Music in 2024

Martin Penny

Much of what follows is, of necessity, a reflection of highlights. We regard every service as special and prepare everything with the same care and attention whether it be a swinging number for an All-Age Service, an anthem we know almost too well or a deeply contemplative motet for Passiontide.

Over the course of the year, in addition to the regular cycle of rehearsals and services we:

- Sang an Epiphany Carol Service.
- Sang for the sequence of services from Palm Sunday to Easter Day
- Sang for a Town Civic Service in May.
- Sang for Simon's Licensing/Installation, as well including music of his choice, we 'nodded' towards his love of Prog Rock with 'The great gig in the sky' …(Pink Floyd)
- Rapidly replanned the music for September and early October due to the demise of a vital part of the main organ's wind system rendering it unusable (see next page). Happily, the combination of the Box organ and the Yamaha kept us going, along with the opportunity to explore some different repertoire.
- Sang the Dove Missa Brevis at an All-Age Eucharist for All Saints Sunday
- Led the music at the annual Services of Remembrance
- Sang the Victoria Mass 'O quam gloriosum' that evening.
- Ran the usual pattern of Advent and Christmas services/celebrations, including a new piece 'Nova nova' by Ian Farrington, with some extra-musical effects.
- sang carols (including requests) at the In Patient Unit of Isabel Hospice.

People

All that we do is only possible because of the commitment and efforts of the choir membership. Youngsters spend between three and six hours each week and adults rather more. Huge thanks to them all (and their chauffeurs) for doing this week in, week out.

We welcomed Paul Attridge as a regular deputy Tenor and said farewell to Susanna Farrell and Tilly Langford, both for work related reasons. It turned out that Paul is a long-term friend of Simon - though we signed him up first!

Throughout John Norris continued to provide a solid base for all our work through his excellent and sensitive accompaniments and David Ford conducting to allow me to play from time to time.

Mary also puts in time distributing, collecting in and re-filing 25 sets of music – an average of 1 ½ - 2 hours per week.

Recruiting

This has been a challenge, not helped by the Covid-19 pandemic - this is a national problem and the RSCM are releasing some new materials (aimed at young people) as I write this.

In parallel, we have been working away at some potential routes to attract more singers. Much strong coffee has been consumed during some encouraging conversations with various schools and other organisations. (More about this later in 2025).

Of course, the best way is through personal recommendation so if you know of someone – or fancy a 'go' yourself do come and talk to us – we'd love to hear from you.

Concerts

We ran an even more ambitious Soundbites programme in 2024, with some larger

ensembles. A total of 28 concerts raised just short of £13,500.

Due to the considerable sum remaining from the 2019 legacy and the shortfall in the Church's ordinary income, at present the entire proceeds are going to the Church. This is kept under review.

Thanks to Ann and her teams and, of course, to Chris for juggling performers and budgets to good effect. Chris has provided an excellent separate report on these concerts from their inception to the current day

We added a couple more Concert promoters to our stable of 'regulars' in total raising a further £5000 for the church. More are planned for 2025, with a very busy December! Special thanks to David Dean for acting as key-holder and ensuring the church is left in a good state for the following day's services.

"Thank you"s

I would like to finish this part of my report by thanking Simon, Janet (B), Verity, Colin and indeed you all for so many helpful and supportive comments.

The Willis organ

We are blessed with an outstanding instrument, most parts of which date from 1898/9. It is in relatively good condition as we have been diligent in ensuring regular maintenance over many years. None the less, it has had a few hiccoughs of late.

Firstly, for some time the wind system has been a bit erratic, occasionally shutting down the supply when much more wind was needed. It completely failed during Simon's Licensing/Installation service (hence my disappearance into the 'innards' halfway through the service), finally dying with a big 'bang' the following Friday. This was accompanied by much rushing wind and so meant the organ could not be used.

Investigations revealed that the design of the main control valve was, to put it mildly 'unusual'. After a valiant, but unsuccessful, day spent attempting to repair it, we decided it would be better to replace it with a completely new unit of standard design. This was made by Mander Organs and fitted mid-October. There is a second similar valve that will probably merit replacement at the next set of major work on the organ (likely to be circa 2030).

Secondly, several pipes from the Fanfare Trumpet, added in 2001, have partially collapsed. Parts of the rank were removed and repaired/replaced late Autumn. It is likely that more needs to be done to affect a permanent solution.

Thirdly, a few supporting clips for one of the 1898 ranks (Swell Cornopean) have failed, meaning some pipes have fallen onto others, damaging both. These have been repaired as needed, but I think it wise to check the whole rank as prevention is easier (and cheaper) than repair.

Fourthly, one (very large and heavy) pipe in the 16' Open Wood rank has been affected by a small water leak and is inoperable. Fixing this would mean removing the whole stop to allow the chest to be turned on its side – an operation involving several people for several days to lift everything out and then return. I have recommended that we leave this 'as is' until the major works referred to above.

There are a few other bits and pieces, mostly to do with the low humidity, addressing these is again something that needs proper planning. I have asked Andrew Stevens (our new organ tuner) to prepare an estimate of what works he believes should be done now. We expect to be able to cover the cost of this from the existing Organ Fund.

I am approaching a couple of reputable firms to get some sense of likely costs of the next round of major work, which will also see the need to replace at least some of the electro-mechanical parts dating from 1971) so we can incorporate these costs into our longer-term plans.

Love,
Martin