

St. Faith's Church Choir

NEWSLETTER

FRIDAY 28TH AUGUST 2020

Welcome to another edition of ramblings from the conductor! I hope this newsletter finds you well. Here is this week's edition... 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>



Chelmsford Cathedral in Essex continue their "hymn of the week" series. Last week, it was the turn of James Davy (Director of Music at the Cathedral) to choose the hymn:

<https://chelmsfordcathedral.org.uk/uploads/church-at-home/hymn-of-the-week-sunday-23-august.pdf>

Incidentally, James Davy was one-time organ scholar at Portsmouth Cathedral.

Live streamed services

I've mentioned the choir of Christ Church, Southgate (North London) on previous occasions. Last Friday, when I was on welcome duty at St. Faith's, it was good to have a chat with Jenny from our choir who told me that she used to sing in the choir at Southgate! So here they are again, singing a motet by the German composer Hans Leo Hassler who was born in 1564 and died in 1612:



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VBUk5INc_hI

I enjoyed two choral evensongs last Sunday.



St. Stephen's Church in Canterbury offered Stanford in B flat, Ayleward Responses and Holy is the true light by William Harris...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MwjKOmi5wg>

... and more Stanford (in A) in this excellent evensong from St. Bartholomew the Great Church in London. Super sermon too!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9EyBAMUjCfM>

The Radio 3 weekly broadcasts of choral evensong continue to be live from St. Martin in the Fields. This week was the turn of newsletter regulars, St. Martin's Voices:



<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000m11k>

For last weeks "Great Sacred Music" service, Rev Dr Sam Wells very bravely decided to take on the theme of the Trinity (I loved his impression of an ancient woman) and St. Martin's Voices provide lovely music. It was very good to see them singing from inside the church:

<https://www.facebook.com/stmartininthefields/videos/312277160074520>

Hymn writer of the week



This week, I've decided to write a bit about the hymn writer **Frances Jane van Alstyne** who was born in 1820 (200 years ago this year) and died in 1915, so lived a long life! She is perhaps better known by her maiden name of **Fanny Crosby**.

Fanny Crosby was born in New York State and as a result of poor treatment, became blind at the age of six. She taught for many years at a school for the blind; and in 1858 married a blind musician. Her first poem was published when she was six. At the age of thirty, she had an undefined religious experience which led her to write thousands of hymns. She was considered to be the greatest gospel-song writer of her era. Many of her words were used by the travelling evangelist and hymn collector, Ira D. Sankey (pictured right).



Two of her most famous hymns are Blessed Assurance and To God be the Glory.

The words of "Blessed Assurance" are a series of personal statements of faith, which speak joyfully of the happiness and freedom of a Christian; and the joy that never ends when anyone accepts Christ as their Saviour. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=60f-xF6mRvs> (organist confession: *I really don't like this hymn, but this version makes me like it a bit more!*)

"To God be the Glory" was written in about 1872 and was published in 1875, although it was already popular in Great Britain before it was published, as Ira Sankey had introduced it there during campaigns to the United Kingdom by the evangelist Dwight L. Moody (pictured left). Rather than personal statements of faith, the hymn is all about the glory of God, who loved the world that he gave us his Son to make atonement for sin (verse one); that all who believe in Christ will receive pardon (verse two) and will rejoice now and in all eternity because of the great things he has taught us and done (verse three). The final line of verse three "when Jesus we see" must have really meant something special to Fanny Crosby, who was blind. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-15v9iworAU> (organist confession: *I much prefer this hymn and enjoyed this version*)



Both hymns were used extensively by the Billy Graham crusades. In the case of "To God be the Glory", it was the making of the hymn, as it was still relatively unknown in the US until 1954, when a copy was handed to Cliff Barrows, who was the song leader for Billy Graham, together with the suggestion that it should be included in the song book for the London Crusade.

On the death of Fanny Crosby, her family erected a very small tombstone at her request, which carried the words: "She hath done what she could". You can view this, plus her headstone (which has the first verse of Blessed Assurance on it) at the slightly macabre website called findagrave.com: <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/4173/frances-jane-crosby>

The future

It was very good to welcome back three members of the choir to provide the singing at last Sunday's service. Many thanks to Kim, Terryle and Victoria for coming along to sing. I thought it came across beautifully.

If you haven't seen or heard it yet, it is available here:

<https://www.facebook.com/stfaithschurchhavant/videos/346424696368602>

As last Sunday was such a success, we will continue to have some choristers singing the hymns and service setting on Sunday mornings. A reminder that there is absolutely no obligation to attend if you don't feel ready 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 singers 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 service setting. 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!

More good news, which is musically related rather than choir related: we hope in the autumn to relaunch the lunchtime concerts. These will take place on Wednesdays (they were formerly Tuesdays) and we hope to have a live (socially distanced) audience and make it available online. Further details will be in the Corona Chronicles in due course.

Reference to the Corona Chronicle leads me to tell you that **I have decided that this will be the last choir newsletter that I will be sending out.** From September, I will be offering a weekly contribution to the Corona Chronicle.

Although the newsletters take at least three hours a week to put together, I have enjoyed being a writer and editor for the last five months! I have enjoyed learning more about some of the anthems that we sing. I have enjoyed making contact again with organist friends through the interviews. I have enjoyed virtually attending places of worship that I know well alongside others that I will never visit. I hope that you have enjoyed reading the newsletters and hope that they have been a useful and an effective way of staying in touch.

Until we can all meet again, **please keep in contact with St. Faith's and keep in contact with each other...** and I look forward to welcoming you back to the choir whenever you are ready!

Stay safe everyone... and keep singing!

Graham

Ps. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OG5bonwSRRI>

(when things get settled, whenever that will be, we really must record ourselves singing this)