

# Sing Joyfully

St Swithun's Choir e-newsletter



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May 2018

## April

### Anzac Day services

We sang at both 8 am and 10 am services on Sunday 22 April when we celebrated Anzac Day. Our anthem was John Ireland's *Greater Love*. The Communion "motet" at 8 am was Nathan Gilkes' arrangement of the hymn written by the Scottish Anglican Henry Lyte, *Abide with me*. We sang it again at the 10 am service during a period of quiet reflection. *The Last Post* and *Rouse* were played by trumpeter Rachel Dubetsky; and we venture to suggest that nowhere else would anyone have heard them played better!

### A noteworthy event

On the last Sunday of the month there was an event took place of which few will have realised the significance. At the pre-service warm up Peter Hamilton suggested that the sopranos run through the descant composed by "MM" for *Amazing Grace*. Unfortunately, Meg Matthews was not present at the service to hear the World Premier presentation of the descant she composed for insertion in our new Descants booklet.

There will be similar noteworthy events over coming months as more of the descants, many composed by MM and PBH (Peter Hamilton), are sung for the first time.

## May

### Heart Foundation service

We are invited to augment the Willoughby Singers as they lead the singing at the annual Heart Foundation service in St Mary's Cathedral on Sunday afternoon, 6 May.

### Evensong for Pentecost

Evensong will be sung on Saturday afternoon, 26 May, followed by High Tea in the hall.

### Cantique de Jean Racine

**Jean-Baptiste Racine** was a French dramatic poet renowned for his mastery of French classical tragedy. He lived during the reign of Louis XIV. Racine was born some 50 km north east of Paris into a provincial family of minor administrators who were financially comfortable and socially ambitious. His mother died 13 months after he was born, and his father died two years later.



His maternal grandparents took him in, and, when his grandmother, Marie des Moulins, became a widow, she brought Racine with her to live at the convent of Port-Royal des Champs near Paris. A group of devout scholars and teachers had founded a school there, so Racine had the opportunity to study Latin and Greek literature with distinguished masters. The school was steeped in the austere Roman Catholic reform movement that came to be known as Jansenism, which had recently been condemned by the church as heretical. The Jansenists participated in the centuries-long debate over the primacy of free will or of divine omnipotence in the process of salvation. Inspired by the writings of Saint Augustine, the Jansenists believed that salvation was a gift—a grace—that was accorded only by God and that free will played little role in the process. For these Augustinians, life on earth was to be a rigorous pursuit of penance for original sin.

Racine might have been educated by Jansenites, but he wanted to be a writer and there were only three ways for a writer to survive in Racine's day: to attract a royal audience, to obtain an ecclesiastical benefice, or to compose for the theatre. The first was out of the

question for the neophyte Racine, though he would eventually receive many gratuities in the course of his career. In 1661 Racine tried, through his mother's family, to acquire an ecclesiastical benefice from the diocese of Uzès in Languedoc, though without success after residing there for almost two years. He returned to Paris to try his hand as a dramatist, even if it meant estrangement from his Jansenist mentors, who disapproved very strongly of any involvement with the theatrical arts.

His career as a dramatist began with the production by Molière's troupe of his play *La Thébaïde; ou, les frères ennemis* ("The Story of Thebes; or, The Fratricides") at the Palais-Royal Theatre in Paris in June 1664. Molière's company also produced Racine's next play, *Alexandre le grand* (Alexander the Great), which premiered at the Palais Royal in December 1665.

Racine was the first French author to live principally on the income provided by his writings.

Within several months of the appearance of his play *Phèdre* in 1677, Racine retired from the commercial theatre and accepted the coveted post of royal historiographer. He was leaving the socially disadvantageous situation of a playwright for the rarefied atmosphere of the court of King Louis XIV, where, according to a prominent member of the Louis' court, he distinguished himself by his "grace and eloquence."

