

Sing Joyfully

St Swithun's Choir e-newsletter



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December 2018

This month, December

We have a busy month, as always at this time of year. Many members of the choir will sing Messiah, either in the Town Hall or in the Hornsby Catholic Cathedral. And we have our own program of events for the month:

- On Saturday afternoon, 1 December, we present a program of hymns and carols for Advent in the church at 5 pm. The plan is to have choristers introduce each congregational hymn. They all have the hymn list. Any who are so moved to introduce one should register their choice with Phillip. Our usual high tea will follow in the hall.
- At lunchtime on Monday 10 December we shall present a program of Christian Christmas music in the atrium of Royal North Shore Hospital. The atrium is accessed through the main entry in the middle of the map. This year will mark our third appearance here; it is has always been a happy outing in the midst of a busy, bustling lunchtime crowd.
- Lessons and carols at Wahroonga House on Sunday afternoon, 16 December.
- Christmas Eve service in the church at 11 pm on Monday 24 December;
- And the Christmas morning service at 8 am on Tuesday 25 December.

The choir is being encouraged to participate in the annual service of solace and consolation to be held in the church at 11 am and again at 7 pm on Thursday 13 December, not as a formal choir but as supporting singers in the congregation.

Once the Christmas services are over, the choir will be in recess until its first rehearsal for 2019, on Thursday evening 31 January.

Last month, November

Evensong

Our final Evensong for the year was held on Saturday 3 November. The service began with an introit, Brumby's *God be in my head*, and concluded with a vesper, Malcolm Archer's *Prayer of St Richard of Chichester*. The anthem was also by Archer: *And I saw a new heaven*. The evening canticles were composed by Goodall.

Howard Goodall's setting of the *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis* was commissioned by Marlborough College and completed in 1994. In describing the style of the canticles, Goodall has said, "When it comes to Evening Canticles, I'm afraid I am an unashamed lover of the epic and the tuneful chestnuts of Stanford, Wesley, Walmisley et al, and apart from lapsing into a vaguely gospel Gloria in the *Nunc Dimittis*, I am true to those boyhood



sweethearts. Stanford would never have sanctioned the gently swaying dance rhythms of these canticles, of course, but then he didn't have Stevie Wonder in his record collection, did he?"

The first performance was at St George's Chapel, Windsor in April 1996 by the Marlborough College Choir, directed by Robin Nelson, then Head of Music at the college.

Marlborough College is an independent boarding and day school in Marlborough, Wiltshire, England. Founded in 1843 for the sons of Church of England clergy, it is now co-educational. The long list of notable ex-students includes HRH the Duchess of Cambridge (née Catherine Middleton), wife of HRH the Duke of Cambridge.

Remembrance Sunday

Special mention should be made of the morning service on Sunday 11 November which marked a century since the end of the Great War. The anthem was the Roger Quilter version of *Non Nobis Domine*. Rachel Dubetsky did a very fine job with her trumpet on the *Last Post* and *Rouse*. The church bell began tolling at exactly 11 am, just as the church bells throughout the United Kingdom did one hundred years previously.

TLC

Our first Christmas outing was in the church hall on Thursday 22 November. Three (very) wise men bearing gifts, and a shepherd (with his trusty sheep-dog), featured in the opening to this year's final meeting of the Thursday Lunch Club when our director Pamela introduced the new baby Jesus to the assembled congregation.

Peter Hamilton accompanied us as we sang four suitable carols with the congregation to tell the story of Jesus' birth.

We fielded fifteen singers. Missing from the photo, but not from the performance were, Lynne Bullock and John Fullager. They were busy off-stage!



Salisbury 2020

The choir has accepted an invitation to sing services at Salisbury Cathedral, from Monday 17 to Sunday 23 August 2020.

Two Russians who visited Salisbury last March leaving behind phials of the nerve agent A-234 claimed that they were only visiting the cathedral, "famous not just in Europe, but in the whole world. It is famous for its 123-metre spire, it is famous for its clock, the first one (of its kind) ever created in the world, which is still working."

The mediaeval clock



The cathedral's website claims that it is "probably the oldest working mechanical clock in existence, made of hand-wrought iron in, or before, 1386."

It is not really a "clock" as we know clocks now. It is a large iron-framed mechanical device with only a few moving parts. It measures roughly 1.3 metres across, 1 metre deep and stands about 1.2 metres high.

It does not have a dial. It had a bell which rang once on the hour to call worshippers to services.

The frame is held together by steel tenons (brackets) and wedges. Nuts and bolts hadn't been invented when it was first assembled.

Originally it was housed in its own tower, separate from the cathedral. The tower was demolished in 1884 and the old “clock” was discarded in favour of a new pendulum clock with a face.

The old one was rediscovered in 1929 by a horological enthusiast who recognised its possible significance. There had been changes in the mechanism during the time it had been working to incorporate new inventions in clock manufacture and improve its accuracy. It was returned to its original working order in 1956 and sits now in the south aisle of the cathedral. Apparently, it can strike on the hour, but the striking mechanism is generally clamped so that it does not disturb the quietness within the cathedral.

When the music stopped

Pippa Cuckson, (English) Country Life June 2018

Art reflects the human condition; music grows from conflict and social upheaval. Jazz was arguably the raw expression of optimism at the end of the First World War, but many serious composers sank into moribund reflection, as manifested by the dark undertones of Elgar’s *Cello Concerto in E Minor* and Holst’s *The Planets* and *Ode to Death*. Other enduring works are the direct result of their composer’s visceral, first-hand experience of trench warfare. Britain’s musical landscape was rudely re-sculptured by the trauma of the musicians who came home – and because of those who didn’t.

