

# St. Faith's Church Choir

# NEWSLETTER

FRIDAY 31<sup>ST</sup> JULY 2020

**Welcome** to another edition of ramblings from the organist! How is it nearly August?!

It was very good to be playing again at St. Faith's for public worship last Sunday. Thank you to those who took the trouble to let me know how it came across. For me, it seemed very strange to just have Tom singing and I missed all of you being in the choir stalls; the choir vestry seemed a bit lonely and is missing you too... The church organ seems to have survived lockdown very well; thanks to Tom for playing it a few times to keep it working! I don't know if you noticed a stuck note during the closing voluntary, thankfully it was an important note in the piece so it probably sounded like a bagpipe drone.

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 by the famous clergyman and abolitionist, John Newton:



<https://chelmsfordcathedral.org.uk/uploads/church-at-home/amazing-grace.pdf>

## Live streamed services

I've been very impressed with the places of worship that have managed to put together virtual choral evensongs. Since the last newsletter, I have listened to three different services, all of them excellent!



Last Saturday was the day that the church remembers St. James; and the church of St. James the Greater, Leicester put together a virtual choral evensong for their patronal festival. Much of the music will be familiar to you; I loved how well they sang the hymns, the conductor looks like he is having the time of his life... and I even enjoyed the sermon!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3wRySf5eJk>

On Tuesday, the Friends of Cathedral



Music uploaded a special choral evensong put together by choral scholars from

various churches and Cathedrals, in aid of the Cathedral Choirs' Emergency Fund. The music here is less familiar but beautifully sung and expertly edited:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0D07EMa\\_kVs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0D07EMa_kVs)



On Wednesday, the Radio 3 broadcast of choral evensong was live for the first time since lockdown! The service was sung by singers from St. Martin in the Fields and led by Rev Dr Sam Wells. I am sure that it must have been quite an emotional experience for all taking part in this service:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000lpbr>

Mentioning St. Martin's above leads us nicely to the theme of this week's "Great Sacred Music" service, which is "Growth". Rev Dr Sam Wells presents from outside the church (I found the noise of the



London traffic in the background rather comforting) and St. Martin's Voices provide lovely music:

<https://www.facebook.com/stmartininthefields/videos/282024926410758/>



From St. Martin's, take four stops on the Eastbound Circle and District line to Cannon Street where you have a very short walk to St. Stephen's Church, Walbrook for their "choral classics" series. This week was the last of the series and the theme is "Glory". Rev Stephen Baxter is back out in the garden this week to present, alongside the lovely voices of the choral scholars singing two hymns with the word glory in them and a rather familiar setting of the Gloria that I've heard somewhere else...

<https://www.facebook.com/ststephenec4n/videos/565808637431547/>

## Anthem of the week



You will recall from the last exciting episode that last week's anthem would have been Jesu, joy of man's desiring by Johann Sebastian Bach (31<sup>st</sup> March 1685 - 28<sup>th</sup> July 1750). By coincidence, Tuesday of this week (28<sup>th</sup> July) was the 270<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bach's death, so it was good to know that we did our bit to commemorate it, although unknowingly! By another coincidence, this week's anthem would have been one by a nearly exact contemporary of Bach, the German composer George Frederic Handel (5<sup>th</sup> March 1685 - 14<sup>th</sup> April 1759).



As well as composing weekly cantatas for services, Bach somehow found time to compose organ works and other choral works including settings of the Passion narratives according to St. Matthew and St. John. In 1712, Handel made a setting of the Passion narrative. In fact, the Handel setting of the Passion predates the more famous Bach settings and it is said that Bach was influenced by Handel's work.



The setting by Handel uses a text by the German poet Barthold Heinrich Brockes (1680 - 1747). In the text, Brockes reworked the traditional form of the Passion narrative by adding descriptive poetry which reflects on the part of the story we have just heard. Because of this association, the Handel work is known as the Brockes Passion. Our anthem would have been Lord, I trust thee which is one of the chorales featured in the work.

Here is a recording of the anthem: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4esjh8zGBMQ>

If you'd like to hear the chorale in context of the whole work, you can hear it here (about 15 minutes in): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rxw1DJVUPQo&t=1121s>

An often asked question, did Bach and Handel ever meet? The answer to this is no, but they nearly did. They missed meeting each other in Halle by a day! It is believed that one of Bach's biggest regrets was that he never met Handel, which is probably true as at the time, Bach was "just" an organist in Leipzig whereas Handel had celebrity status, composing, for example, for English royalty (Coronation Anthems, Music for the Royal Fireworks, etc.)