Racine's official duties culminated in the *Eloge historique du roi Louis XIV sur ses conquêtes* ("The Historical Panegyric for King Louis XIV on His Conquests"). He also wrote the *Cantiques spirituels* ("Spiritual Canticles") and worked hard to establish his status and his fortune. In 1672 he was elected to the French Academy, over which he came to exert almost dictatorial powers. In 1674 he acquired the noble title of treasurer of France, and he eventually obtained the higher distinctions of ordinary gentleman of the king and secretary of the king, which were mixed blessings, as their purchase constituted a considerable drain on his family's finances.

Racine died in 1699 from cancer of the liver. In a codicil to his will, he expressed his wish to be buried at the Port-Royal convent where he had received his early education. When Louis XIV had Port-Royal razed in 1710, Racine's remains were transferred to a tomb in the Parisian church of Saint-Étienne-du-Mont.

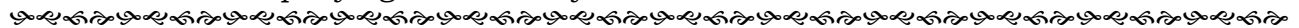
### **Gabriel Fauré**

Gabriel Fauré was born two hundred years after Jean Racine. He studied at the École Niedermeyer in Paris from the age of nine until he was twenty. His classes included subjects emphasizing sacred music, such as chant, organ, and Renaissance polyphony. They included piano and composition, both of which he studied with Camille Saint-Saëns, the leading French composer of the day.

Fauré is best known today for his Requiem, but his second most famous choral work is his youthful *Cantique de Jean Racine*. Originally composed in 1865 for four-part mixed chorus and organ, the piece won his school's first prize for composition despite having keyboard accompaniment rather than orchestral parts, as required. In 1866 the work was revised for chorus, harmonium (a kind of reed organ popular in the nineteenth century) and string quintet, and then orchestrated (double winds, two horns, string quintet) in 1906. When the work was published in 1876 it was dedicated to César Franck.

The French text, "*Verbe égal au Très-Haut*" is a loose paraphrase of a pseudo-ambrosian hymn for Tuesday matins from the Roman Catholic breviary, *Consors paterni luminis*. Fauré named his composition after Racine and not after the Latin original, possibly because he preferred the "elegant and rather florid" French text.

Our English text is a paraphrase of Racine's French by Harold Heiberg, a noted Professor of voice and accompanying at University of North Texas from 1971 to 2004.



### **The Future of Church Music**

By virtue of the choir's corporate membership of the New South Wales Branch of the Royal School of Church Music (RSCM), all our choristers enjoy associate membership of this organisation.

Last Saturday, 28 April, the Branch Committee held its Annual General Meeting at Christ Church St Laurence in Sydney. The meeting was preceded by a panel discussion about the future of Church Music and how RSCM should be contributing. The panellists were Dr Neil McEwan, Associate Professor of music performance at Sydney University and Director of Music at Christ Church St Laurence, Kanishka Raffel, Dean of St Andrew's Cathedral, and Steve Crain, Music Director at St Barnabas Church, Broadway. Rather than try to summarise the 90 minute discussion, we publish, with the authors' permission, an exchange of emails.

The first came from Stephen Matthews. It was addressed to the Committee of RSCM NSW:

Permit me to make a few observations on the "Future of Church Music" discussion panel held yesterday at Christ Church St Laurence. The topic attracted the interest of a number of successful, dedicated and well qualified church musicians whose formal and informal contributions were interesting and extremely worthwhile.

The division between "traditional" and "contemporary" was laid out from the start with the composition of the panel.

The opening outline was later expanded to include "people of a certain age" (said to be aligned with the traditional) and "the younger generation" (claimed to be aligned with contemporary). Perhaps a dangerous assumption given the increasing numbers of students passing through the education system with its growing exposure to great church (and other) music.

Traditionally the composers of really great and enduring church music have enjoyed the patronage of either the aristocracy or the church. With increasing equality in our society aristocratic patronage of church music is now almost non-existent and, very generally speaking, the church authorities appear to have adopted an attitude that "we have to deal with what we have" rather than provide leadership and investment in the performance of the truly great church music of the last 900 years.

