

Sing Joyfully

St Swithun's Choir e-newsletter



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April 2018

This issue of Sing Joyfully is all about Easter; cantatas, opera chorus, services, a hymn.

We are very pleased to welcome Adam Wu to our bass line. Adam quietly moved into our midst after the first Messiah rehearsal.

With the conclusion of Eastern Summer Time and the turning back of our sundials by one hour, “shirts” now means (for men) the addition of Swiz ties and dark jackets to our choir uniforms.

Easter at Swiz

Messiah, 24 March at 5 pm.

We counted 60 voices in the choir, plus a trumpeter (Andrew del Riccio), our organist (Peter Hamilton) and our Director (Phillip Linquist); a music group of 63. We particularly enjoyed the company and appreciated the contributions of 19 people who do not usually sing with us on Sundays. Mention must be made of our soloists and duettists made up predominately from Swiz choristers – Belinda Robinson, Joanna Forbes, Eleanor Gilkes, Julie Hobson, Amanda Drake, Louse Kearns, Kathleen Ctercteko, Jane Wang and Margaret Coulter, Don Mayes, Peter Gilkes, Fred Morris and Phil Linquist. And we should include the whole alto section in this list for its rendition of the solo alto aria *He shall feed His flock*. All acquitted themselves very well.

Of the 53 separate pieces in *Messiah*, our Easter presentation included 37; 14 of the 20 choruses Handel composed. (That computes to 70% of the entire work.)

The church was packed for this the seventh occasion we have sung *Messiah* at Easter. Our thanks to Roger for his introductions to the three parts (and to Richard Kaan for his prior research).

Thanks also to all the people who worked behind the scenes in the choral preparations and the preparation of the high tea that followed.

Seven times probably doesn't make it a “tradition”, but we must be getting close.

The chorus *Lift up your heads* was reprised at both morning services on the following day, with very creditable numbers (30+) on both occasions.

Good Friday, 30 March at 8:30 am

We have rehearsed a couple of new pieces for this year's service: “*The Crown of Roses*” (also known as “*Legend*”) by Tchaikovsky, and *O for a closer walk with God* by Stanford. Three other seasonally appropriate pieces from our vast repertoire will also be sung as choir anthems, plus five well-known hymns, making the service quite a big sing for this very special day.

Easter Day, 1 April at 10 am

Our anthem for the day will be one that we sang a few years ago in our Opera concert; *Easter Hymn* from Mascagni's opera *Cavalleria rusticana* (see article following).

Some have suggested that it is not a suitable piece to sing in a real church because of the opera's complex plot which involves disloyalty and cheating, etc. – all the things you might expect in an opera. But we sing it completely isolated from the opera's context. A quick look at the text that we shall sing (John Rutter's English translation of the Italian) will reveal not a word out of place for our celebration of Easter:

Alleluia,
Praise to the Lord who is risen,
Death's dominion and pow'r to deny,
He has broken the bonds of his prison,
He is risen to glory on high!
Alleluia!



Easter Hymn

In July 1888 a Milanese music publisher announced a competition open to all young Italian composers who had not yet had an opera performed on stage. They were invited to submit a one-act opera which would be judged by a jury of five prominent Italian critics and composers. The best three would be staged in Rome at the publisher's expense.

Pietro Mascagni heard about the competition only two months before the closing date and asked a friend, who was a poet and professor of literature, to provide a libretto. That friend chose *Cavalleria rusticana*, a popular short story (and play) by Giovanni Verga, as the basis for the opera. He and another friend set about composing the libretto, sending it to Mascagni in fragments, sometimes only a few verses at a time on the back of a postcard. The opera was finally submitted on the last day that entries would be accepted. In all, 73 operas were submitted, and on 5 March 1890, the judges selected the final three, including Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* (in English, "Rustic Chivalry").

The events of *Cavalleria rusticana* take place in a small village in southern Italy on Easter Day. Central to the story is the Easter service in the church, a vital focus in such a community's life. The opera's characters and their narrative are introduced before the service, and the violent conclusion takes place during celebrations after the service concludes.

But we don't see the service itself. Instead, we hear it.

