



Edington Music Festival Association Newsletter

Autumn 2009

The Edington Music Festival 2009

THIS YEAR'S THEME was that great hymn of praise *Tē Deum laudamus*, with each day focusing on a different theme from within the text. The programme covered a wide range of music with extra emphasis being given to the works of Haydn, Mendelssohn and Purcell whose anniversaries fall this year.

Monday was the feast of St Bartholomew, celebrated with the phrase 'To thee all angels cry aloud'. The music for the Mass was Palestrina's *Missa Aeterna Christi munera*, and the organ prelude at evensong was Messiaen's *Les Anges* with the Kenneth Leighton Second Service as the setting for the canticles.

For Tuesday the focus of the theme was Sin. Music by Jacob Handl provided the setting for the Mass, and at Evensong there was an opportunity to hear the long and complex Christopher Tye anthem *Peccavimus cum patribus nostris*, superbly sung by the Consort.

At the Wednesday Eucharist we heard Purcell's *Remember not, Lord, our offences* as the gradual and *Crux fidelis* by Graham Ross at the offertory along with the *Jesu redemptor plainsong* Mass setting.

This year we were back to a live Radio 3 Choral Evensong, with the music including the *Magnificat* in B flat for double choir by Stanford and the Charles Wood's *Nunc dimittis* in the same key. The Festival commission (funded by the Festival Association) was the anthem *Most glorious Lord of Lyfe* composed by Dr Francis Jackson. Despite the wet and windy weather the congregation numbered almost 450.

Thursday found us celebrating the King of Glory with Howells' *Collegium Regale* Mass setting, Gibbons' *O God, the king of glory* with chamber organ accompaniment and *O rex gloriae* by Nicolas Gombert. At the evening Sequence of Music and Readings, highlights were the motet *Priidite, poklonimsya* from Rachmaninov's *All-Night Vigil* (Vespers), *Jauchzet dem Herren* by Schütz and the *Brazilian Psalm* by Jean Berger.

Friday's theme was Judgement ('We believe that thou shalt come to be our Judge'). Choral Matins included Britten's *Tē Deum* in C, Mendelssohn's canticle *Jauchzet dem Herrn* and Haydn's *Insanae et vanae curae* whilst the evening Solemn Requiem saw the return of Humphrey Southern, now

Bishop of Repton, to preach the sermon and preside at the communion. The setting was the Howells Requiem.

On Saturday the focus was on Trust with Canon Neil Heavisides returning as preacher. There was a plainsong Mass, and the service also included music by Lassus, Trombetti and Victoria. The last Solemn Evensong of the week brought us the Tallis *Octavi toni* setting of the canticles and Parry's *Lord, let me know mine end*.

For the final Sunday the theme was Majesty with music from a variety of composers including the *Missa Brevis* of Kodály; *Frohlocket, ihr Völker* by Mendelssohn and the Sanctus from the Mass for double choir by Frank Martin.

Despite indifferent weather, this final Festival under the directorship of Julian Thomas was a very fine one, and we thank him warmly for all he has done over the past six years. On a different topic, it was so good to have Lady Barbara Calcutt with us on many occasions during the week. The continuing connection through Lady Barbara with the Festival's founder, the late Sir David Calcutt, is one we treasure.

MICHAEL COOKE

Chairman's Report to the AGM for the year 2008-9

THE MAIN TASK of the Association is the administration and appropriate distribution of money. During the past year the following grants have been made:

Core costs of the 2009 Festival

A grant for the 2009 Festival

Commission

A grant for the hire of a chamber organ for the 2009 Festival

The arrangements put in place for a standing grant to be paid by the Association upon receipt of a grant request from the Festival seem to be working smoothly. The 'core costs' have been identified as printing, mailing, organ tuning, catering, hiring of facilities and insurance.

Last year there was a suggestion that the accumulating funds of the Association might be used to begin a chorister bursary scheme, and this has been the subject of ongoing thought and discussion. Any such scheme would of course require the approval of the membership in order to proceed.

During the past year the PCC of Edington has agreed to the establishment of a Working

Group to look at the feasibility of building a new organ, and this group has begun the process of investigating what might be possible. Naturally, the Association is interested in supporting this work and has agreed to fund these early investigations (principally engaging the services of an Independent Organ Advisor). Any progress in this area will naturally involve a great deal of thought and consultation. It is perhaps enough to say here that the Association is more than willing to offer and provide such practical, administrative or financial assistance to the PCC as might be deemed appropriate or helpful.

PETER McGEARY

Julian Thomas

JULIAN THOMAS has been an integral part of the Edington Festival since 1987 during which time he has sung as a treble in the Nave Choir (1987–1990), served (1991), sung in the Schola, played voluntaries at Matins and Compline (1992–2003) and been Festival Director (2004–2009). In all that time he has only missed one Festival—in 2001 when he was moving house.

Four years of service as a treble had to be a record, I thought. Apparently Julian first came to Edington at the age of ten to cover for his elder brother Adrian in case his voice went on the blink during Festival week. He reckoned his own voice might have been close to the edge by 1990!

Julian was due to be a server for a second year in 1992, but someone dropped out of the Schola at the last minute and he found himself upgraded. I imagined that being a server at the Festival might be a touch tedious. Julian didn't quite see it that way. 'I think if you hadn't already come to the Festival as a treble it would be a strange experience, but if you've got caught up in the spirit of the Festival then it's just as much fun. It's certainly much less work!'

After all the years that he sang in the Schola I wondered whether he had missed it since becoming Festival Director. 'One of the nice things about being Director is being able to sit back and listen to other people doing the work,' he responded. 'It's the one week in the year when I'm not having to conduct or organise things.'

