

# Music in 2020/21

*Martin Penny*

This report covers 2020 and 2021, a period of considerable challenge for us all and one in which we learnt to do things we never expected to need to do and found out many hidden strengths. Because of this, it seemed important to just record what we (Team All Saints – all of us) did to keep worship alive and available to as many as possible.

## **Early 2020**

2020 began much as usual and ran so until mid-March when all churches in the UK closed.

## **Music making/Sunday Worship in a Pandemic**

At this point it was very unclear what would be needed and for how long. We began modestly, posting links to Cathedral and National services and providing printable materials ourselves.

This soon grew to include pre-recorded readings, music and the entire 'ordinary' of the Communion Service – many thanks to those brave enough to make those early recordings – and by Easter Day we felt confident (ish) enough to run a 'live' broadcast via Zoom.

At the time, we all felt that this was quite a temporary stage. In the event we remained 'on-line only' until September 2020. We became confident enough to run services live on Zoom, record them as they occurred and post onto our newly created YouTube Channel, learning much about what did/didn't work when live-streaming! Much to our surprise, some of these services gained upwards of 500 views.

In parallel we ran choir rehearsals on-line every Friday, quickly discovering that various, and very variable, degrees of time-lag meant it was best if we all sang along to a pre-recorded 'master' rather than try to listen to each other!

By September 2020, having produced detailed plans and risk assessments agreed with the PCC, we were able to go back into church, albeit with no congregational singing and with the choir suitably distanced. My files have no fewer than twelve different layouts used in the first few weeks as we tried to balance being 2m apart and yet not feel as though we were a bunch of separate soloists rather than a choir.

Relief came in the form of the purchase of a box organ, at a very modest price, funded out of the

legacy mentioned in my 2019 report. In the short term it was expected, and did, provide gentle support to the singers, and over the longer term to be usable as a continuo instrument by us and others.

In the event it has proved very useful for both – but its very low clearance and wide 'wheelbase' have posed some challenges regarding moving it around the building that we have yet to fully address.

And so we sang three or four motets each week – and provided a set of on-line materials for those who couldn't join us in person.

Early November saw a second lockdown – and a very hasty recording session putting as much Advent/Xmas music down as we could in 40 minutes on All Saints Day. In parallel, Jo and Col Keith Cockburn pre-recorded a short Act of Remembrance at the War Memorial in the church ably filmed by Doug, which was premiered on Remembrance Sunday at 10.57.

With a lot of help from many people, we reverted to manufacturing complete 'on-line' services and, also, a sequence of Music, Readings and Prayer covering the season from All Saints to Candlemas "The Promise of His Glory" – which is still available on YouTube – a total of 34 separate, but linked, videos.

We returned to church by mid-December. Recognising the limitations, Jo and I had devised a sequence of six Lessons and Carol, alas with no congregational ones, and hoped to run it live. In the event several choristers had to withdraw due to a misdiagnosis of Covid and I found myself trawling through several recordings of previous year's services to extract the relevant carol (and, of course, add back some congregational ones).

By now I was one of the many Directors of Music in Major Churches who were feeling that 'doing it live' was a complete doddle in comparison with the seemingly endless to-ing and fro-ing with video editing software to align images, sounds and hymn texts.

We were more than a little envious of those who had a team of people (and expensive 'kit' and software) to do it all. Nevertheless, we felt we had delivered, we were on the way back and we anticipated gradually doing more in church in 2021.

This was not to be and a third lockdown commenced in early 2021. Aided and abetted by many (honourable mention to David Ford) we began to experiment with making multi-track recordings. Basically, each member of the choir was sent the same recording (or click track) and asked to sing their part into a recording device whilst listening to the master via separate headphones. Of course, it also meant that anyone could submit multiple recordings of the same/different parts to allow a richer soundscape.

This was a very stretching experience, but we are proud of what we achieved – much of it is still up on our YouTube channel, either as separate items or as part of a specific service. We were also glad to use many 'All Saints' images in our videos, including the sequence of displays in the North-West Porch during Lent 2021, by Dorothy, Fiona and others.

In late May we got back into church and began singing again, with a final hymn being sung by all in the churchyard at the end of the service from the beginning of June. In the circumstances it seemed odd to take August 'off' so we sang something every week.

September saw a return to congregational singing in church – a welcome development! At the same time, we continued (and continue) to create and publish service material for on-line users – not least those in care homes. An increase in confidence saw us re-start evening worship in October and by the beginning of Advent we were running very much as we would have been without the pandemic.

## People

Over the period some of our members moved away:

- Julian Royals to a new job and home in Peterborough
- Andrew Fletcher and Rachel Brett to a new home in Norfolk
- Rachel Morgan to a new job and home in Cambridge
- Gabriela Matesovic to a new job and home in Hemel Hempstead
- Krystal Porter to other activities on a Sunday

For obvious reasons it was not possible to undertake any recruiting activities either for adults (eg 'Bring and Sing' – two of which were cancelled) or to go into schools to recruit youngsters. Nevertheless, we did welcome one

new member: Kate Glover who is coming on in leaps and bounds.

I must say a huge 'Thank You' to all the members of the choir for looking some steep challenges in the eye and 'giving it a go', mostly very successfully, and for sticking with it even when things felt very 'scary':

Kate Glover, Isabel Jorge, Soraia Jorge, Hazel Ford, Julia Gough, Samantha Bowden, Fiona Ford, Mary Penny, David Ford, Graham Jones, Bob Toll, Nick Hassell;

and some regular guests:

Samatha Chadwick, Zo Ford, Miles Knapman and Michael Stephens-Jones

and of course:

John Norris.

## Concerts

Most of these were cancelled, but we were able to re-start SoundBites with a series of nine concerts in the Autumn of 2021, with a restricted level of catering, which involved much additional work by the catering team, ably co-ordinated by Ann Stephens-Jones.

Chris Benham worked wonders in finding performers willing to work to a tight budget and with the possibility of short-term cancellation (it should be said that most of them were very grateful for the opportunity to perform after an enforced break).

We are hopeful that we will be able to run a more 'usual' programme during 2022. Due to the considerable sum remaining from the 2019 legacy and the shortfall in ordinary income, at present the entire proceeds are going to the Church. This will be kept under review,

## "Thank you"s

I've tried to mention most people during this report. I would like to finish by thanking Jo, the Wardens, Colin and indeed you all for so many helpful and supportive comments.

It's not been easy at times (to put it mildly) especially having to help everyone else cope with their disappointments and frustrations, nevertheless we do feel a strong sense of being valued and loved.

Thank you all.