Ralph Vaughan Williams was 42 in 1914, but he volunteered as a stretcher-bearer. By 1916 he wrote to Holst that he ‘dreaded’ coming home: ‘It is wrong to have made friends with people younger than oneself.’ Most veterans suffered in silence, but he was able to process his inner torment through music. *The Pastoral Symphony* (1921) – ‘incubated when I used to go up night after night with the ambulance wagon to Ecoivres’ – the cantata *Dona Nobis Pacem* (1936) and *The Lark Ascending* (1941) are notable responses.

Arthur Bliss survived the Somme and a gassing at Cambrai. Regular nightmares fuelled his choral symphony *Morning Heroes* (1930) and, importantly, his anti-German sentiments influenced the teaching of composition and orchestration. He campaigned against the ‘Brahmsian’ tradition and led by example: his *Colour Symphony* (1922) sounded ‘disconcertingly modern’ to Elgar.

In the 1900s, Vaughan Williams led a movement to write down melodies enshrined in Britain’s folk-song tradition. One follower was George Butterworth, arguably the greatest composer we ever had. He was recommended for the Military Cross three times before perishing in the Somme; tragically, he inexplicably destroyed his manuscripts in 1914 before leaving for the Front. Musicologists are uncomfortable about attempts to complete them, but the remaining originals are sublime. *Banks of Green Willow* and his setting of *A Shropshire Lad*.

Australian born Frederick Kelly, a rowing-eights gold medallist at the 1908 Olympics, sailed with Hood Battalion together with Rupert Brooke and composer William Denis Brown, whose unfulfilled ‘sound’ was redolent of the prewar Bliss. Unusually, Kelly, who won a DSC at Gallipoli and died at the Somme, continued to compose while in action – his *Elegy* for strings and harp was written for Brooke’s burial on Skyros.

Ernest Farrar fell after only two days at the Front with the Grenadier Guards in September 1918, soon after conducting his last major orchestral piece, *Heroic Elegy (For Soldiers)*, at home in Harrogate. The melancholia in his pupil Gerald Finzi’s work is often attributed to the impact of Farrar’s death.

For the ‘enemy’, a sniper’s bullet ended the life of Rudi Stephan, hailed as the outstanding talent of his generation, but two returning Austrian performers inspired others to write a feast of music: Fritz Kreisler, the violin supremo invalided out from the Eastern Front in 1915, and pianist Paul Wittgenstein.

Wittgenstein’s family purportedly had seven grand pianos in one home alone, where Brahms, Mahler and Richard Strauss were regular guests. He lost his right arm on the Russian Front in August 1914 and, as a prisoner of war, discovered what was possible for him from Leopold Godowsky’s one-handed arrangements of Chopin’s fiendish études.

Once home, Wittgenstein commissioned concertos from the likes of Ravel, Strauss, Paul Hindemith (who survived Flanders) and, later, Britten. ‘It was like climbing a mountain. If you can’t get up one way, you try another,’ he wrote. Audaciously, he rejected Prokofiev’s contribution, which was finally premiered in 1956 by another war-amputee, Siegfried Rapp.

The Ravel Concerto for the Left Hand is still a summit for able-bodied pianists, but Wittgenstein’s commissions helped the career of Leon Fleisher, who in 1964 succumbed to the pianist’s greatest dread: focal dystonia, in which the fingers curl up in permanent spasm. He was cured 30 years later – by Botox.

Like his student Vaughan Williams, Ravel joined the medical corps, determined to serve despite being rejected several times, aged 39. Having shelved his Baroque homage *Le Tombeau de Couperin* in August 1914, he revived it in memoriam for six fallen comrades, including the husband of legendary pianist Marguerite Long. Untypical of ‘war music’, *Le Tombeau* is mostly dazzling and upbeat. Ravel said: ‘The dead are sad enough, in their eternal silence.’



A Christmas Carol

“Christians awake! Salute the happy morn.” So wrote the English poet John Byrom in 1745. Writing poetry seems to have been his hobby; he actually earned his living teaching a system of shorthand which he had invented. John and Charles Wesley were his friends. Wesley said of him: “He has all the wit and humour of Dr Swift (*Jonathan Swift, of Gulliver’s Travels fame*), together with much more learning, a deep and strong understanding, and above all, a serious vein of poetry’.

Byrom had several children, but his favourite was his daughter Dorothy, known as Dolly. In December 1745 he promised to write her something for Christmas; it was to be written especially for her and no one else. The delighted Dolly reminded her father of his promise each day as Christmas grew nearer. On Christmas morning, when she ran down to breakfast, she found several presents awaiting her. Among them was an envelope addressed to her in her father's handwriting – “Christmas Day for Dolly”. It was the first thing she opened and, to her great delight, it proved to be a Christmas poem entitled "Christians awake! Salute the happy morn".



The poem was published a year later. The organist at a Manchester parish church, John Wainwright, composed a tune specifically for the words and the hymn was first sung in public, so it is said, by Wainwright’s choir outside Byrom’s home in Manchester on Christmas Eve 1750.

We still sing it to that same tune in 2018.



Choir program – 2018

Date	Venue	Time	
Sat 1 Dec	Swiz	5 pm	Advent hymn festival
Mon 10 Dec	RNSH	Lunchtime	Carols in the atrium
Thu 13 Dec	Swiz	11 am	Service of Solace & Consolation
Sun 16 Dec	Wahroonga House	3 pm	Lessons & carols
Mon 24 Dec	Swiz	11 pm	Christmas Eve service
Tue 25 Dec	Swiz	8 am	Christmas Day service

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