

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

### Music Notes ~ April 2025

Our music for Holy Week begins with the antiphon to be sung at the entry into the church on Palm Sunday, in a setting by the 18th-century Venetian composer Baldassare Galuppi, born on the island of Burano. For the last three years we have been performing settings of the Passion by Orlande de Lassus, and the cycle begins again this year with his St Luke setting. For this I have gently manipulated the music for the crowd scenes so that they are sung in English along with the rest of the narrative.

The service of Tenebrae returns to our Holy Week observances this year, replacing the more freely-structured collection of readings and music on the evening of Good Friday that has taken place in recent years. The service consists of a rolling sequence of psalms, responsories and readings, during which candles are gradually extinguished, as well as the canticle *Benedictus Dominus Deus Israel*. There are many fine 16th-century settings of the responsories, but for this occasion I have selected some relatively brief settings by Joseph Haydn's younger brother Johann Michael. The Haydn brothers both sang as choristers at St Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, and late in life Joseph suggested that his brother was the finer composer of sacred music, perhaps because Michael's music was often more suited to the liturgical environment than his own. The *Tenebrae Responsories* are a good example of this; they are suitably austere and show a careful concern for the meaning of the texts. Following this we sing a simple chant-based setting of the *Benedictus* by Palestrina, and then the more expansive and expressive 8-part setting of *Crucifixus pro nobis* by Antonio Lotti.

At the 2 pm service of the Liturgy for Good Friday we have a similar overall pattern, with austere and unaccompanied music forming the greater part of the music, but concluding with something more expressive and personal in nature, the setting by Jean Roger-Ducasse of the quintessential Good Friday text: *Crux fidelis*. Roger-Ducasse studied with Gabriel Fauré at the Paris Conservatoire where he succeeded him as Professor of Composition. He wrote much music but destroyed most of it, being severely self-critical. His *Crux fidelis*, composed for soprano solo, choir and organ, comes from a collection of 3 motets published in 1911.

There are not many circumstances in which the very different worlds of opera and church music collide, but to help us celebrate Easter Day we perform music from the popular one-act opera *Cavalleria rusticana* by Pietro Mascagni. Christianity has a prominent but scarcely conventional place in Wagner's *Parsifal* of course, more Dan Brown than the Gospels, but safer appearances of church music in opera are more often a case of eaves-dropping, as at the start of *Die Meistersinger*, with a hymn tune that even makes it into the *New English Hymnal*, though it's rarely sung. In the passage from *Cavalleria rusticana* we perform on Easter Day, two groups of musicians are involved: inside the church the choir sings the Easter Marian antiphon *Regina coeli*, whilst outside the villagers are heard singing "Inneggiamo, il Signor non è morto".

Our Mass setting for Easter Day is by the American composer Horatio Parker, one of the most prominent and successful American composers around the turn of the twentieth century. Long associated with Boston and Yale University in particular, where he taught Charles Ives, Parker had studied with Josef Rheinberger in Munich, where he gave the first performance of Rheinberger's 1st Organ Concerto. Highly esteemed in England, he was the first American composer to have a work performed at the Three Choirs Festival, and was awarded an Honorary Doctorate at Cambridge. His *Communion Service* was published in London by Novello in 1892, when Parker was Organist at the Holy Trinity Church in New York. Our Easter Evensong, which will feature S. S. Wesley's masterpiece *The Wilderness*, is being held this year on the 2nd Sunday of Easter.

Geoffrey Webber