



Edington Music Festival Association Newsletter

Winter 2008

The Edington Music Festival 2008

ANOTHER 'Edington Festival of Music within the Liturgy' has come and gone leaving those present with many happy memories.

This year, as well as commissioning a setting of the *Pater noster* by Nico Muhly, a young American composer, the Festival Association provided a grant for the hire of a chamber organ, allowing a broader spectrum of music to be performed. In addition, the Festival recognized the anniversaries of four composers with music by John Blow, John Sheppard, Ralph Vaughan Williams and Olivier Messiaen, and also the 400th anniversary of the poet and writer John Milton.

The theme—*The Lord's Prayer*—presented a challenge to both musicians and clergy. On Monday the focus was on *Thy will be done*. The preacher at the Solemn Eucharist was the Bishop of Ramsbury, the Mass setting being Byrd's Mass for five voices.

On Tuesday we considered *Our daily bread*. Many of us were hearing Kenneth Leighton's Mass for Double Choir Op. 44 for the first time and were deeply moved by this challenging music, superbly sung by the Consort. At Evensong the centenary of Messiaen's birth was marked with the organ prelude *Le banquet céleste* and the introit *O sacrum convivium*.

Our focus for Wednesday was *Forgiveness*, musical highlights at the Eucharist being S S Wesley's *The Wilderness* and Matthew Martin's *Adam lay y-bounden*, both sung by a vintage Nave Choir. (The number of trebles was increased to 18 this year.)

The music for the evening Sequence was enhanced by the use of the chamber organ for Henry Purcell's *Jehovah, quam multi sunt hostes mei*. John Sheppard was remembered with the Introit *Libera nos, salva nos*, and John Milton with the reading of an extract from his 'Christian Doctrine'.

On Thursday we explored *Temptation* with Canon Paul Rose as preacher at the Eucharist when the *Missa Bell' amfitrit' altera* by Lassus was sung. The BBC recorded Choral Evensong for transmission the following Sunday. Here the anthem was Gabrieli's *Jubilate Deo*, and after the prayers the commissioned *Pater noster* by Nico Muhly received its first performance.

On Friday we reflected on *Deliverance*. At Choral Matins we heard a new setting of the

Venite by John Duggan, the Te Deum in G by Ralph Vaughan Williams, the Jubilate in C by Benjamin Britten and the anthem *Tribulationem et dolorem* by Carlo Gesualdo. The Reverend Andrew Wickens made a welcome return to the clergy team as the preacher at the evening Solemn Eucharist where there was the opportunity to hear John Sheppard's *Missa Cantate* in a liturgical setting.

On Saturday the theme was *Thy kingdom come*. The music was a veritable feast: the plainsong *Mass Deus sempiternae*, Harwood's *O how glorious is the kingdom*, Gibbons' *O clap your hands*, Victoria's motet *O quam gloriosum* and Harris's *Bring us, O Lord God, at our last awakening*. At Evensong the chamber organ enabled the Buxtehude Magnificat and Monteverdi's *Beatus vir a 6* to be sung to great effect. On Sunday the final Solemn Eucharist rejoiced in *The power and the glory* with the Gloria from William Walton's *Missa brevis*, the Sanctus from Poulenc's Mass in G and of course Parsons' Ave Maria.

As always, the Schola Cantorum provided a framework to the worship of each day with its beautiful singing of Matins and Compline, and contributed fully to the daily Solemn Eucharist and Evensong.

Overall, and despite some very cold and occasionally wet weather, the 2008 Festival was a vintage one.

MICHAEL COOKE

Chairman's Report for the year 2007–8

*Annual General meeting
Edington Priory, Monday 18 August 2008.*

FIRST, I would like to record how delighted I am to have been asked to chair the Executive Committee of the Association. I feel slightly fraudulent in this position: I was told that my main task as Chairman would be to make sure that others were doing what they said they were going to do. In this task I have been virtually idle: it has become quite clear to me that the position of Chairman is made easy by the dedication and hard work of others, and I wish to record my thanks to all my colleagues on the Executive Committee for all that they have contributed over the past year. There are lots of quite prosaic but essential tasks that need to be done before and after a Festival,

and I thank all of those who give so much of their time and skill.

