

In Quires and places where they sing

The arts are the product of the variety of God given gifts that in turn may be used to help us to know and understand more about our Creator. At the head of the list comes literature and we immediately think of the Holy Scriptures, our various Prayer Books and the writings of the saints. Then in quick succession we think of Architecture and paintings, and music. The wonderful church buildings declare God to their parishes by their very presence. Many churches have paintings, often in stained-glass, and statues to enhance God's message. Music, instrumental (organ) and sung, has now for many centuries been a major and fundamental part of Christian worship. The 1549 Book of Common Prayer, and its successors, makes this clear in the rubrics for Morning and Evening Prayer.

With this recent Covid-19 pandemic from the middle of Lent music and especially singing has been stopped as an essential part of worship. Perhaps the last time this occurred was during the Commonwealth period from 1649-1660! Now nine weeks into the Trinity season music is beginning to return to the churches but in the meantime many innovative digital sung services have been held as new ways of worship are explored.

On the Lesser Festival of St Laurence two items came through the letterbox, *Cathedral Voice* – the newsletter of the Friends of Cathedral Music and *The Times* newspaper. The former was entitled *Responding to a crisis*. It is a record of the creative approach of many including a report on the Cathedral Choirs' Emergency Fund with a letter of support from HRH The Duchess of Gloucester. By contrast, *The Times* had an entirely negative article entitled 'Good riddance to insanely expensive cathedral choirs' in which, amongst other negative statements about choirs, the writer indicates his lack of support this Emergency Fund! Whilst this piece might have caused concern to some the story behind it needs definition before we allow it to discourage us.

Many have spent the recent months supporting musicians whose livelihoods are at risk as they have been unable to fulfil their calling. This also applies to young people involved in church music, including cathedral choristers who experience a remarkable education doing something they also enjoy hugely. Some choirs are voluntary but to reach the standard that has now been reached in our cathedrals much time, usually on a daily basis, has to be spent and so the 'ministers of music' will have to attract a stipend as do the ordained ministers of the church.

As we emerge from this crisis, and praying there is no second wave, we must remember our musicians, especially church musicians supporting them in anyway we can. It is inconceivable to imagine the loss of Choral Evensong, which is widely appreciated by the faithful and those of no faith. It is a wonderful Anglican treasure for the Glory of God 'in quires and places where they sing'. And we must recall those words attributed to St Augustine of Hippo that *to sing is to pray twice!*

Feast of St Gregory the Great - 3rd September 2020

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