



Music @ Saint Bartholomew's

<http://www.stbartholomews.ie>

January 2013



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Call the Fire Brigade?

In June 2011, the Select Vestry of Saint Bartholomew's Church formally approved a plan to produce two new recordings of Saint Bartholomew's Choir. The first of these, *And the house was filled with smoke*, featured the girls and men, and was launched by Tim Thurston on December 18th, 2011.

Production is now underway on the second disc, featuring the boys and men. Unlike the first project, which concentrated on music from the existing choir repertoire, the new disc will include a number of pieces that are not regularly heard in Saint Bartholomew's in addition to a selection of favourites.

The first recording session took place in a bitterly cold church on Saturday, November 24th. Our engineer, Brian McIvor, elected to begin our project with take number

one hundred and fifty-six, perhaps in homage to this writer's sarcastic comments in the January 2012 issue of this magazine!

The entire day was dedicated to recording the six movements of the Haydn *Little Organ Mass*. Five of these have been a staple of the choir repertoire for decades, and were thus well known to all, but the *Credo* was new to us, since we normally sing a plainsong setting of this movement at Saint Bartholomew's. Haydn's setting was heard in the church as a special once off (by kind permission of the Vicar) at the Solemn Eucharist on Sunday, November 11th.

The group gathered back in the church the next afternoon to record a further three tracks. The first of these was a treble solo performed by Gavin Jones. *For I will*

consider my Cat Geoffrey is the second movement from Britten's *Rejoice in the Lamb*, a slightly bizarre festival cantata for four soloists, choir, and organ based on a poem by Christopher Smart, that was written while its author was confined to an insane asylum. This was followed by Haydn's *The Heavens are Telling*, from *The Creation*, featuring solos from Elias Dempsey, Emmet Kiberd, and Richard Bannister – and Byrd's *Teach Me O Lord*, featuring a solo from Martin Henihan.

Later on that evening, as the church was being tidied, our producer Judy Martin was overheard commenting that "that was the best recording session I've ever had with an amateur choir". Two further weekends of recording are planned for mid-2013.

Richard Bannister



RSCM Events at Saint Bartholomew's

The annual RSCM Awards service was held at Saint Bartholomew's on Saturday, September 29th.

It was heartening to welcome so many young candidates (and their families and friends) to celebrate their success in the examinations for the Bronze and Silver awards of the RSCM Voice for Life chorister training scheme. Choristers from Saint Mary's Pro Cathedral, Dublin; Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin; Saint Bartholomew's Church, Dublin; and Saint Gall's Church, Carnalea all received awards this year – a total of thirty-six candidates. We also presented the Church Music Skills certificate to Deirdre Macklin (Saint Macarten's Cathedral, Monaghan), the first time this award has been presented in Ireland.

These awards present

a wonderful opportunity for musicians to develop their skills and abilities, and to have them tested by the RSCM.

The work that these musicians do, in preparing for these exams, is demanding. Both singers and organists must achieve proficiency across the repertoire, and they are also tested in musicianship skills, aural and sight reading ability, music theory, and on their understanding of the liturgy.

The awards were presented by the Vicar, Fr Andrew McCroskery, at Evensong, with Blanaid Murphy conducting and Tristan Russcher as organist.

The RSCM was back again a few weeks later for the "Come and Sing" event, which was held on Saturday, October 20th. These events are an opportunity for singers of all abilities to join with a

large group to perform major choral works – in this case Fauré's *Requiem* and Vivaldi's *Gloria*. Over seventy people took part from as far away as Newry and Cork, and as close by as Ballsbridge. We were delighted to have Tristan Russcher as our conductor for the day, with David Grealy as organist. The singers were joined by three soloists; Tanya Sewell, Catherine Redding (at extremely short notice!) and Michael Lee.

The event itself had an afternoon of rehearsing, followed by a performance of both works, open to anyone who wanted to listen, at 5:00pm. We had excellent feedback from all those who took part, and we very much look forward to using Saint Bartholomew's again for future events.

