

St. Faith's Church Choir

NEWSLETTER

FRIDAY 24TH JULY 2020

Welcome to another edition of ramblings from the organist!

Good news: St. Faiths have announced that public worship will recommence this Sunday (26th July)! Please refer to this week's Corona Chronicle for full details.

More good news: I am able to play for services again! **Thank you to Lyndon** who has been providing the organ music for the live streamed services from the rectory. I know that the **music has been much appreciated.**

Not so good news: Singing in services is not allowed at the moment... apart from one person singing, therefore acting as a cantor.

So while we very much welcome a return to public worship, we remain patient for the time when we can sing together again. I hope it will be soon, but only when it's safe!

Here is this week's newsletter... as ever, comments, feedback, suggestions welcome!

All about Hymns

Richard McVeigh continues his live request show of hymns and organ music every Sunday evening starting at 5pm via his "Beauty in Sound" YouTube channel:



<https://www.youtube.com/c/BEAUTYinSOUND/videos>

 The Royal School of Church Music are still offering a "hymn for the day" via their YouTube channel:

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

Canon Alison Kennedy from Chelmsford Cathedral in Essex continues her "hymn of the week" series. This week, Canon Alison



has chosen a hymn which we often sing as an anthem:

<https://chelmsfordcathedral.org.uk/uploads/church-at-home/theres-a-wideness.pdf>

Live streamed services

Although churches are starting to resume public worship, I'm pleased to see that many places are still offering something online.



This week I had a listen to the lockdown recordings that the choir of St. Francis church, Welwyn Garden City have put together during lockdown:

<https://www.facebook.com/richard.harrison.547389/videos/10157071921000124/>

Portsmouth Cathedral have had the pleasure of having this choir as a visiting

choir during the summer for the last two years. Here's a link to the choir page on the church website:

<https://stfranciswgc.org.uk/the-choirs/>

Back to this diocese, the choir of St. John's church Newport (IOW) have put together some excellent virtual recordings during lockdown. Here is their latest one...



<https://www.facebook.com/stjohnschurchchoir/videos/2744746969104297/>

... and here is the link to the choir page on the church website:

<https://www.stjohnsnewport.org/choir>



The theme for this weeks "choral classics" from St. Stephen's Church, Walbrook is "Journeying".

Rev Stephen Baxter is out and about this week (on a journey I guess), alongside the lovely voices of the choral scholars singing an alternative version of "Lead me Lord" and two hymns based on folksongs, one with a reference to Hobgoblins.

<https://www.facebook.com/ststephenec4n/videos/290234518879704/>

The theme of this weeks "Great Sacred Music" service from St. Martin-in-the-Fields is "Fellowship". Rev Dr Sam Wells presents (he's either a keen gardener or has very good gardeners) and St. Martin's Voices provide lovely music:



<https://www.facebook.com/stmartininthefields/videos/296611708441659/>

Anthem of the week



The anthem for this Sunday would have been Jesu, joy of man's desiring by the famous German composer and organist Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 - 1750). The origin of "Jesu, joy" comes from a cantata called Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben, which translates as Heart and mouth and deed and life. It was composed in 1723.

1723 was an important year for Bach as he became the Thomaskantor (which is the common name for the musical director for the famous boys choir, the Thomanerchor) in Leipzig. As part of his duties, Bach was to offer music for the Sundays and Feast days for all four churches in the town, so he decided to compose new cantatas for these occasions (a cantata is a vocal composition with an instrumental accompaniment, typically in several movements, often involving a choir). This YouTube video beautifully explains Bach's working week and how he composed the cantatas: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KsyBN6p_hh0&t=186s (beginning about three minutes in, but if you have a spare hour, the whole documentary, split into seven parts is well worth a watch).



The cantata was written for the Feast of the Visitation of the Virgin Mary to Elizabeth and Bach based the music on an earlier cantata composed in 1716 when he was at Weimar, for the 4th Sunday of Advent. Bach wasn't able to use the earlier cantata at Leipzig as they observed a time of silence during Advent (sounds a bit like 2020 lockdown), so Bach adapted it for the Visitation.

The Leipzig version of this cantata is in ten movements, some for choir and some for soloists. The chorale, which we know better as Jesu, Joy is movement six and then a second verse as movement number ten.

The text that we now use for Jesu, Joy is attributed to the poet laureate Robert Bridges (1844 - 1930). It isn't a translation of the version in the cantata, but takes its inspiration from the same hymn that Bach used originally.



