

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

### Music Notes ~ October 2024

In selecting music for October I have looked for opportunities to tie in with our new Evensong sermon series. Some themes are easier to match than others of course, but at various moments I hope that an introit, anthem or hymn will add to our contemplation of the ideas being expounded. It is also Black History month, so we hear choral and organ music by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (in fact transcriptions for organ of various pieces, published posthumously as a collection in 1916) and my setting of four traditional South African melodies in the form of Preces and Responses.

We sing three 20th-century Mass settings in English this month and one in Latin composed by Venetian baroque composer Giovanni Rovetta, whose *Messa concertato* we sang for Michaelmas. This other setting is written in the old contrapuntal style, so sounds more like Palestrina than Monteverdi. Alongside this we sing a more modern-style communion motet by Rovetta, setting the anonymous medieval prayer 'Anima Christi' which opens with the memorable lines –

*Anima Christi sanctifica me*

*Corpus Christi salva me*

*Sanguis Christi inebria me*

which are sung in Rovetta's expressive setting by three solo voices in turn.

On Dedication Sunday we sing a hymn-anthem by Charles Wood that was composed for use at his principal Cambridge College, Gonville & Caius, on the occasion of the Commemoration of Benefactors, and specifically for the 300th anniversary of the death of John Caius (1910). Wood took his text 'Glorious and powerful God', from an anthem by Orlando Gibbons which talks of God's dwelling place 'above the starry sky' and ends by lauding the 'founder and foundation of endless habitation'. The hymn-anthem format allows the text to be heard clearly, with little musical elaboration beyond Wood's choice harmonies on the organ.

Complementing the Vicar's Evensong sermon on 13th October we sing the famous anthem by Edward Bairstow *Let all mortal flesh keep silence*. The text was originally an early Greek hymn, and the English version used by Bairstow differs from that normally sung as a congregational hymn. The theme of the text is essentially Eucharistic, but of particular interest here is Bairstow's portrayal of silence in standing before the throne of God. The piece as a whole in fact ranges from this awed silence to Alleluias sung *tutta forza* in imitation of the cherubim and seraphim. The composer separates the climactic Alleluias with pauses, so you might wish to imagine the acoustic of York Minster, where Bairstow worked, as you listen to these. Picking up on Bairstow's use of F sharp minor and unison writing, I have composed an introit for the service that sets a text more clearly centred on the theme of silence from *The Imitation of Christ* (1418) by Thomas á Kempis – 'In silence and in quiet the devout soul goeth forward and learneth the hidden things...' – coupled with a verse from Psalm 4 which he quotes, 'Commune with your own heart and in your own chamber and be still' and the Latin 'Silentium'.

At the final Evensong of the month on the 27th we sing Ireland's popular anthem *Greater love*, as well as two less familiar pieces, a 'Verse' Service from c. 1670 by William Child of St George's Chapel, Windsor (postponed from a few months ago due to illness) and as the introit the opening of a metrical setting of Psalm 8 by Thomas Ravenscroft published in 1621.

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