Mark Bowyer



Carols and Readings

The annual *Concert of Carols and Festive Readings* has been a staple of our choir calendar for more than twenty years, and we have been very fortunate to have Alan Stanford to perform readings throughout this time.

Alan has been an associate artist at the Pittsburgh Irish & Classical Theatre since 2008, and unfortunately his work commitments prevented him from being with us for the event this year, which took place on Sunday, December 16th. We are exceptionally grateful to Senator David Norris, himself a former chorister at Saint Bartholomew's, who agreed to present the evening at the last minute after the planned speak-

er withdrew at short notice. The Senator performed the usual set of readings in his own unique style, making the evening truly a night to remember.



There were approximately three hundred and thirty people in the audience this year, and they were treated to a varied programme included a selection of the usual favourites such as *We Three Kings* and *O Holy Night*, and some more

unusual items. The writer particularly enjoyed *I want Jesus to walk with me*, a spiritual arranged by Roderick Williams that, if nothing else, demonstrated (oh, yeah!) the versatility of our singers!

Well over ninety percent of patrons purchased their tickets online, the first time the choir has tried to use Internet based ticketing, and for the most part this worked as intended. Having said that, a few people have given us feedback on the system, both good and bad, and rest assured that we'll be taking all this on board ahead of the next choir concert!

Richard Bannister

Dromomania

We may have the most travelled parish choir in the Church of Ireland. In the last twenty-five years, the boys and men have sung at Chester, Gloucester, Exeter, Lichfield, St Davids, Ripon, Wells, and Worcester in England, as well as San Suplice, La Madeleine, and Chartres Cathedral

in France.

The Girls' Choir made its first international trip two years ago to Venice, which you can read about in more detail in the June 2010 issue of this magazine.

Both choirs have toured across Ireland, visiting Armagh, Belfast, Cork,

Galway, Kildare, Kilenny, Youghal, and of course the great Cathedrals in Dublin.

The current state of the economy in Ireland restricts us from further adventures for now, but there will surely come a time when we can afford to tour again.

Bobby Barden

Bach Organ Works

Many of our readers will already be aware that Lyric FM presenter Tim Thurston was once a member of Saint Bartholomew's Choir.

Tim has recently begun a year-long cycle of the organ music of J. S. Bach on *Gloria*, his radio programme that is broadcast each Sunday morning. Bach wrote over twenty hours of organ music including preludes and fugues, chorale preludes, and organ adaptations of orchestral works. Like his cantatas, many of his chorale preludes follow the feasts and seasons of the liturgical year. A full list of the music to be played can be found on the programme's website www.rte.ie/lyricfm/gloria.

Beginning on Sunday, January 6th, some of the organ works played on *Gloria* will also be played in Saint Bartholomew's, either at the 11:00am Eucharist or at the 6:00pm Evensong. The first of these will be a selection of the chorale variations on *Vom Himmel hoch* (BWV 769). A full list of Bach's organ works to be played in Saint Bartholomew's will be available on the parish web site by the time these words are read.

David Grealy

Voice for Life Examinations

The Voice for Life scheme provides a framework for choral singers to develop their vocal skills, their musical understanding and their knowledge of the music we sing at services throughout the year. In order to support the choir trainer and affirm the levels achieved within the choir while working on the Voice for Life training scheme, the RSCM provides a system of awards designed to be assessed through a formal examination: these are called the Bronze, Silver and Gold awards. The choristers present a number of prepared items to sing at each exam, and are tested on their aural, sight-reading and theoretical skills. They also study and prepare liturgical subjects such as major feasts and seasons of the church year.

Seven members of the Girls' Choir sat their Bronze or Silver Voice for Life examinations on Saturday, December 1st. Aisling Wright achieved a Merit at Bronze level, Niamh Corcoran and Lily Magahy Buckley both achieved

distinctions for Bronze, and Isabelle McGeough achieved a high distinction for her Silver award. Maya McNair, Mazzy Ronaldson and Rachel Spratt all passed their Silver awards with flying colours.

