

The Parish Church of St John-at-Hampstead

Music Notes ~ July 2026

This month represents perhaps the highpoint of our year-long exploration of the church music of Charles Wood, who died on 12th July 1926. The special Choral Evensong on Wednesday 8th July is described in a separate paragraph below, but on the 12th itself we perform his *Missa Sancti Patricii*, or Mass of St Patrick, that day, composed with St Patrick's C.o.I. Cathedral, Armagh, in mind, where his father was a tenor lay-clerk and where he and his brothers were choristers. (His elder brother William also became an organist, studying at the Royal Academy of Music and later becoming a Professor there and also Organist and Director of Music at Highgate School.) Having put together plans for the co-ordinated performance of all of Wood's church music in Armagh, Cambridge and London this year, I will in fact be away from Hampstead on the 12th, attending celebratory performances elsewhere in London, and Francesca Massey, who has been deputising for us as organist recently, will be at the helm. We have now advertised our post of Organist, and hope to have someone able to join us in this role (replacing Joshua Ryan) from September.

Irish connections remain strong on the 19th July, since we will perform a new work by bass choir member Eoghan Desmond to mark the final choral service with Mthr Carol as our Vicar, *Fáeth Fíadha*. Eoghan writes: "The famous Irish poem *Fáeth Fíadha* is attributed to St Patrick, and comprises part of a larger text, *Lúireach Phádraig*, commonly translated into English as St Patrick's Breastplate. *Fáeth Fíadha* is often translated (erroneously) as 'The Deer's Cry', due to the word *fíadha* bearing a resemblance to the modern word *fíá* meaning deer. *Fíadha* in this instance is likely more closely related to the modern word *fíanna*, meaning "warriors" or "defenders", with *Fáeth* likely linking to a word meaning 'spell' or 'mist'. Hence my subtitle, 'A Mist of Concealment'."

We also say farewell this month to alto Rebekah Nießer-Jones who has sung with us since January 2023. With the arrival of her first child due soon, she is moving to a lighter church commitment with just one Sunday service, the Jesuit Church at Farm St. She has served the choir brilliantly over the last three-and-a-half years, and there will be a chance to say thank you to her over drinks at the last Evensong in July (26th), after she sings for us the final 'Angel' section of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*. Most of the music for the service has been chosen by Rebekah. Auditions are currently in progress to identify her replacement.

For Mthr Carol's final Holy Communion service on 19th July we will have an expanded choir to sing the *Jazz Mass* by Bob Chilcott. The music was in fact planned anyway for this particular Sunday, but it will certainly help make the service feel different and special. Unlike another Jazz Mass we performed a few years ago which featured a small instrumental group, Chilcott's setting will be sung with piano only.

At Holy Communion on Sunday 26th we will sing a new anthem by Philip Moore, whose *Messe Solennelle* we sang on Easter Day. Beginning 'We do not presume', the text is a mixture of the Prayer of Humble Access and the Prayer of Consecration. Unlike the grand *Messe*, this anthem is quiet and prayerful, ideal for performance during the communion. Our visit organists this month will be Joshua Ryan, Francesca Massey, Martyn Noble and a new addition, Tom Winpenny, who was Assistant Organist at St Albans Cathedral for 16 years before moving to freelance work.

Geoffrey Webber

BBC Radio 3 - Choral Evensong

Wednesday 8th July 3 pm

Sung by the Choir of Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge, directed by Matthew Martin.

This is a live broadcast, and the congregation should be seated by 2.45 pm.

The service is repeated on Radio 3 on Sunday 12th and will be also available on BBC Sounds.

As part of the Charles Wood centenary celebrations this year, the choir of Wood's principal Cambridge College, Gonville & Caius, will be coming to sing Choral Evensong on 8th July with a programme of music to mark the centenary of his death. Most of the music will of course be by Wood, and since he was an undergraduate at the newly founded Selwyn College in the 1880s, the setting of the Preces & Responses are those by the current Director of Music there, Sarah MacDonald. Two of Wood's stirring hymn-anthems will book-end the service, and the anthem will be his extremely moving *Expectans expectavi*, composed in memory of his eldest son, Patrick, killed in the First World War, with the text written by another casualty of the war, Charles Sorley, whose father was a close friend of Wood. Matthew Martin and the Organ Scholars have also fashioned some psalm chants from fragments of other compositions by Wood, and the Office Hymn will be sung to the fine tune 'Cambridge', published in the Songs of Praise hymnal. The service will also feature my reconstruction and edition of Wood's *Magnificat and Nunc dimittis in A flat*, which survives in an almost complete fair copy and some sketches in the library at Gonville & Caius. The BBC's Choral Evensong is celebrating its own centenary this year, having begun its weekly broadcasts in 1926.

Geoffrey Webber

Final Organ Recital of the current series

Cristina Brancato

Saturday 18th July 4-5 pm

Our current organ recital series ends this month, with a visit from the distinguished Neapolitan organist and pianist, Cristina Brancato. She graduated with top honors in Organ and Organ Composition from the prestigious *San Pietro a Majella* Conservatory in Naples, and has built a distinguished concert career since the 1990s, performing both as a soloist and with various ensembles. She has been a member of the unique *Chant d'Oiseaux* Organ Quartet, a unique ensemble featuring four organists playing on a single console, with whom she has performed in Italy and abroad, including at the Salzburg Organ Festival. In addition to her concert activity, she has been teaching since the early 1990s, currently serves as Principal Organist at the *Basilica of Santa Maria di Piedigrotta* in Naples, and dedicates herself to exploring the organ's expressive potential as well as researching early childhood music education.