Performances of great traditional church music like Beethoven's *Mass in C* and Bach's *B minor Mass* appear to be attracting audiences in increasing numbers to the concert hall giving the appearance that the church has ceded one of its greatest treasures and inspired creations to "Mammon". There are exceptions of course, even in evangelical Sydney where the great Viennese Classical and other settings of the Mass are now regularly performed liturgically to packed congregations in several churches. Other great church music is occasionally offered to packed congregations in the suburbs.

I recall visiting a parish church in Oxford, England where on Saturday afternoons the choir offered Bach cantatas and cream teas. Here was a parish church thriving in spite of the daily competition from many college chapels with world renowned choirs, all of them within a short walking distance.

Perhaps, after all, truly great "traditional" music and food does lead to growing congregations, and perhaps leadership and more investment in the former is what is needed to make it an inspiring part of Christian worship. That will mean more clergy training so perhaps RSCM should be thinking about how it can best contribute to that.

*Stephen Matthews*

Our Rector, Roger, is the Anglican representative on the State Committee. His response to Stephen's comments follow:

Dear Stephen,

Thank you for your reflections on the panel discussion last Saturday.

I do not, nor cannot, disagree with any of your comments. It is very important that the great music of Christendom over the centuries is maintained and not just in classical concerts in churches and other buildings (which, as you say, attract younger people as well as those of more mature years!).

Since I was the catalyst for the panel taking place, I need to explain that the issue that RSCM NSW is grappling with is church music in parish churches across the city and state. The

decline and almost total disappearance of voluntary choirs, together with the cost of building and maintaining pipe organs (and even electronic organs), means that much of our annual programme at present is inaccessible or irrelevant for churches across all denominations. Together with that change, there has been an evolution (some might argue devolution) in church music since the late 1960s in this country. The hymns and songs written for congregational worship are not suited generally to organs. The writing of new songs for worship has been prolific over the past 20 years. Some will disappear with the mist, others will have a long church life.

I am sure that there will be cathedrals and major city churches that will be able to maintain a strong choral tradition and keep the great music of the past as part of their repertoire. Many of our well-funded private schools will also be able to educate our future generations of young people in the best sacred music of the past (and present!). However, this will happen with or without an RSCM.

I may well be wrong but I believe we have a great responsibility under God to help churches across the denominations and across the different traditions of worship to have the best of our expertise to enable congregations to worship in music wholeheartedly and with the best that is available to them. Clergy and worship leaders need training so that they can give the best leadership in this. Sadly, RSCM is not doing that at present, as our annual programme reflects. We hope that the forthcoming Winter School will be one means of starting to address this issue.

These are the matters that our Committee will have to wrestle with for the 21st century. Thanks again for your comments and contribution. Warmest wishes,



ROGER CHILTON

The Chair of the RSCM Branch Committee is Ross Cobb, Director of Music at St Andrew's Cathedral. In his report to the meeting following the panel discussion he outlined his vision for the week-long school to be hosted by the Branch in July 2019. Planning covers most of the areas explored during the panel discussion. There are traditional and contemporary music streams to be led by professional church musicians including:

- David Hill, renowned choral and orchestral conductor;
- Noel Tredinnick, Director of Music at All Souls Church, Langham Place in London and arranger of anthems in our blue *Worship in Song* anthem book;
- Stephen Cleobury, who will by then have retired from directing the choir at King's College, Cambridge;
- Stuart Townend, composer of contemporary Christian songs including *The Lord's My Shepherd*;
- Stephen Darlington, another of England's leading choral conductors;
- Revd Canon Helen Bent, Head of Ministerial Training for RSCM in the UK.

The Winter School will be held here in Sydney from Saturday 6 to Sunday 14 July **2019**.

### Choir program - 2018

Date	Venue	Time	
Sun 6 May	St Mary's Cathedral	1:30 pm	Heart Foundation service
Sat 12 May	Swiz	SA 1 to 3 pm TB 3 to 5 pm	Mozart rehearsal
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
Sun 23 Sep	39 Brightmore St, Cremorne	3 pm	Choir soiree @ Chez Gilkes
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.