

St. Faith's Church Choir

NEWSLETTER

FRIDAY 19TH JUNE 2020

Welcome to another edition of ramblings from the organist! I hope these newsletters continue to find you and your nearest and dearest well... and I hope you're still enjoying reading them. To date, I haven't had any complaints about the newsletters, which to be honest is a bit unnerving... perhaps I've just tempted fate!

Thank you to my fellow editor (Canon Tom) for continuing to produce the weekly "Corona Chronicle". I thought about adding further comment to his remarks on page 21 of this week's Chronicle, but decided that "stir up Sunday" is quite a way off yet...

So to this week's newsletter... and as ever, comments, improvements, suggestions are more than welcome!

Online singing opportunities



William Saunders from Bury St. Edmunds is doing his last 10am Saturday morning hymn practice for the time being this weekend...

<http://william-saunders.info/2020/05/21/hymn-practice-congo-live-on-saturday-mornings/>

... and organist Richard McVeigh continues to offer hymns and organ music every Sunday evening at 5pm via his "Beauty in Sound" YouTube channel.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vKuVUjnK3SI>

Both of these sessions (for want of a better word) are available to watch again at any time. Well done and thank you to both William (who I don't know) and Richard (who I do know) for these resources during lockdown.

Live streamed services

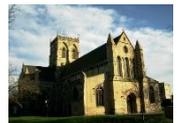
(some personal recommendations)



I don't know how many of you were able to watch "The Big Music Sunday" service put together by the Royal School of Church Music last Sunday. It was a real mix of singing, readings, prayers and interviews including an interview with Martin How who spent the majority of his career with the RSCM.

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

At St. Faith's, we probably know Martin How best as the composer of the anthem "Day by Day". Here is a recent virtual version of that anthem by members of the choir of Grimsby Minster...



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvEEMS6QyDY>

... and here's a link about the Minster choir:

<https://www.grimsbyminster.com/page/14/music>



I really enjoyed this weeks "choral classics" from St. Stephen's Church in Walbrook which focused on contemporary hymn writers, in particular John Bell from the Iona Community, Bernadette Farrell and Stuart Townend.

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=582344042659764>

This weeks "Great Sacred Music" service from St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London is on the theme of the Eucharist. Rev Dr Sam Wells provides wise words alongside St. Martin's Voices, who provide quality music, including a "naughty but nice"



arrangement of the hymn "Let us break bread together on our knees".

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=593285104644890>



York Minster continues to offer lovely weekly choral evensongs. This week they celebrated St. William of York (no I hadn't heard of him either). The very good sermon is from Rev Catriona Cumming and lasts just over two minutes (*no further comments*).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOCStCAsb6I>

Finally, I liked the musical content of the services from St. Stephen's Church, Canterbury:



<https://www.ststephenscanterbury.net/>

Anthem of the week

As the Gospel reading for this Sunday talks about the love that God has for us, the anthem for this Sunday would have been a setting of the words "Love divine, all loves excelling", commissioned by the Choir Schools' Association in 2000 to celebrate the new millennium.



The music for this anthem is by the composer Howard Goodall, who began his musical career as a chorister at New College, Oxford. He later read Music at Christ Church, Oxford. Today, Howard Goodall is a regular presenter on Television and Radio and is well-known for his choral compositions, but is also a composer of musicals.

Howard Goodall is best known musically for his television work, as he is the composer of the main themes and incidental music for UK comedy programmes including Red Dwarf, Blackadder, Mr. Bean, The Thin Blue Line, The Vicar of Dibley, The Catherine Tate Show, 2point4 Children, Words and Pictures and QI, on which he has also appeared twice as a panellist. As an undergraduate at Christ Church, Oxford, Howard Goodall met actor Rowan Atkinson and writer Richard Curtis, his collaborators on several of these projects, including his first break into TV, "Not the Nine O'clock News".

For a recommended recording, I liked this video of the anthem sung by the National Youth Choir of Scotland, complete with an interview with Howard Goodall:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tis8E7IZDBU>

I also headed virtually to Leicester Cathedral to hear the choir of St. Stephen's Church, Canterbury (second mention for Canterbury this week) singing the anthem:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qruGxwZt_gM

Special Guest!

This week, I've posed my questions to Myles Tyrrell. Myles has been Director of Music at St. James' Church, West End, Southampton since September 2018 following in the footsteps of me as I was Director of Music at this church from 2015 to 2018. Myles is busy as an instrumental teacher and an accompanist; and is also conductor of the Woodside Singers, based on the Eastern edge of the New Forest.



Where did you study music?

"I studied at Southampton University and did a joint Honours degree, combining Music with French".

Who are your greatest musical inspirations?

