

The Parish Church of St John-at-Hampstead

Music Notes ~ December 2024

At the licensing of Fr Yin-An it was a pleasure to perform Victoria's *Missa O quam gloriosum* (O how glorious [are the Saints]...) for a celebration of Holy Communion within the octave of the Feast of All Saints. It is one of the most perfect of all Renaissance mass settings, and one that younger singers enjoy due to its concise tunefulness. We sang the Gloria at the licensing but in Advent we sing the Kyrie instead, and both choirs will be taking part in the performance at the All-Age service on Sunday 1st. At the Advent Carol Service in the evening the main choral item will be Edward Naylor's dramatic motet *Vox dicentis*, setting verses from Isaiah 40. Other items will include Ravenscroft's haunting *Remember, o thou man* and John Rutter's *There is a flower*, together with pieces to match the theme of the readings: 'The King and his kingdom'. Before the service we hear one of the movements in the *O Antiphon sequence* composed by Cecilia MacDowall in 2018. These elaborate on the Magnificat antiphons used at Vespers at the end of Advent.

At Communion on the 8th we hear music by the great Portuguese polyphonist Duarte Lobo as well as a motet by the 18th-century Italian composer Giovanni Martini, often known as 'Padre Martini' as he was a Franciscan friar. At Evensong the choir sings one of J. S. Bach's finest motets *Komm, Jesu, komm*, a work that changes style and mood several times, matching the changing sentiments of the text which examines both the trials and tribulations of normal life and the comfort offered by the expected Jesus, 'the way, the truth and the life'. The voluntary in the morning is a setting by Samuel Scheidt of verses from the great Advent hymn *Veni redemptor gentium* (O come, Redeemer of the earth) and for the Introit at Evensong we sing the German Lutheran version of the same hymn in the form of a simple setting of *Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland* by the 16th-century composer Johannes Eccard.

The Communion motet on Sunday 15th is the wonderful *Audivi vocem de caelo* by Thomas Tallis. The text of this, referencing the story of the wise and foolish virgins, was sung in the Use of Sarum on the Feast of All Saints and for the Common of Virgins, but it is most often used today for Advent as it anticipates the arrival of the bridegroom that is Christ. Gentle polyphony alternates with the beauty of Sarum plainsong. In the evening we perform Handel's *Messiah*, singing all of Part One, most of which concerns Advent and Christmas, and then highlights from Parts Two and Three. Cellist Jacob Garside of the Hampstead Collective has put together an orchestra using period instruments, and our regular professional singers will be joined by the Junior Choir for some items. Thanks to the Hampstead Church Music Trust the performance is with free admission, so it's a great opportunity to bring along friends and family.

Our Mass setting on Christmas Eve is the powerful and joyful *Messe solennelle* by the great early-20th-century French organist Louis Vierne, and Joshua will be playing his popular *Final* from the first symphony at the conclusion of the service. On Christmas Day we will sing three separate settings instead of a single Mass setting. This allows us to bring more variety into the occasion with music by a famous modern Anglican composer, Herbert Howells, as well as an increasingly recognised Afro-Brazilian composer of the early 19th century, José Maurício Nunes Garcia. We will also sing a single movement from one of the greatest of all polyphonic Christmas works, the *Missa Puer natus* by Thomas Tallis. The work is too long for us to sing liturgically in the normal manner, but just one movement will be a treat: the Agnus Dei, which we will sing during the distribution of Communion.

Geoffrey Webber