

The Parish Church of St John-at-Hampstead

Music Notes ~ May 2025

First performed in St-John-at-Hampstead on 16th May 2004, the *Jubilate* by Grayston Ives was commissioned by the Friends of the Music, and will serve as our Introit on the 4th May. According to Ives's website the work remains unpublished, but if anyone would like to see this remedied, please speak to me over sherry after the service. Bill (as Grayston is known) uses a familiar rhythmic idiom made popular by composers such as William Mathias and John Rutter in the 1970s and '80s, and the work includes a nod towards Benjamin Britten's famous *Jubilate Deo in C* and a 'drop' before the quasi-shouted final Amen. By way of contrast, the anthem at the same service celebrates the resurrection in a slow and solemn manner. *Surrexit pastor bonus* by Jean L'Héritier inhabits an idiom more familiar to us in the music of Thomas Tallis in works such as *In ieiunio et fletu*, reminding us of the crucial part played by continental music in the music of this beloved English composer. The style also reminds us that the great celebrations of the church's year are worthy of solemn reflection as well as outbursts of joy. L'Héritier was a Flemish composer from the region of Thérrouanne in the Pas de Calais; he studied with Josquin and spent most of his working life in Italy, including a spell at the French church in Rome, San Luigi dei Francesi.

We continue to celebrate the season by singing several of the most well-known Easter anthems at Evensong from across the ages: John Tavener's *Dum transisset Sabbatum*, Samuel Wesley's *In exitu Israel* and Charles Stanford's *Ye choirs of new Jerusalem*. Having performed Samuel Sebastian Wesley's *The Wilderness* in April, it is fitting that we acknowledge the influence of his father Samuel, evident perhaps most clearly in the rigorous fugal writing in both pieces, both employing extended passages of quaver runs.

Having long admired John Stainer, more for his work as music historian than a composer, I have been taking stock of his service settings to see what might suit us at Hampstead. Settings of the Communion Service in the late 19th century followed the requirements of the Book of Common Prayer, and so do not fit easily with our modern liturgy. The BCP has no requirement to include the Benedictus or the Agnus Dei, and the Kyrie is rendered in the form of the Responses to the Ten Commandments. However, even at this time the tide was turning in High Anglican circles at least, and Stainer was one of the first musicians to set the Benedictus and Agnus Dei which were becoming used as optional extras. Stainer also recognised that the need to keep a single tonal centre, as was typical for the Canticles at Matins and Evensong, was less crucial in the Communion Service, so he often set the different movements in different keys. Having considered the various options, no single setting seemed to be well suited for us to do issues of length or musical content, so I have selected a mixture of movements from his three Communion settings for the morning of Sunday May 4th: The Gloria and Agnus Dei come from his Service No. 2, the Sanctus from his Service No. 3, and the Benedictus from his Service No. 1 (transposed). Stainer also provided further musical settings of Communion texts, and as the anthem we will sing the Introit that forms part of his Service No. 1, *Jesus said unto the people*.

On the Eve of Ascension Day we sing the *Messa a 4 voci 'da capella'* by Claudio Monteverdi. The work is somewhat enigmatic. It was published several years after his death as a result of the noble efforts of Venetian publisher Alessandro Vincenti: "These sacred remains of the works of the most excellent Monteverde, which not without a miracle after his death I was able piously to collect, are now published by me to satisfy common devotion". We don't know when Monteverdi composed it, and the music inhabits a strange idiom somewhere between the renaissance and baroque styles, then known simply as the first and second practices. It thus has a unique blend of homophonic and contrapuntal elements, with two notable highlights being the wistful 'miserere' sequence and the off-beat Osanna choruses, as punchy as anything by Grayson Ives.