We discussed taking over as Director of the Festival at a time when it had become a

mature event with most of the mistakes having been made and solutions found. 'It was wonderful taking over from Peter Barley who had got it on such a good footing. Everything was working really smoothly, and with the help of the Association we were financially in the best position the Festival has ever been in. But within the established framework, which I think works very well, there is still scope to try things out. In my first year for instance we had readings from the Rule of St Benedict at Matins and Compline instead of readings from the Bible. You do liaise with the clergy of course, but you have more control over the direction you are taking things than in a normal church service where the priest is in charge.'

I mentioned that Jeremy Summerly and Andrew Carwood as choir directors were long-established members of the Festival and older than Julian. Had the relationship worked well? 'Certainly from my point of view. I don't know what they think! One of the joys of the Festival is working with such experienced people, and when we are choosing the music in January or February I can suggest one or two ideas and they will come back with many more. So they can help shape and flesh out my original ideas.'

Julian spoke warmly of the relationship with Robert Quinney and more recently with Matthew Martin. 'In some ways the hardest job of all is directing the Nave Choir, because you never know what the trebles are going to be like until they arrive. Having someone who is confident and really gets the best out of the boys is so important, and Matthew went seamlessly from playing the organ into that role.'

We discussed the annual commission. Julian felt it to be a very important part of what the Festival had done over the years. The Association had given it the financial stability to be able to approach esteemed composers such as (this year) Francis Jackson. 'It is of course a huge gamble to ask a composer to write a piece and to put in print that you are going to broadcast it before you've seen it. Occasionally there are slight problems and you have a piece which is a bit too hard to be adequately prepared in the time available, but the vast majority of these commissions get a very honourable first performance.'

Julian concluded by saying what happy memories he had as he looked back on 22 years of participation in the Festival. 'Coming back after the one year I missed—2001—made it all the more special. If you miss it for a year and then you come back, you realize just how much a part of your life it has been. That said, I feel it's the right time to be handing over the reins to someone else after six years in charge, and Ashley Grote is just the man for the job—I think he'll be splendid at it.'

Julian and Ellen are intending to give the Festival a miss in 2010, but we hope they will return for visits in 2011 and beyond. We owe them both so much, and thank them warmly for all they have done to ensure that our Festival remains such a very special event in the year.

JOHN BARNARD

An interview with Joanna Robertson

JOANNA retired as churchwarden earlier this year after six years' service, and I wanted to explore with her some of the issues surrounding the interface between the Festival and the church community. 'The majority of people who regularly attend the parish church will also attend some of the Festival services', said Joanna. 'A lot of them are actively involved in helping behind the scenes. Some of the congregation are very knowledgeable about church music, they are regular worshippers and therefore they come to the Festival because of the spiritual aspect of it all as well as the musical aspect.'

I wondered about the reaction of the parish community more generally. 'Only about ten per cent come to church, and that means that ninety per cent don't. A few of those people really struggle with the Festival. They see it as a takeover, as an invasion by people who have no understanding of village life. Festival people are seen as coming from London with an awful amount of money, and in they come and they take it all over—the village, the church, the pub, anything they can take over they do. And then they go away again.'

On the issue of Festival people taking over the pub, we noted that there was another side to that. 'The previous landlord, the one who has just left, said that without the Festival he could not have gone on as long as he did because that was where so much of his income came from.'

Was there anything we from the Festival could do to build bridges with the community? 'So much of it is communication, and helping people understand what the Festival is all about and how it operates.'

'People in the village have become very much aware of the need for the church to raise money to cover everyday expenses and are wonderful in supporting events even though they may not come to services. Over recent years we have tried very hard to open up the church and make it available to the community because there are not a lot of other facilities here. There is now a much wider range of events in the church, most particularly the jazz when we turn the building upside down, move the pews, in comes the band, the microphones and speakers, and we have a bar and a barbecue in the car park, and people dance in the church. It took a bit of doing. To start with some

church people understandably struggled with it, but now everybody has accepted it and it's wonderful.'

Our conversation moved on to the relationship between those who organise the Festival from outside and from within the village. We were clear that it was a very happy relationship. Joanna spoke warmly of Julian Thomas, of Ashley Grote, Julian's successor, and most of all Peter Roberts. 'He has a fantastic ability to remember everyone in the village—who they are, where they live, what they do. He is so good at that.'

Joanna also emphasized the number of people from the village who quietly and without fuss or recognition do jobs that are so important to the Festival. We mentioned Sheila Miles, who cleans all the brass and silver and works with Adrian Hutton on the robes, and Susan Bray. 'Susan washes all the white linen throughout the week. She lives in Bratton, she doesn't drive, she comes into church very quietly with a little plastic bag. Every day she takes the white linen, washes it, irons it and brings it back. She has done it for years. Nobody knows, and there are a lot of people like that.'

We reflected on making people feel welcome when they come to services during Festival week. 'In 2008 the average size of congregation at the 'big' services was 349, and I just think from the parish point of view we are so privileged to have that number of people come to services and to be able to welcome them. It is so important to get things right because people come from all over the world, many of them for the whole week. They use it as a retreat, so we need to get the seating issues right and in particular to look after people with disabilities.'

So much care goes into the preparation and carrying through of the Festival, and we are all privileged to be a part of it. To Joanna herself we owe a debt of thanks for the great sensitivity she showed over her period of office as churchwarden. She and so many others make possible the glimpse of heaven which the Festival through liturgy and music offers.

JOHN BARNARD

Compact disc offer

THE FINAL instalment of Andrew Carwood's survey, with The Cardinal's Musick, of the complete Latin sacred music by William Byrd ends with a phenomenal performance of the monumental masterpiece *Infelix ego*.

If you would like a copy of the disc—which won't be available in the shops until February—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.