

## The Parish Church of St John-at-Hampstead

### Music Notes ~ May 2024

This month encompasses a succession of major liturgical feasts: Ascension, Pentecost and Trinity Sunday. The music naturally reflects these joyful celebrations, with many familiar items together with a few unusual ones which may need some introduction. Joshua at the organ plays some of the great movements for Ascension and Pentecost by Olivier Messiaen, as well as Maurice Duruflé's variations on *Veni Creator Spiritus*, and the *Prelude and Fugue in E flat* (BWV 552) by J. S. Bach, associated with the Trinity on account of its three-fold key signature and design. Less familiar organ composers featured this month are: Domenico Zipoli, who was Organist at the Jesuit church in Rome before moving to Argentina, and whose fine collection of organ works was published in 1716; and Louis Couperin, who was the first of a succession of baroque keyboard players from the Couperin family, the most famous of whom was Louis's nephew, known as 'François Couperin le Grand'. Louis was Organist at St Gervais in Paris, and died aged only 35.

The Preces and Responses at Evensong this month are by Sir John Stevenson (1761-1833) who was a prominent Dublin musician who worked at both Protestant Cathedrals there as well as the Royal Chapel. Comparatively few settings of the Preces & Responses were composed during the 19th century since most institutions routinely used a version of Tallis's setting, but Stevenson composed his set alongside chants and more major liturgical items that were published together in a two-volume collection printed in London in 1825. A few years earlier, in 1812, a publication of church music by Miss Lucy Moseley (whom I haven't been able to identify adequately) was printed for use at Exeter Cathedral, containing what would appear to be the earliest surviving setting of the Canticles by a female composer, which we will perform on Sunday 12th.

Our Mass settings this month include music from the Renaissance, Baroque, Classical and modern eras. Francisco Guerrero's *Missa Saeculorum Amen* from the late 16th century is based on the music for "...saeculorum. Amen", being the notes C-A-B-C-A-G, a common chant-ending formula. Orazio Tarditi's four-part *Missa* is composed in the lively concertato style of the mid-17th century. Mozart's *Mass in C* K220 (Wednesday 8th May at 6 pm) is often called the 'Sparrow Mass' due to the chirp-chirp formula heard at the start of the 'Pleni sunt caeli' in the Sanctus. Lennox Berkeley's *Missa brevis* dates from 1960 and is dedicated to his sons Michael and Julian Berkeley and the boys of Westminster Cathedral Choir. Rupert Jeffcoat's *Missa Verbum Supernum* is a recent work in the modern French style which both senior and junior choirs will perform as part of this year's London Festival of Contemporary Church Music.

The anthem on Sunday 12th is one of several hymn-anthems composed by Charles Wood, in which a hymn-style tune is varied with changing choral textures and organ harmonies, building to a grand climax. This one, entitled *Ascension Hymn*, with a text by A. P. Graves, was composed in 1913. The anthem was subsequently published with a different text, 'Who through the desert vale', but the original setting provides a fine choice for Ascensiontide. On Pentecost Sunday we will sing one of the less well-known but excellent settings of the Evening Canticles by Herbert Howells, those composed for New College, Oxford, alongside one of the most famous motets by Palestrina, *Dum complerentur dies Pentecostes*. On the morning of Sunday 26th we sing the communion motet for Trinity Sunday *Benedicimus Deum coeli* by Samuel Webbe, a prominent Roman Catholic composer around the turn of the 19th century. His music was often sung in the London embassy chapels by visiting foreign opera singers. At one chapel the singing was so good that many non-Catholics that came purely to hear them were charged for admission...

Geoffrey Webber