

St. Faith's Church Choir

NEWSLETTER

FRIDAY 5TH JUNE 2020

Welcome to another edition of ramblings from the conductor! Congratulations on getting through May... and welcome to June! As I type this, we are enjoying a slightly cooler temperature and it's been nice to have some rain!

Before I forget, a quick reminder that I have been producing a newsletter for my two other choirs, which is along the same format of these ones. If you would like to have a look at them, they are available on the website of my "Thursday" choir here:

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

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

Online singing opportunities



William Saunders from Bury St. Edmunds is continuing his Saturday morning hymn practices. If 10am on a Saturday isn't a good time for you, the sessions are always available to watch again at any time. I've just had a look at the selection of hymns this week and it's great!

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

Richard McVeigh is continuing to offer hymns and organ music at your request via his "Beauty in Sound" YouTube channel every Sunday evening from about 5pm. It always amazes me that Richard can keep these Sunday evening sessions going for over three hours!



<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UckdRXZZXDmLJM6XBnUpIooq>



The Royal School of Church Music continue to upload a wealth of resources to use during lockdown, including a "Hymn of the Day" on their YouTube channel.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/RSCMCentre/videos>

In addition to the YouTube content, you can join in with daily webinars and, perhaps most importantly during lockdown, you can have a go at the vocal warm-ups. It's important to remember that our singing voices are musical instruments, so the more we practice them, the more we can achieve with them!

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

Live streamed services

(some personal reflections and recommendations)

I'm continuing to enjoy spending time dipping in to services during this period of lockdown.

Like all of us, I am missing being able to take part in worship "in ordinary time" and there have been quite a few times in the last few weeks when I have missed lighting a candle in a church (the Dean of Chelmsford Cathedral pretty much sums up my thoughts on churches and COVID here:

<https://www.sacristy.co.uk/blog/2020/holy-ground-common-ground>), but I am grateful that St. Faith's and so many churches are able to offer worship in an online form. I'm really enjoying being ministered by people and places I know from the past alongside people and places that I'll never know. Sometimes I do skip through the sermon, but on other videos I skip through the music and in some cases, I only listen to the sermon!

Personally, I very much hope that online services will continue when things start to reopen!

Last week, I introduced you to members of the choir of Chingford Parish church in NE London, singing an Ascension Hymn. Here they are again with their offering for Pentecost:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BEf6ifvyI2U>



This weeks "choral classics" from St. Stephen's Church in Walbrook featured music and readings on the theme of the theme of Pentecost. The Rev Stephen Baxter must have read my newsletter last week as he has abandoned the wallpaper background and leads this service

outdoors. The musical menu includes the reflective hymn "Be still for the presence of the Lord" (more about that hymn in a future newsletter) alongside the spiritual "Every time I feel the spirit" which really drives along.

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=267617004618549>

This weeks "Great Sacred Music" service from St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London is "A sacred music response to the killing of George Floyd" and includes the highly appropriate "Beauty for brokenness" by Graham Kendrick, alongside wise words from Rev Dr Sam Wells.



<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=667051533886170>



For the aficionados of choral evensong, I loved this service from York Minster, led by the Right Reverend Dr Jonathan Frost. I liked the sermon in this one (proof that I do listen to online sermons) but I won't give you any spoilers!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ql86o-jbeRs>

Finally, I'm going to break with tradition and mention something that is neither a service nor does it contain music!

I found this reflection encouraging us to consider the consequences of our words really helpful.

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=344049769895082>

The reflection is by Rev Canon Tim Schofield who on Sunday 7th June (this Sunday) will lead his last service online as he retires after 14 years as Precentor of Chichester Cathedral.



It must be very strange to be retiring during this period of lockdown!

Anthem of the week



As this Sunday is Trinity Sunday, the anthem for this Sunday would have been the "Hymn to the Trinity" composed by the famous Russian composer Peter Ilych Tchaikovsky who was born in 1840 and died in 1893. This might possibly have been a new anthem to you, as I'm in my first year as director of music I'm still finding out!