The grand *Easter Hymn*, scored for pretty much the whole cast of the opera, starts with just a solo organ playing from inside the church nearby. Then we hear an unaccompanied choir singing (in Latin) the beginning of the service – '*Regina coeli, laetare*' – with the voices of the congregation responding '*Alleluia!*' The choir sings two more phrases and the congregation responds. All this is out of sight.

In fact, the focus of the number is on the villagers on stage in the piazza, waiting to process into the church. This chorus now picks up a new section of the hymn, echoing the choral style of the church choir: '*Rejoice, for the Lord has risen*'. (This is where we begin the piece on Easter Day at Swiz.)



Organ and four-part choral singing give way to orchestra, solo soprano – Santuzza, a central character of the drama – and a wonderfully lyrical melody that just keeps rising higher and higher, phrase by phrase. This is the sincere expression of religious belief by Santuzza, made all the more poignant by her situation: because of her illicit affair, she considers herself unworthy to enter the church and take part in the service. Instead she sings in what builds in stages into a huge chorus involving everyone in the village.

Santuzza's introduction of the main melody is given a short response by the assembled villagers, who echo her final words, with a further response of '*Alleluia!*' from the choir inside the church. Then the melody is taken up by the chorus – but it doesn't just repeat. It extends into a section that hovers round the top notes as Santuzza and the sopranos sing a high phrase that the tenors echo back to them, and which then descends.

The build-up keeps going. The way the music rises – as though depicting in sound Jesus rising from the grave Heavenwards – is developed by Mascagni with a vengeance in pitch and alternating voices, broadening out into the fullest sound so far. Suddenly, the sound drops away, with an increasing rhythmic urgency as voices come in one by one, building up to a statement by everyone of the original main tune. There is one more impression of the forces gradually diminishing, but it is really a preparation for the full-on conclusion.

The *Easter Hymn* is compelling through its sheer aural drama: from distant introduction to massed ensemble, the evocation of ritual, dynamic contrasts of pitch and volume, and the uplifting effect of melody.

Jesus Christ is Risen Today

Our processional hymn for Easter Day has a long history. It began in Bohemia during the 14th century as a Latin hymn, *Surrexit Christus hodie*, with eleven verses. Its English version was published in 1708 by John Baptist Walsh in his *Lyra Davidica* (or a Collection of Divine Songs and Hymns). Who made the translation is not clear; it may have been Walsh himself, but there are also references to its being the work of Nahum Tate. Of the three verses translated, only the first was a literal rendition. The three verses were revised forty years later by John Arnold and were published in his *The Complete Psalmist* in 1749.

The Biblical references are to

Matthew 28:6; *He is not here; for He has risen.*

Acts 2:32; *This Jesus God has raised up*

1 Peter 3:18; *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.*

Revelation 1:17-18; *And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore."*

The hymn is set to a piece of music entitled "Easter Hymn" which was apparently composed for "Jesus Christ Is Risen Today". The illustration below is a facsimile of the *Lyra Davidica*

The image shows two pages from the *Lyra Davidica*. The left page is titled "The Resurrection." and contains musical notation for a hymn. The lyrics are: "Jesus Christ is Risen to Day Halle-Halleluiah", "Our triumphant Holyday Halle-Halleluiah", "Who so lately on the Cross Halle-Halleluiah", and "Suffer'd to redeem our loss Halle-Halleluiah." The right page is titled "On the Resurrection." and contains lyrics for a dialogue. The lyrics are: "Halt ye Females from your Fright, Hall. &c.", "Take to Galile your Flight: Hall.", "To his sad Disciples say, Hall.", "Jesus Christ is Risen to Day. Hall.", "In our Paschal Joy and Feast. Hall.", "Let the Lord of Life be blest, Hall.", "Let the Holy Trine be prais'd, Hall.", "And thankful Hearts to Heaven be rais'd. Hall.", "A Resurrection Dialogue.", "Erstanden ist der Heilige Christ.", "To the same Tune.", "Christ our Lord is Risen to Day; Hall. &c.", "Christ our Life, our Light, our Way, Hall.", "Th' Object of our Love and Faith; Hall.", "Who but dy'd to Conquer Death. Hall.", "Th' Holy Matrons early come, Hall.", "To Bedew their Savior's Tomb; Hall.", "Jesus seek among the Dead, Hall.", "Far from those Dark Regions fled. Hall.", "Two bright Angels, that appear, Hall.", "Thus Salute 'em; He's not here. Hall.", "Banish Sorrow, Shout and Sing, Hall.", "Welcome to your Risen King, Hall.", "Why, Beauteous Angels, say what place, Hall.", "Does his charming Presence Grace? Hall.", "Dost my Eyes; then bid Rejoyce: Hall.", "That to Praise I'll tune my Voice. Hall."

