

St. Faith's Church Choir

NEWSLETTER

WEDNESDAY 19TH AUGUST 2020

Welcome to another edition of ramblings from the organist! I hope you've had a good couple of weeks since the last newsletter.

Yes, I know it's Wednesday rather than Friday... but this week's newsletter has important updates in it, which I thought you should have today rather than Friday!

It was very good to be able to play for two special services at St. Faith's last Saturday; the civic service for VJ Day in the morning and in the afternoon, a lovely service of thanksgiving and renewal of vows on the occasion of Bruce and Marys golden wedding anniversary. Although we as a choir weren't able to give musical support on the day, I'm sure you will join me virtually in congratulating them on fifty years of marriage!

Talking of Marys, Last Saturday was also the day when many churches remember the Blessed Virgin Mary, hence many of the online materials that I mention in the newsletter have a Mary theme!

Here is this week's newsletter... as ever, comments, feedback, suggestions very 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 posted their final "hymn for the day" on their YouTube channel last Saturday. The



complete set of hymns (numbering over 100) are still available to listen to. Well done to all who contributed hymns to the series:

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

Canon Alison Kennedy from Chelmsford Cathedral in Essex continues her "hymn of the week" series. Last week, Canon Alison chose a hymn based on the song of Mary:



<https://chelmsfordcathedral.org.uk/uploads/church-at-home/tell-out-my-soul.pdf>

Live streamed services

Although we're well into August, I thought that live streamed services involving music and choirs would be scarce, but no, I've found quite a few places that are still going strong!



St. James' church in Malden have been putting together virtual evensongs for quite a while during lockdown and here is their latest one. The anthem will be especially familiar to you. As I type this, I'm enjoying listening to the closing voluntary which is a favourite of mine. I might even learn to play it one day...

and I'd like to have it at my wedding if I ever get married!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DHsiDx6r7N0>

St. Stephen's Church in Canterbury were very brave and had a choral evensong in the church with a small group of singers leading the worship:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=drcgMBBA73c>



The Radio 3 weekly broadcasts of choral evensong continue to be live from St. Martin in the Fields. This week is the turn of the vocal consort The Gesualdo Six:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006tp7r/episodes/guide>

Mentioning St. Martin's leads us nicely to the theme of last weeks "Great Sacred Music" service, which was "Witness". 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 providing lovely music as normal:



<https://www.facebook.com/stmartininthefields/videos/787644238707506/>

Anthem of the week

In "ordinary time", we probably would have had a month off from singing anthems. So for something different, I've chosen to write about the anthem **I will lift up mine eyes**.



I've chosen it for three reasons: 1) it's written for altos, tenors and basses, so I don't think the sopranos would be best pleased if I chose it for a normal Sunday morning (although I've just discovered that there is a version for upper voices), 2) the anthem is by Ernest Walker who was born in 1870, so this year is 150 years since his birth, 3) this anthem makes my top ten list of favourite choral pieces!

Ernest Walker was born in Bombay and came to England with his parents the following year. He was educated at Oxford and became a Doctor of Music in 1898.

In 1901, Ernest Walker became director of music at Balliol College, Oxford. Among his students were Herbert Murrill (Professor of Music at the Royal Academy 1933 - 1952), Reginald Jacques (co-editor of the green Carols for Choirs book) and Sir William McKie (Director of Music at Westminster Abbey 1941 - 1963 who presided over the music at the wedding of Queen Elizabeth II in 1947 and the 1953 coronation).



At Balliol, Ernest Walker organised Sunday music chamber concerts, which he often played piano for. Ernest Walker had a great reputation as a piano accompanist, playing privately with the physicist Albert Einstein who was a violinist and publicly for the famous cellist Pablo Casals (pictured). On one occasion in 1898, Casals and Walker performed for Queen Victoria at Osborne House. Ernest Walker resigned from his position at the college in 1925 to devote more time to composing. He continued to live in Oxford until his death in 1949.

In addition to his director of music role, Ernest Walker was assistant organist at Balliol College from 1891 to 1901 and then organist from 1901 to 1913. He resigned because his private views on religion didn't match the religious nature of the texts that the choir were singing, although, interestingly, the college didn't require the organist to profess the Christian faith!



"I will lift up mine eyes" is one of two anthems for voices and organ, composed in 1899. I think it's a beautiful setting of the familiar text of psalm 121, with a lovely ascending and descending organ part, with a wonderful shift in harmony in the last few bars.



Here are the choir of Wells Cathedral singing it, together with an introduction by the Precentor, Canon Nicholas Jepson-Biddle, who was previously Precentor at Portsmouth Cathedral: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FMXxYyA-qBM>

If you liked that, you might like to listen to "the other" anthem of the set, which is a longer one using words from psalm 90: "Lord thou hast been our refuge". Here are the choir of Wakefield Cathedral in action, with (I think) Sachin Gunga at the organ, who is now the Sub-Organist at Portsmouth Cathedral: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLdHga6KBg0>



When the time comes, I would like "I will lift up mine eyes" at my funeral please!

Some small steps for singers

In light of recent Government guidance updates at the end of last week, the Church of England have updated their guidance at the beginning of this week. This is particularly because, as you will have spotted from some of the live streamed services and as you may have read elsewhere, the advice on choirs singing during services has changed.

The very good news is that, although congregations are not able to sing yet, a "small choir" ARE able to sing (hooray), as long as appropriate social distancing is achieved. The RSCM have really come up trumps and provided extremely clear and helpful, positive guidance (alleluia).

So it gives Tom and myself great pleasure to be able to invite you back to sing with us from this Sunday (23rd August)!

There is absolutely no obligation to attend this Sunday if you don't feel ready to just yet. For some, that will be this Sunday (great), for others, it will be a bit longer... and that's absolutely ok. Please come back when you feel ready.

We have looked carefully at how we can manage social distancing and we will be able to have a **maximum of seven choristers** (five people sat in the choir stalls and two in the sanctuary). For this week, we will manage this on a first come, first served basis. ***If you would like to sing this coming Sunday, please drop me an email: music@stfaith.com so we have an idea of numbers.*** If more than seven of you are willing and ready to come along, then I'll start a new list for next week and we will look at setting up a rota.

For the moment, we will only be leading the hymns and mass setting for the service, just like Tom has been at services. We will not be singing anthems just yet, nor will be having choir practices yet, although fingers crossed that we can sooner rather than later.

We will robe as we normally would for services, in either the choir vestry or the North Transept, depending on space. We need to be careful about monitoring this, so please bear with us if you're unable to robe as soon as you arrive. Please arrive by 9:15 if you can, so you can be in place ready to go for when we go live at 9:25. We will not be processing before or after the service. If possible, it would be good if you could take your robes and hymn books home after the service and bring it back the next time you come to church.

The current guidance recommends that masks are to be worn at all times, except when you are singing, which I appreciate will be quite a bit of removing and replacing during a service... but I'm sure we'll get used to it, especially as it means a return to singing!

The key words from everything that I've written above are *very good* and *positive*. It certainly feels *very good* to be able to invite you back to restart (or relaunch I guess) the choir so we can sing joyfully again. I very much hope that any further updates will be steps forward and *positive* over the coming weeks and months.

And finally!



One more online service to mention this week, from members of the choir at St. Leonard's Church, Lexden (Colchester) which was the featured church in the newsletter on 10th July. I understand that these videos take a huge amount of work to edit! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E5qy0eSO2xE>

That's all for this week folks.

Stay safe, keep singing and maybe see you in the stalls on Sunday!

Graham