The main task of the Association is the administration and appropriate distribution of money. During the past year the Association has made the following grants:

- Core costs of the 2007 Festival
- A grant for the 2008 Festival Commission
- Catering costs for the 2007 Festival
- A grant for the transportation of a chamber organ for the 2008 Festival

Formal arrangements have been put in place for a standing grant to be paid in future by the Association upon receipt of a grant request from the Festival. This will be to fund 'core costs', which have been identified as printing, mailing, organ tuning, catering, hiring of facilities and insurance. It is to be hoped that this arrangement will prove more convenient for all.

Forward Planning

There has been discussion on the Committee of EMFA about the use to which the steadily accumulating capital sum might be put. Peter Roberts has mooted endowing an Edington Choristership/Bursary.

The general direction is what needs to be set at this point. This must take into account the aims of the Association and have an eye to the needs of the Festival and the plans of the Parish Council.

Some will be aware that the former Choir Master gave a report to the PCC earlier this year on the possible way forward for the organ. The PCC voted not to proceed with the vision set out therein. The PCC through Robin Wilson is still looking into this area.

What the EMFA is faced with at this juncture is a decision as to whether to continue to amass money in the hope that a large capital scheme such as a new organ might be considered desirable by the PCC, or whether to divert these funds to other projects such as Bursaries.

One possible plan for Bursaries would involve much administration, and it would need to be a system that was transparent and open to all. Were it a single and large annual sum it would necessarily need to be awarded on merit and/or on account of means. In an era where some choristers at the less prestigious cathedrals still have to pay many thousands of pounds a term, this route could be both meaningful and a very good form of

promotion of the festival. That said, the process of selection would be difficult unless it were decided upon from amongst the pool of choristers sent to the Festival for a given year, i.e. the week became a very informal and long audition. The successful candidate would need to return the following summer ...

Another route would be to have much smaller bursaries awarded to all choristers who are selected to attend by their choir masters. This would be far easier to administer but would have far less impact on each recipient and perhaps a lower status.

These ideas can be fleshed out and developed, but at this juncture the principle is what concerns us. Should the EMFA investigate a bursary scheme for a decision in due course or continue to amass funds for any possible organ fund? The bursary course is a venture that supports the future of the Festival by promoting its name and influence to a wide and receptive future membership (choristers and their parents), but it is a bold step and one which would clearly need the approval of the membership.

PETER McGEARY

An interview with Jeremy Summerly

JEREMY first came to Edington in 1980, John Harper's final year as Director, as part of an 'all-singing, all-dancing' group which included instrumental players, directed by Geoffrey Webber. Jeremy came to play the viol and baroque viola, and also to sing. In the following two years he sang in the Nave Choir, but reminded me how overburdened the Nave Choir was in those days with only the Schola Cantorum to share the musical burden of the daily Eucharist and Evensong.

The Consort as we now know it began in 1983, and the three-choir structure of the Festival (Nave Choir, Schola Cantorum and Consort) has continued ever since. (Strange to think that at the Festival's weakest point—there was no Director in 1983—we should have hit on the winning formula for the future.) Since then Jeremy has only missed one year, 2002, when he had a serious accident—breaking his shoulder—in the days running up to the Festival, and so 2008 marked the 25th time that Jeremy has conducted the Edington Consort.

I commented that he seemed to approach the Festival with the same freshness I remembered from the 1980s. 'It's partly because the personnel gradually changes—this year we have six new members of the consort, three of whom I had never actually met before. It's like being a teacher—even if ostensibly you are teaching the same thing, the people you are talking to are new people, and it's the same with the Consort.'

I invited Jeremy to tell me something about the connection between the Edington

Consort and the Oxford Camerata. 'It's always been a close one, and they have run in tandem for our entire existence. There are a lot of Camerata members who come down here, but there are others who cannot for various reasons. We can then fill those places with young people who want to sing with the Camerata. If they can put up with me for a whole week and still be singing at the end of it, then it's very likely I will book them professionally. A lot of the repertoire we have done over the years has been worked out in Edington in front of a congregation before we commit it to record. If it does not work at Edington, it won't work on record either.'