"This question requires a lot of self-restraint as I could go on forever, so I'll limit myself to 5. I would say Lili Boulanger for her amazing compositions during her very short life (also the first woman to win the Prix de Rome!), Einojuhani Rautavaara (who knew that arctic birdsong could be orchestrated in such a haunting and beautiful way?), Jacob Collier for his incredible and inventive arrangements (and by extension Dolores Catherino for introducing me to microtonalism), Chi-chi Nwanoku OBE for her work on championing black and minority ethnic musicians (see: Chineke!) and, of course, Glen Gould".

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

"I would say so. St. James has a very responsive congregation and they certainly let you know when they like the voluntaries, and I've never had to fight them for a tempo - although I'm lucky to be reliably and robustly informed if I've been a little too excited with a hymn's speed! When the church is packed to the brim, such as our Christingle Services, I do start to feel like an island of pipes in a sea of people, but the rest of the time, as most of the congregation are lovers of music, I never feel too hidden away! The sung evensongs are a rather special occasion for me, as our reduced congregation are back-to-back with me in the choir stalls. It's a very intimate experience, and suits me well as an introverted musician!"

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

"I'm lucky in multiple respects here. I usually play solo for services but since November I've been blessed with a very keen and attentive organ scholar, Asuka Tsuchiya (you may have heard her interview recently on BBC Radio Solent about the life and future of organs and organists). This, coupled with a lovely team of deputy organists, give me the freedom to pop off the bench on the odd occasion and conduct for our more challenging works. I also get to process out and hear the pipes from the other side when Asuka plays a final voluntary, which is a very nice treat".

Which choral pieces would you take to a desert island?

"This is another one of those questions requiring discipline...! If I had to choose eight, my immediate go-to pieces are: Seek Him That Maketh the Seven Stars (Jonathan Dove), 2. Lo, the full and final sacrifice (Finzi), For lo, I Raise Up (Stanford), Lay a Garland (Pearsall), Vieille prière bouddhique (Boulanger), And I Saw a New Heaven (Bainton), Immortal Bach - Komm süßer Tod (Knut Nystedt) I know this piece ruffles some feathers...but read up on how the piece is made first and it makes a little more sense! Alma Redemptoris Mater (Cecilia Macdowell)".

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

"I would not class myself as an authority on this subject compared to some considering my age. However, I think to get people to join, you have to establish a continual output of interesting music from right across the board; showcase what a prospective member could be singing! Make sure that the choir is not 'insular', but open and especially fun! If your choir is sat there grim-faced trying to get through a piece they despise, instead of grinning with joy or satisfaction, think of how that comes across to a non-singer! The choir must be a loving and supportive place to be; especially for those who are not as confident or out-going, singing in front of a congregation can take a lot of confidence, and having a warm and unpressured atmosphere really helps this. I think we have to embrace advertising in every form and place; remember to reach out to those who may not be your regular church-goers.

As for getting children into choirs, this is difficult if you've limited resources or time, but a two-pronged approach can be effective - children love singing, but are often intimidated by the formality of some church choirs, so think about how you advertise the choir and singing in general to children when doing presentations or parent's evenings. Furthermore, some parents are reticent to be driving to rehearsals and services on top of their busy lives; get them involved too, and make it worth their while, especially if they aren't regulars or from outside the parish.

Musical companionship is a very special moment in a week where everything else melts into the background, so when it comes to keeping members, the advice I'd give (to myself, too!) is remember that the choir is not just about the music. Make it social, organise trips if you can, celebrate its achievements, and most importantly challenge its members to achieve something they might not have thought possible. Think about your newer vs. your more veteran members; what haven't they ever done before, and what new experiences can you give them?

Finally, I think feedback culture is important in choirs. Some musical directors and organists can unwittingly turn a choir into an autocracy, and this brews resentment and frustration, so encourage feedback and constructive criticism. Steel yourself that this might not always be the most comfortable experience. Church music stirs up very strong feelings and don't come down too hard on yourself if the feedback is a little...vigorous, otherwise you might end up reflecting this negativity back into the choir. Instead step back, and remember (especially if you're at the beginning of your career like I am!) that mistakes are inevitable and your choir will help you to grow as much as you will help them! If a choir sees you taking on advice too, a respect and mutual growth can develop, and help to maintain your numbers!"

Many thanks to Myles for his time in answering my questions!

If you didn't hear the radio interview that Myles refers to, it's still available here:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p086ptsq>

And finally!

A quick reminder that I have been producing a newsletter for my two other choirs, which is along the same format of these ones:

<https://www.sarisburychoralsociety.com/grahams-corona-chronicles/>

If you haven't browsed these yet, you might be interested to read about (and maybe join in with) the "virtual summer sing" that they are running. All the details can be found at the link above.

That's all for this week folks. Stay safe and keep singing!

Graham