

Music Planning

Martin Penny

Some months ago, Jo wrote about the process for choosing hymns here at All Saints. Here, in outline, is how other musical contributions to our worship are chosen.

The starting points for anthem texts, as with hymns, are the readings and collects of the day, along with recommendations from the Royal School of Church Music. Other resources include the HymnQuest database (which has formidable search capabilities these days covering 26,000+ texts) and, of course, a variety of web-based resources such as Hymnary.org and cpdl.org (a treasure chest of copyright free choral scores).

We also have a detailed catalogue of the music (many thanks to Sam Hudson for the original software and to Mary for counting all the copies!); this supports searches on Bible reference, liturgical season, difficulty, length, musical forces required, when last performed etc. I update the database every week with notes on that Sunday's performances. These usually include names of soloists, things that went well and things that need a bit of work and, most importantly, an assessment of their effectiveness. Records go back to 2011 so we have two sets of performances for the complete three-year Lectionary cycle.

This rich resource makes some periods quite straight forward to plan and some others less so. It also ensures that I know if I am about to reschedule something too soon after a previous performance or to let a well-loved favourite slip out of the active repertoire by accident. Another factor is that not everyone is available every week and so, sometimes, we just will not have the resources to do the 'ideal' choice.

January's music included some 'old favourites' such as *Handel* 'Behold the Lamb of God' and *Gibbons* 'Almighty and Everlasting God' (The Collect for the Third Sunday of Epiphany). There were some newer ones such as *Marenzio* *Tribus Miraculis*

(The three Epiphany Manifestations: The Magi, Jesus' Baptism and his turning water into wine) and a new one "Cana's Guest" by *Allain* – a very simple piece depicting the cumulative wonder of the miracle.

Easter is very late this year so services in February have readings that are used very infrequently. This made the Family Service, for example, challenging to plan. The Gospel is Matthew 5.13-20 and most poets, hymnodists and composers have focussed on 'light'. Our theme is 'Salt and Service' based on verse 13. Some digging around produced two new hymns to go with two 'familiar favourites' and a well-known anthem themed on service in Christ.

On the other hand, readings on the 26th evening allow us to dust off Stanford's 'For Lo I raise up': a bit of a blockbuster and a great accompaniment for Michael to learn over half-term!

The style of music for Evensong starts with the psalm. We have a full set of carefully matched chants and pointing, mostly the work of Michael Frith aided by John Saward. It has had a few updates but has stood the test of time. This dictates key(s), mood and duration of the setting of responses, Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis and the anthem – some psalms are quite long.

Voluntaries are usually in the same style/period as one of the choral items and chosen to match the mood/key of the final hymn.

Finally, we review the whole term's plan to ensure that it is doable (practice time!), balances old and new, has a good variety of styles and periods and, most importantly, will be worthwhile for singers, players and congregation whilst giving enough challenge to avoid unthinking routine.

Do let me know what works for you.

Love, Martin