Edington offers the opportunity to perform sacred music in the context of a service. Was that important, I wondered? 'Completely. It is liturgical music, and unlike some people in the industry who believe these are free-standing pieces and that one should view them in terms of their musical worth and their musical structure, I believe the opposite. I don't understand a work completely until I have done it live, as part of the liturgy. That authenticates the piece.' We reflected further on the fact that Edington also offers the opportunity to sing pieces which because of their length or complexity cannot normally be sung liturgically—the Leighton Mass for double choir and the Sheppard *Missa Cantate* being examples from the 2008 Consort repertoire.

We moved on to discuss the fact that choirs at Edington spend much of their time listening to other choirs singing. 'We may only be singing two pieces in a service, which does not sound very much, but they will generally be pieces that require a lot of rehearsal. In church that could result in people hanging around not having much to do.' Jeremy went on to reflect that he had heard the Byrd five-part Mass for the first time at the 2008 Festival. 'I have performed it millions of times from the age of eight, but I have never actually heard it live—ever. When I asked around, it turned out that very few people in the Consort had ever heard the Byrd five-Part Mass live. And that is such joy.'

Jeremy commented further on the pleasure of listening to the particular repertoire in which the Nave Choir and the Schola Cantorum specialize. 'We hear beautiful chant from the Schola which I think we understand in our heads, but wouldn't be able to sing as beautifully as they do because they concentrate on that very refined art. That is one of the great pleasures of Edington—standing there in a cassock and surplice but not actually being responsible for the provision of music for two thirds of the service.'

I wanted to know whether Jeremy felt the three-choir structure was the perfect structure for the Festival. 'It is. Like all these things it started as a bit of an experiment,

born of necessity because the other two choirs were too busy. It was to save people from going mad at having to do too much, but as it happens we hit on a winning formula. The only thing that the Festival could do is one year to admit a baroque instrumental group—it would have to be just a quartet or quintet—and then one could do some Bach, Handel, Scarlatti for instance; but it would not alter the basic three-choir structure.'

I commented that the Festival seemed to have become a lot calmer over recent years. Did that reflect on the way things had bedded down? Jeremy agreed that this was so. 'We have a heritage now so a lot of trouble-shooting has been done in panic over the years. These days I can concentrate much more on the music.'

I reminisced with Jeremy about performances from the Consort that had stuck in my mind. I mentioned their Poulenc which I have always relished, and their singing of Tippett's spiritual settings from *A Child of our Time* at a Thursday evening Sequence some years ago. Jeremy immediately picked up on this latter memory. 'At that Sequence that was all we did—we took in one copy, one piece of music, and we interspersed it with readings and other music. As I remember we started exactly at eight o'clock, we finished exactly at nine o'clock, precisely one hour, and the most intensive hour of music making I can ever remember. The other thing I will never forget is standing in the middle of the church conducting *Spem in Alium* surrounded by forty of my closest friends (for the 50th Festival celebration). I still think of that and I get tears. It is the sort of thing that only happens at Edington.'

Here I added my own reminiscence, because for that same service Paul Wigmore and I had been invited to write a new celebratory hymn. To my certain knowledge none of the choirs had rehearsed it, yet it sounded fabulous. 'Here's another thing about the Festival,' Jeremy responded. 'Even the hymns are special. Hymns we have sung a million times are never as special as at Edington. The congregation is another choir itself, so the fourth choir is the congregation.' A moving thought with which to conclude.

JOHN BARNARD

Compact disc offer

WE ARE pleased to offer the eleventh volume of Andrew Carwood's survey, with The Cardinal's Musick, of the complete Latin sacred music by Byrd—which won't be available in the shops until February 2009.

If you would like a copy, please send a cheque for £12 (per CD) payable to *Edington Music Festival Association* to the Editor of this newsletter: John Barnard, 34 Queens Walk, Harrow, Middlesex HA1 1XS.