

Music at Services at the Cathedral of St.Machar for March 2020

Choral Music

The thriving choir, which includes Choral Scholars, sings at the Sunday morning Service. It has an extensive repertoire, ranging from medieval plainchant to pieces which have been written in the twenty first century. The Choir usually makes two contributions to the Service - an Anthem and a Motet during the Offertory collection. Three items are included at the monthly Communion Service on the last Sunday of the month.

The year 2020 marks a special year in which we celebrate 500 years of Bishop Dunbar's iconic ceiling. During the year this will be cleaned to reveal its true greatness. While this is taking place, we are taking the opportunity to expand the repertoire of choir pieces to reflect some of the music that the Cathedral has witnessed since it was established in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. (By 1165 a Norman style cathedral stood on the site and under Bishop Cheyne (1282-1365) it underwent extensive restoration.) From the second week of January until the end of the year we shall hear music ranging from the twelfth to twenty first centuries. During the month of March, for the season of Lent, we shall begin each of the morning Services with an Introit taken from the vast repertoire of Plainchant, both medieval and modern. The Anthems and Motets will be taken from repertoire composed from the sixteenth to the twenty first centuries.

If you are an experienced singer who might be interested in joining the choir please contact the Music Director (rogerbevanwilliams@gmail.com)

Mar. 1st.

Introit: Make speed, O God	Plainchant
Anthem: Lord, for thy tender mercies' sake	Farrant/Hilton
Offertory: Lead me, Lord	S.S.Wesley

Mar.8th.

Introit: Ubi caritas	Plainchant
Anthem: God so loved the world	Stainer
Offertory: Christus factus est	Anerio

Mar. 15th.

Introit: Lord Jesus, think on me	Plainchant
Anthem: God so loved the world	R.Chilcott
Offertory: Crux Fidelis	John of Portugal

Mar.23rd..

Introit: Alone in depths of woe	Plainchant
Anthem: Salvation to all that Will is thine (Commissioned for St.Machar's Cathedral: First performance)	R.B.Williams
Offertory: Nolo mortem peccatoris	T.Morley

Mar. 29th.

Introit: Attende Domine	Plainchant
Anthem: Kyrie (Mass XVII)	Plainchant
Offertory: Sanctus	Plainchant
Communion: Agnus Dei	Plainchant

The Organ

The present organ is not the first in the Cathedral. Because of the lack of evidence, it is difficult to be certain what instrument there might have been before the Reformation. But if St. Machar's was as many other similar buildings, both in Scotland and elsewhere, there would have been an organ, most probably of some considerable size, fixed to the building. According to the distinguished historian Leslie Macfarlane, we learn of two organ books in the Inventory of 1436. At the turn of the sixteenth century, during the time when William Elphinstone was Bishop, it seems likely that there would have been a large organ sited in the building, possibly in the Choir or in one of the Transepts. Given that Bishop Elphinstone had come to Aberdeen after living in both Paris and Louvain, it seems very probable that the instrument would have been as splendid as the Bishop's enlarged foundation of Vicars Choral. This organ would most probably have been built on medieval *Blockwerk* principles, with loud and magnificent sounds, and would have been played on Sundays and major feast days.

The organ in use today is a splendid example of a romantic instrument built by 'Father' Willis. It has three manuals and pedals and was originally built in 1891 with a third manual added in 1898. The organ was at first sited in front of the east window, but was moved to its present position in 1928, at which time some tonal additions were made. In 1973 there was a rebuild, with some further tonal modifications, carried out by the firm of Noel Mander of London. The three ranks of Willis pipes that were at that time taken off and kept in storage, were brought back onto the Choir organ in July 2018, with assistance from the Bach Choir. This most recent work has restored some of the quieter

sounds that the organ originally possessed. The organ has a rich resonance and a variety of tonal sound that was characteristic of this most celebrated of Victorian organ builders.

In recent times, since the first Organist, Sydney Townsend, was appointed in 1891, there have been only nine Organists, including some very eminent figures. These include George C. Dawson (1893-1916), Arthur Pirie (1916-1920), Marshall Gilchrist (1920-1938), John B. Dalby (1938-54), David Murray (1954-81), and James Lobban (1981-2006), after which Mike Thomson held the post until 2016.

Organ Music for the Services in March will feature the two books of Chorale Preludes Op. 122, by the German Romantic composer Johannes Brahms. Though not widely known, these examples of Brahms' writing for organ come from the very end of his life, and are harmonically rich but mainly quiet, contemplative pieces.

Mar.1st.

Before the Service: Herzliebster Jesu (No. 2) J.Brahms

After the Service: Mein Jesu, der du mich (No.1) J.Brahms

Mar.8th.

Before the Service: Schmücke dich (No.5) J.Brahms

After the Service: Herzlich thut (No. 4) J.Brahms

Mar.15th

Before the Service: O wie Selig (No.6) J.Brahms

After the Service: O Gott, du frommer Gott (No.7) J.Brahms

Mar. 23rd

Before the Service: Herzlich thut mich verlangen (No. 10) J.Brahms

After the Service: Herzlich thut mich verlangen (No.9) J.Brahms

Mar. 29th.

Before the Service: O Welt, ich muss dich lassen (No.3) J.Brahms

After the Service: O Welt, ich muss dich lassen (No.11) J.Brahms

Director of Music and Organist - Dr. Roger B. Williams, M.B.E.
(March 2020)