entry. The "FH" reference I cannot identify. The word "soulpsit" has been dropped from modern dictionaries. I believe it is Latin and most likely refers to FH being the copyist, rather than the composer of the music. The tune is recognisably the one we know; the original text varies somewhat from that with which we are familiar. Our later version clearly reflects the John Arnold revisions. ("f" in the original text is not "f", but an old English "long s" and should be pronounced as "s".)

Where to next?

Over the past month or so, early planning for a possible choir trip in 2020 has begun. Nothing has yet been fixed, not even the destination, so please be patient.

We asked Allin Cousens about the very first trip in 2001. This is his story.

Choir in Residence at Winchester Cathedral - 2001.

This project had its genesis in 1998 by way of an invitation from Jenny Sparkes (Arch Walker's daughter and a former member of our choir) to sing at her church in Tokyo, where she was a member of the choir. The invitation was included in a Christmas card she had sent the choir and was circulated at a Choir Christmas function held at Judith and John McKernan's home. I undertook to have a look at the pro's and con's.

As I recall I cobbled a proposal together: Japan - New Zealand - Australian church/cathedral. I put together a small committee with one member from each voice whom I reckoned would work together, Jenny Kaan, Lynne Bullock, Don Mayes, and John Staveley, plus Jan Kneeshaw (Choir Mistress) and Neil Cameron (Organist). I set myself up as the Chairman and tried to run things with a soft set of reins. Later Brian Watson (touring) and Gerry Bruce (treasurer) joined the team. Later again, James Allington accepted our invitation to be the Choir Director for the venture. Rector Roger was kept right in the picture.

Neil suggested that as our centenary year (2001) was coming up we should include Winchester Cathedral in our wish list. Winchester became our focus. With the support of the choir we made our first approach to Winchester, probably late 1999. Because of personnel changes in the Cathedral, it took about 15 months of "negotiation" before we gained our invitation. A great team effort.



The tour was self-funded by choir members. Parishioner contributions enabled Brian and Enid Watt to join us, plus the separate tour to The Holy Land which followed the Winchester "Choir in Residence" experience.

On Monday 27 August 2001 we sang our first service in the Cathedral, then through the week, concluding with Evensong on Sunday 2 September 2001.

AHC

Immediately afterwards, we looked upon Winchester as being a once in a lifetime experience. And now we are seriously contemplating a seventh such trip!



Choir program - 2018

Date	Venue	Time	
Sun 6 May	St Mary's Cathedral	1:30 pm	Heart Foundation service
Sat 26 May	Swiz	5 pm	Pentecost Evensong
Sat 16 Jun	Swiz	8 pm	Mozart concert
Sun 17 Jun	Swiz	2 pm	Huguenot service
Sun 15 Jul	Swiz	5 pm	St Swithun's Day
Sat 25 Aug	Swiz	5 pm	St Bartholomew's Day Evensong
Sat 3 Nov	Swiz	5 pm	Evensong for the persecuted church
Sat 1 Dec	Swiz	5 pm	Advent hymn festival

Note that nothing is final until the actual day has arrived, so please be mindful of possible changes.

A footnote, received lately from Don Mayes:

Breaking news from the tenor line for insertion in the next Sing Joyfully

Our esteemed Editor and Publisher has been awarded Life Membership of the NSW Branch of RSCM. This is richly deserved, and it is delightful that Brian has been recognised in this way.

Congratulations Brian.