Symphony - my favourite moment is "flashing and frolicsome" in the third movement, where cymbals are crashing all over the place and the whole orchestra sounds wonderfully chaotic.

George Frederick Handel: Surely he hath borne our griefs from Messiah - this is so exciting when the dotted rhythms pick up again after "he was bruised for our iniquities" and the music changes from F minor to A flat major, and that final phrase "of our peace was upon him" seems to stretch and stretch until you feel the music might burst.

Edward Bairstow: The Lamentation - this is so fantastically miserable that I would have to have it playing whilst I sat stranded waiting to be rescued. The last chant is twice as long as those which have gone before it, and has a wonderful twist in the harmony of the second part. And all topped off with a pianissimo final refrain of "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, return unto the Lord thy God" that gives me Goosebumps every time."

How can we encourage people to join a church choir and maintain membership?

"Variety is key: if all the music is too easy, people will get bored; if all the music is too difficult, people will get cross and bored, which is even worse! There is so much music out there to choose from - as beautiful as it is, Mozart's *Ave verum corpus* can get a bit wearing if it pops up every week! I've also found that a break with fun biscuits works wonders..."

Many thanks to Claudia for her time in answering my questions.

Maybe we can go and lead the singing for a service at Winchester Cathedral some time...

Another Cathedral organist next week, but from which Cathedral?

That's all folks!

That's all for this week, don't forget to let me know of any VE Day services that you come across that you'd like others to watch. Stay safe and keep singing!

Graham