

The Parish Church of St John-at-Hampstead

Music Notes ~ July 2025

This month we say our sad farewells both to Joshua Ryan as Organist and Assistant Director of Music and to Louis Horsman Carpenter, our Organ Scholar this past year. Their work will be much on display during July, and on Joshua's last Sunday he will conduct the choir at the morning service and play the organ for Evensong. Joshua's lively and imaginative improvisations as part of the morning service, often picking up on liturgical themes and other references appropriate to the day, will be much missed, along with his championing of the wonderful organ music by Olivier Messiaen. He has been an outstanding accompanist for the choir and has brought forth some superb colours from our versatile Willis/Harrison/Bower organ, as we heard to great effect last month in his playing of the Prologue to *The Apostles* by Edward Elgar. We also owe a great debt of thanks to Joshua for his establishment and curating of the organ recital series we now enjoy. He signs off with some superb voluntaries during the month including transcriptions of music by Wagner and Elgar, and organ works by Bach and Vierne. We also say thank you and farewell this month to soprano Rebecca Hardwick who has done great work as our Evensong soprano over the last 4 years.

On the final Sunday in June we sang a setting of the *Nunc dimittis* by Mendelssohn, and on the 13th July we will sing one of its companion pieces, the *Magnificat*. The origins and nature of Mendelssohn's *Three Motets* Op. 69 is not well known or understood, and I've recently been spending some time investigating this. When he was in England and being entertained by the musical great and the good in London, it was suggested that he might compose a setting of the Anglican Service. He had a go at a Te Deum in English, for Matins, but didn't find the task easy, given the particular nature of Anglican service music at this time, and eventually gave up on it. However, he returned to the project just before his untimely death aged 38 in 1847, and shortly after he had heard of the death of his beloved sister Fanny. He composed the Jubilate, to complete the Matins service, but added a notably reserved *minore* setting of the doxology to conclude the otherwise joyful setting. He also composed the Magnificat and Nunc dimittis, initially without doxologies, as he had at some point decided to make something of them for the German market, where doxologies would not be needed, with texts in German. For the English market, an organ accompaniment was *de rigueur*, but this was not so in Germany. All four canticles were published in England with English texts and organ accompaniments, and he made preparations so that the pieces would also be published in Germany, with parallel German and English texts and for unaccompanied voices, which eventually appeared in 1848 after his death (but with a different Jubilate doxology). Since that point, the Breitkopf & Härtel edition has held sway, and has been used even by English choirs. Indeed, we sang the Evensong canticles here at Hampstead using this edition not long after I became Director of Music. The performance wasn't altogether satisfactory, partly because of the problem of reading from copies with different texts and alternative rhythms, producing a very cluttered score, and some of the accentuation of the English and even the text itself gave cause for concern. Was Mendelssohn negligent/incompetent with composing in English? No, he took great care with his English texts and took advice as needed, but somewhere along the line in the preparation of the German edition after his death, problems arose. In recent decades some new editions of the *Three Motets* (published in the order Nunc, Jubilate, Magnificat) have appeared, but only the most recent (2022) and expensive collected works edition has presented the Magnificat and Nunc dimittis as they were originally conceived in their English version. Having consulted the original 1847 edition in the British Library I have also now prepared an edition of his 'Evening Service' for us to use at Hampstead, and I hope they will sound more convincing this time round.

Inspired by our Finzi service at the start of June, bass James Geidt has asked that we sing his anthem *Lo, the full final sacrifice*, so that is down for our final service before the summer break, and for a likely 'first performance in modern times', I hope everyone will admire Daniel Roseingrave's anthem *Lord, thou art become gracious* which we're singing at Evensong on 20th July.

Geoffrey Webber