Tchaikovsky is better known for his orchestral music such as the famous 1812 overture and the music for the ballets *Sleeping Beauty*, *Swan Lake* and *The Nutcracker*. However, Tchaikovsky did write a considerable amount of choral music including settings of texts by St. John Chrysostom from the 4th century and texts from the Russian Orthodox all-night vigil ceremony. The Hymn to the Trinity dates from 1884 and is the first of a set of nine sacred pieces. I enjoyed this version from a service sung by the choir of Wakefield Cathedral:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=848iruk72RM>

On this recording, they use the English translation by one W. G. Rothery. You will be relieved to know that the plan was to sing it in English! The original text for this anthem is in Church Slavonic and looks like this:

Иже Херувимы тайно образующе, и животворящей Троицѣ трисвятую пѣснь припѣвающе. Всякое нынѣ житейское отложимъ попеченіе. Аминь. Яко да Царя всѣхъ подыmemъ, Ангельскими невидимо дори-носима чинми. Аллилуіа

Here is the St. Petersburg Chamber Choir singing it in the original, at a slightly slower tempo than the version from Wakefield: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNMOREpKCK8>

Special Guest!

Way back in my first newsletter on Friday 3rd April, I recommended having a look at a really lovely version of Mozart's *Ave verum* sung by singers from St. James RC church, Spanish Place, London. They were being very well behaved and obeying social distancing rules. The video was snapped up by Classic FM and has apparently been viewed by 471K via their Facebook page!

I am delighted that for this week's interview, our "special guest" is Iestyn Evans who is Director of Music at St. James, Spanish Place and Director of Music at St. Botolph without Bishopsgate in London.

Iestyn also teaches Music at the Cardinal Vaughan Memorial School, where he is school organist.



Where did you study music?

"I grew up in west Wales and was very lucky to have fabulous and lovely first piano teacher. After school locally I went to be organ scholar of The Queen's College in Oxford. After graduating, I moved to London to be organ scholar of Westminster Cathedral, and then Westminster Abbey the following year. I also did a postgraduate course at the Royal Academy of Music".

Who are your greatest musical inspirations?

"A tricky question! So many composers, especially from the Renaissance; Bach, of course; not to mention Puccini (who is secretly my favourite!). As for performers, my favourite singers are Renata Tebaldi and Fritz Wunderlich; I have a soft spot for Ella Fitzgerald too. I think that the greatest personal inspiration on me is James O'Donnell. I had the joy of working with him at the Cathedral and

the Abbey, and I found his musicianship in training the choir extraordinary. He's also a fabulous organist of course".

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

"This varies so much from church to church. On Sundays, I'm upstairs with the choir. We're very high up in a big gothic building, largely out of sight. There's a great sense of camaraderie upstairs, though we are far away from the congregation. I do try to go to the social centre for drinks after the service to talk to people though. At St Botolph's, the choir and I are in the chancel, so we are certainly nearer the people there. I'm lucky that in both places that I am near the singers, sometimes I deputise in places where I'm miles away".

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

"Luckily I do keep my hand in with the playing. I have an excellent assistant on Sundays and he does most of the playing, but I try to do some voluntaries each month. We share the accompanying a bit as well. My school has a liturgical choir and I play for that, so I've not given up on the playing yet!"

Which choral pieces would you take to a desert island?

"How many am I allowed?! It would be lovely to have some variety. I'd definitely want some Renaissance polyphony - probably some Victoria and Guerrero. I'd also take the St Matthew Passion. It would be lonely on the island, so I'd need some Haydn to cheer me up - probably the Theresienmesse. The Brahms Geistliches lied would be quite soothing too. Then something from the Anglican tradition - Baristow's Blessed City probably, or maybe the Nunc from Stanford in C. Can I take a Welsh hymnbook too? And a piano?!"

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

"I work in two churches in London with professional musical set-ups. This means that the singers are paid to be there, and that singing, be it in services, concerts, recordings, operas, is what they do for a living, so this makes recruiting fairly straightforward. However, I play once a month for a volunteer choir that sings for Evensong at St. Giles in the Fields. They meet weekly to rehearse and sing, but once a month they do more challenging repertoire that needs a separate accompanist. The director is inspiring and there is a healthy balance between making music at the highest possible standard and making the whole experience enjoyable. Having a pub next door probably helps too. I suppose that one



of the difficulties in maintain church choirs is that church attendance isn't what it used to be. However, one of the great joys of church music is that there's scope for doing new music often, as well as having a running repertoire to pick from. It's potentially more varied than singing with lots of other choirs who might meet often to rehearse, but only do a limited number of performances".

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

Further details about St. James, Spanish Place are here... <https://sjrcc.org.uk/> ... and here's a reminder of the socially distanced performance of Mozart Ave verum that I mentioned previously: <https://youtu.be/nkp0ajH2AnM> (Ave verum is about 1 hour 5 minutes into the video). I'll save talking about Iestyn's other church (St. Botolph without Bishopsgate) for another newsletter.

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

Graham