

Music at Services at the Cathedral of St.Machar in March 2019

Choral Music

The thriving choir, which includes Choral Scholars, sings at the Sunday morning Service and has an extensive repertoire, ranging from medieval plainchant to pieces which have been written in the twenty first century. The Choir usually makes two contributions to the Service - an Anthem and a Motet during the Offertory collection. Three items are included at the monthly Communion Service on the last Sunday of the month.

If you are an experienced singer who would be interested in joining the choir please contact the Music Director (rogerbevanwilliams@g.mail.com)

Music sung by the Choir this month will include a wide range of repertoire. Beginning with an English pupil of Mozart – Thomas Attwood – and continuing with recent anthems by Sidney Campbell, and the former Music Director at St. Machar’s Mike Thomson, during Lent we shall sing a number of pieces drawn from the 16th -18th centuries. One recent feature which will continue is the singing of an Introit for each Service in Lent. These Introits will be taken from Plainchant, both old and more recently written. More Plainchant will be sung for the Communion Service at the end of the month when the music for Mass XVII will be sung. The Sanctus for this is particularly old, and was written down in the 11th century. This variety of music is a reminder of the great and long history of this wonderful building.

March 3rd. Anthem: Come, Holy Ghost: T.Attwood
Offertory: Sing we merrily: S.Campbell

March 10th. –First Sunday in Lent.
Introit: Attende Domine: Plainchant
Anthem: Alone, Thou goest forth: M.Thomson

March 17th.- Second Sunday in Lent.
Introit: Lord Jesus, think on me: Plainchant
Anthem: Lord, let me know mine end: M.Greene.
Offertory: Let my complaint: A.Batten

March 24th. – Third Sunday in Lent.
Introit: Ubi caritas: Plainchant
Anthem: Nolo mortem peccatoris: T.Morley
Offertory: Lord, for thy tender mercy’s sake: Farrant/Hilton

March 31st. – Fourth Sunday in Lent.
Introit: Make speed, O God: Plainchant
Anthem: Kyrie (Plainchant Mass XVII)
Offertory: Sanctus (Plainchant)
Communion: Agnus Dei (Plainchant)

The Organ

The present organ is not the first that there has been in the Cathedral. Because of the lack of direct evidence it is difficult to be certain what sort of instrument there might have been in the Cathedral before the Reformation. But according to the distinguished historian Leslie Macfarlane, we do learn of two books of organ music which were recorded as having been at the Cathedral in 1436 – a very early date for an organ book. At the turn of the sixteenth century, during the time when William Elphinstone was Bishop, it seems likely that there would have been a large organ sited in the building, possibly in the Choir or in one of the Transepts. Given that Bishop Elphinstone had come to Aberdeen after living in both Paris and Louvain, it seems very probable that the instrument would have been as splendid as the Bishop's enlarged foundation of Vicars Choral. This organ would most probably have been built on medieval *Blockwerk* principles, with loud and magnificent sounds, and would have been played on Sundays and major feast days.

The organ in use today is a splendid example of a romantic instrument built by 'Father' Willis. It has three manuals and pedals and was originally built in 1891 with a third manual added in 1898. The organ was at first sited in front of the east window, but was moved to its present position in 1928, at which time some tonal additions were made. In 1973 there was a rebuild, with some further tonal modifications, carried out by the firm of Noel Mander of London. The three ranks of Willis pipes that were at that time taken off and kept in storage, were brought back onto the Choir organ in July 2018 with assistance from the Bach Choir. This most recent work has restored some of the quieter sounds that the organ originally possessed. The organ has a rich resonance and a variety of tonal sound that was characteristic of this most celebrated of Victorian organ builders.

In recent times, since the first organist Sydney Townsend was appointed in 1891, there have been only nine Organists, including some very eminent figures. These include Marshall Gilchrist (1920-38), John B. Dalby (1938-54), David Murray (1954-81), and James Lobban (1954-81), after which Mike Thomson held the post until 2016.

During the month of March we shall hear pieces by the French composer Louis Vierne and the early twentieth century English composer Walford Davies. From the first Sunday in Lent Chorale Preludes by the twentieth century Organist and Composer Helmut Walcha will contrast with pieces by J.S.Bach. The closing Voluntaries will be taken from composers of the generation before Bach – the North German composer Johannes Pachelbel and the Danish born composer Diderich Buxtehude.

Voluntaries for February

3.3.19:	Epitaph Toccatina and Fugue in d minor, BWV 595	L.Vierne J.S.Bach
10.3.19	Solemn Melody Passacaglia in d minor	Walford Davies D.Buxtehude
17.3.19	Chorale Preludes: Herzliebster Jesu: Herzlich tut, BWV 727 Ciaccona in e minor	H.Walcha J.S.Bach D.Buxtehude
24.3.19	Chorale Preludes: O Mensch beweine Gott und Herr Ciaccona in d minor	H.Walcha J.S.Bach J.Pachelbel
31.4.19	Chorale Preludes: O wie armen Sünden Christ lag in Todesbanden Ciaccona in f minor	H.Walcha J.S.Bach J.Pachelbel

Director of Music and Organist - Dr. Roger B. Williams, M.B.E. (March 2019)