Here's an organ only version, recorded during lockdown by Marion Bettsworth who is Assistant Director of Music at St Michael's Church, Highgate, North London. Do sing along, the words are provided! I've chosen this video, so you can see why its not my favourite anthem to play...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COY3a7ZLoRO>

... and here's newsletter regular Richard McVeigh who shows off by having singers at his disposal, singing in German: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lsqSRJ1CvL8>

Although not the fastest piece of music in the world to play, its not the easiest! As both organists show, the right hand, left hand and pedals are all doing very independent things.

Its not very often that you get to hear a full Bach cantata within the context of a service, however, on selected Sundays throughout the year (outside of lockdown), St. Anne's Lutheran Church in London (about half a mile west from the Tower of London) hosts Bach Vespers, an evening Lutheran service featuring a church cantata by Johann Sebastian Bach and the music of his contemporaries. <http://www.stanneslutheranchurch.org.uk/about-us/bach-vespers/>



Featured Church!



Last week I gave you a whistle stop tour of St. James's Church, West End near Southampton. For a lot of my time at this church, I wasn't playing the organ, so I occasionally made "guest appearances" at other churches for services that needed an organist. One of those churches was St. Michael and All Angels, Bassett (North Southampton) whose choir has been featured during lockdown. Another was **St. Michael the Archangel Church in Southampton City Centre**, which is the one that I'm featuring this week.

St. Michael's is the oldest building still in use in Southampton. To find about the history of St. Michael's, we need to go right back to the 9th century, nearly as far back as the Battle of Hastings in 1066! In 1070, the Normans began to build the church tower. Like many churches, St. Michael's began life as a much smaller building, with the tower being the middle of a simple cross shaped church. Over the centuries the church has been extended, including two side chapels and two side aisles. The church spire was heightened by nine feet about 150 years ago, to be an aid to ships coming up Southampton Water, St. Michael's being less than half a mile away from the docks. In the first half of



the 19th century, the population of Southampton practically doubled and St. Michael's was altered to make room for more worshippers; a lovely problem to have!

The City of Southampton suffered terribly in world war two. Thankfully, St. Michael's only had some damage, especially to the stained glass windows from a nearby bomb. The damage of the great East window enabled a new installation, commemorating the five churches that existed during the medieval period of what is known as the "Old Town" part of Southampton. Of the five churches depicted in the window, only St. Michael's survives.



In the 1960s, the church was restored at a total cost of £36,000 and the work was completed in time for the 900th anniversary of the church in 1970. This year (2020) is the 950th anniversary of St. Michael's and a full programme of events to mark the occasion were planned. Sadly, many of these have fallen victim to the current situation, but the church very much hopes to be able to mark their Patronal Festival in the autumn. Another significant milestone



for Southampton is that 2020 marks the 400th anniversary of the first English Pilgrims to cross the Atlantic in the Mayflower. It's quite amazing to think that St. Michael's was there all that time ago!

The choir at St. Michael's is called "Cantores Michaelis" and is made up of choral scholars and an organ scholar from Southampton University. They sing for every Sunday and Feast Day during term time. In December of each year, the choir enjoy singing carols to passengers on the cruise ships, before they embark for Christmas in the sun (the passengers that is)!

In December 2016, a new electronic organ was installed in the church, which is basically a replica of the organ in Hereford Cathedral. Clever technical wizardry has digitally sampled the sounds of the Hereford Cathedral organ! You can hear the choir and the organ in action on their YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/TheCantoresMichaelis> (I think I'm playing the organ on a couple of the videos).



The first time I played at St. Michael's was on 22nd March 2015. The church was in an interregnum at the time as the previous vicar had "retired", although he hadn't really as the vicar in question is Rev Tim Daykin who has only just stepped down from presenting the Sunday morning programme on BBC Radio Solent. Between 2015 and 2018 I was an occasional organist and worshipper at the church. For the 2018/19 academic year, there wasn't an organ scholar, so I played for a lot more services there. I very much enjoyed working with the current vicar Fr David Deboys and the Director of Music, Keith Davis. My final service was Michaelmas 2019, before playing for my first service at St. Faith's a fortnight later.

Further information about St. Michael's church is here: <https://www.stmichaels1070.org.uk/>

To complete the link between Southampton and Havant, I was really interested to read recently that the British Pilgrimage Trust have rediscovered the "Old Way" pilgrimage route from Southampton to Canterbury, bypassing Fareham and Portsmouth but going via Havant! Amazingly, it was rediscovered on a map known as the Gough Map, which is reputed to be Britain's oldest road map, dating from around 1360! I am very tempted to do the part of the walk from Southampton to Havant sometime... Have a look at the "Old Map" here: <https://britishpilgrimage.org/old-way/>

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

Graham