The Parish Church of St John-at-Hampstead
Music Notes ~ November 2026

All Saints / All Souls

On 1st November we observe both All Saints' Day and the Eve of All Souls' Day. In the morning we sing Victoria's bespoke mass setting, and the organ music by Titelouze is based on hymns for related feasts for confessors, apostles and evangelists. Jean Titelouze (1562-1633) was both a canon and organist at Rouen Cathedral, whose surviving organ music betrays both his liturgical interests and his mastery of the late-Renaissance style of composition. At the evening service the chosen music closely reflects the theme of the occasion, with the respond *Audivi vocem de coelo* being sung as the candles are lit, and culminating in the superb setting of verses from Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* by Vaughan Williams, *Valiant for Truth*, with its triumphant conclusion that follows a magical harmonic transition at 'so he passed over'. We will also sing the setting of the Nunc dimittis by the American composer Amy Beach. She came from a congregationalist background but became involved with the Episcopal church later in life, though her canticle settings were not written for Evening Prayer, having no doxology. Former Director of Music Peter Foggitt has fashioned a version that follows the Book of Common Prayer that is available online, but as we are not singing the canticle as part of Evensong, it seems fitting to use the original version on this occasion.

Remembrance Sunday

Our Requiem setting this year is that by Josef Rheinberger in D minor, last sung here in 2023. It was composed in 1900 when Rheinberger was working as professor of organ and composition at the Munich conservatoire, before his death the following year. The style of the work is predominantly one of quiet restraint, since the composer seems to have purposely avoided the extremes of other settings that revel in representations of both the Day of Judgement and Eternal Paradise. We welcome back the trumpeter Robert Vanryne to play for us again for this occasion. At Evensong we continue the theme with one of the finest motets by Rheinberger's Austrian contemporary Anton Bruckner, his *Os iusti*. Bruckner composed this in 1879 and dedicated it to Ignaz Traumihler, choirmaster of St. Florian Abbey. Traumihler was a staunch supporter of the Cecilian movement which advocated the use of unaccompanied voices and Renaissance techniques. Bruckner's motet blends both polyphonic and harmonic writing in the Lydian mode (F major with B naturals). Joshua Simões will play one of the finest 'modern' Preludes and Fugues surrounding the service, that in G minor by Marcel Dupré.

Second Sunday before Advent

John Sheppard, like Thomas Tallis, managed to write brilliant music both for the Sarum Rite – large-scale and in Latin – and for the emerging English church of the Reformation – short and in English. At Evensong we sing examples of both, an Introit composed in a very similar manner to Tallis's *A new commandment* which we sang in October, and a hymn-setting on the theme of the Trinity as we come to the end of that long period of Sundays after Trinity. The canticles are composed by John Amner, organist at Ely in the early seventeenth century, and is notable for it being apparently dedicated to the Dean, Henry Caesar, thus being a happy example of a musician and priest apparently getting along well together – a feature worth celebrating at a time when so many cathedrals are encountering difficulties in this area. However, Caesar was a descendent of wealthy Italian aristocrats, and the only hint of doubt about the situation is that he left legacies to certain officers of the Cathedral on his death, but I don't know if Amner was one of them…

Christ the King

The music at Evensong has been designed with the celebrations of the Friends of the Drama in mind, as well as St Cecilia. Organ music provided by Martindale Sidwell for a production of *The Lark* will be played on a recording before the service, and the singing of some Sarum chant recalls a production of *Murder in the Cathedral*. For the anthem we use Milton's poetry as set by Hubert Parry in *Blest pair of sirens*, with its

memorable twinning of the harmonious sisters, 'voice and verse'. (This anthem was chosen for the recent centenary celebrations of BBC's transmission of Choral Evensong in Westminster Abbey.)

Advent Sunday

The music for our Advent Carol service this year will include the setting of *Adam lay y-bounden* by leading Scottish composer Stuart MacRae. Born in Inverness in 1976 he has served for many years as Professor of Composition at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in Glasgow. He is perhaps best known for his operas working with librettist Lousie Welsh, but his haunting carol – with wonderfully spare organ interludes – is for my money one of the very best carols composed in recent decades, first performed at Paisley Abbey in 2003.

Geoffrey Webber