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## Featured Church!

About six years ago, I was reading the weekly church times newspaper backwards (I always start from the end to read the job adverts and see if anyone I know is moving parish or retiring) and I was intrigued to read about a church in London which doesn't have Sunday services. I decided that this was worth investigating...

So on the way back from a visit to see University friends in May 2015, I popped in to the weekly Eucharist on a Wednesday lunchtime at **St. Botolph without Bishopsgate Church in London**, which is just round the corner from Liverpool Street station. The reason for not having a Sunday service is because the church is right in the middle of the city, with very little (if any) residential properties, so it serves as a church for the city during the week. In fact, the church is lent out to an Orthodox church on a Sunday!



The original Saxon Church of St. Botolph dated from 1212 and was repaired, at his own expense, by Sir William Allen who was Lord Mayor of London in 1571/2. Although the church survived the Great Fire of London in 1666, by the 18<sup>th</sup> century the church had fallen into disrepair and it was decided to demolish the old church in 1725 and build a new church which was completed in 1729 and stands to this day. The church is unique amongst the other churches in the City in that the tower is at the East End, with the chancel underneath.



Amazingly, the parish registers date back to 1558 and record the burials of many notable people, including an infant son of the playwright and poet Benjamin Jonson (1572 - 1637). The Elizabethan actor Edward Alleyn (1566 - 1626) was baptised at the church and the poet John Keats was baptised in the present font in 1795.



St. Botolph's survived the Great Fire of London and managed to only lose one window in World War Two, but was a major casualty in the IRA Bishopsgate Bombing in 1993. The bomb opened up the roof and left the church without doors or windows and the building was cordoned off and classed as a dangerous structure. The office and vestry were shattered and papers and files were scattered all over Bishopsgate. There followed a restoration project which lasted three and a half years. A Thanksgiving Service was held in January 1997 and the Bishop of London dedicated a new stained glass window.



Today, St. Botolph's is a living church, open every weekday and a regular Sung Eucharist on a Wednesday lunchtime, alongside said services on a Tuesday morning and a Thursday lunchtime. I think the current priest in charge takes Sunday as his day off!



St. Botolph's was the first of the burial grounds in the City to be converted into a public garden. At the time, the transformation caused much opposition (as you can imagine!) but today it is much appreciated by City workers who are enjoying some air on their lunch break!

The choir at St. Botolph's is made up of a group of professional singers, the number varies depending on the music being sung. In the summer, the music is led by a cantor, a bit like the current lockdown situation. The director of music at St. Botolph's is Iestyn Evans, who was one of our "special guests" to be interviewed back in June.

The beauty of the music, the worship style and the very warm welcome I received has meant that since 2015 I've tried to make a monthly pilgrimage to St. Botolph's for their Wednesday Sung Eucharist. For the majority of that time, the church has been in an interregnum, although they have been lucky to have other vicars from the diocese to take services. I haven't been able to get to St. Botolph's much over the last 18 months, but lockdown has meant that I am able to join their community on a weekly basis via their live streamed services.



The church website address is here: <http://www.botolph.org.uk/> and here's a link to their YouTube channel: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCC3oLzGDnpw6XHVGJi2A9\\_A](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCC3oLzGDnpw6XHVGJi2A9_A)

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## When's the next choir practice?

Well, the quick answer to that is, not yet!

The current Government guidance for "amateur music groups" is: *"Non-professionals should currently not engage in singing or playing wind and brass instruments with other people given these activities pose a potentially higher risk of transmission and whilst research is ongoing. DCMS has commissioned further scientific studies to be carried out to develop robust scientific data for these activities. Existing and emerging evidence will be analysed to assist the development of policy and guidelines"*.

The paragraph above this in the guidance says: *"Non-professionals (meaning those participating in performing arts other than for work purposes), or groups which include non-professionals, may refer to this guidance for their activities, but must at all times do so in line with government legislation and guidance on meeting people outside your household"*.

The guidance on meeting people says: *"only socialise indoors with members of up to 2 households" and "socialise outdoors in a group of up to 6 people from different households or up to 2 households (anyone in your support bubble counts as one household)"*.

So although slightly frustrating, we continue to be patient and I hope the newsletters are helping to keep us together as a choir. Personally, I'd rather be patient than restart early (too soon) and then have to suspend rehearsals / services due to a second spike or a local lockdown.

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## And finally!

I am now taking two weeks off from writing the newsletter, so the next edition will be sent to you on **Friday 21<sup>st</sup> August**. Until then, stay safe and keep singing!

*Graham*