The girls prepared very hard for these examinations throughout the term and their hard work obviously paid off; they are great ambassadors for Saint Bartholomew's. We would like to thank Lucy Champion, our Vocal Coach, and David Grealy, our Assistant Director of Music, for helping to develop the girls' abilities to such high levels of choral singing.

In June 2013 we will be presenting six candidates from both the Boys' and the Girls' Choirs for the Gold award. This will be the first time that any chorister from Saint Bartholomew's has undertaken this examination, and work has already begun in earnest. I look forward to reporting on their successes in the next issue of this magazine.

Tristan Russcher





Girls' Choir Instrumental Concert

On Sunday, December 9th, we were fortunate to hear the 'extra-choral' talents of many of the members of the Girls' Choir, when they presented a fund-raising concert of instrumental music in the church. A number of small instrumental ensembles were formed under the expert guidance of cellist and choir parent, Una ní Chanainn. Rehearsals for the concert began way back at the beginning of term and the hard work and preparation clearly paid off!

We heard Brahms' *Variation on a theme of Haydn*, Mozart's *Ave Verum* arranged for cello ensemble, Ennio Moricone's famous *Gabriel's Oboe* and

an arrangement of *A Whole New World* from the Disney movie, *Aladdin*. We were also fortunate to hear Catherine Neenan perform as a soloist on both



piano and oboe (not at once!); and Isobel Howard-Cordone gave a superb performance of the technically demanding *Fuga* from J.S. Bach's *Third Sonata for Solo Violin*. As an encore all the girls joined the stage and sang

an *ad hoc* performance of John Gardner's *Tomorrow shall be my dancing day* as a taster for the Christmas concert on Sunday, December 16th.

Choir parents Mary Neenan, Belinda Buckley and Eileen MacCarthy were very kind to donate their skills in the baking department, and treated the audience to a wonderful afternoon tea. Many thanks go to everyone involved in the organisation of this

concert, and to everyone who took part. In all more than half of the members of the Girls' Choir performed, and all proceeds went towards the running of the choir.

Tristan Russcher

Unusual Musical Offerings

There were a few unique musical offerings heard in the church during the Barts-Fest event that took place on Saturday, August 25th.

Tristan and David performed the *Star Wars Suite*, an organ arrangement of the film music by Stuart Nicholson, Master of the Choristers

at Saint Patrick's Cathedral. Tristan also performed the *Toccata sur 'Pat le Facteur'*, a piece best described as a musical joke. Continuing on similar lines, Cliona Rogan, Killian Rogan, David Greal, Warwick Harte, Tristan Russcher, and Richard Bannister performed the *Bond*

Responses. Composed by English composer Robert Dufton, this setting of the Evensong *Preces and Responses* is based upon themes from the various James Bond movies. Curious readers can find a performance by the composer on YouTube.

Richard Bannister

The Life of a Choir

I believe it was Saint Augustine who said that he who sings, prays twice (*Qui bene cantat bis orat*). Since the earliest of times, choral music has been an integral part of worship. The disciples gathered with Jesus on the Mount of the Ascension to sing psalms and hymns, and, from those beginnings, the church has developed the rich and varied repertoire that enhances and enriches our worship today.

It is all too easy to take a choir for granted, when a parish has had a long tradition of choral music at its services. I know that we in Saint Bartholomew's church are very grateful for all the time and effort that goes into the liturgy and its music, for the organists and all those who teach, conduct, and sing. In the background, there are the parents who dutifully brave Dublin traffic to ensure that their children come to sing at our services. But there are times it helps to be reminded of just how special our choir is.

Recently a visitor to our church was 'blown away' by the choral tradition here. She was surprised that we were able to maintain it and the enthusiasm and joy of being part of it, and as we talked she described

her own parish: a small little church in a rural setting with no organ and no choir and only recorded music for its hymns. She impressed upon me just how remarkable our choir was, and how thankful she was to be able to come and visit, and hear it in the context of the liturgy.

The choir provides its boys and girls with a free musical education, but there is much more to it than that. For many, it opens up a whole new world of faith, a life that is linked to the rhythm of prayer and to the seasons in the church year, a place that provides peace, solace and spiritual comfort. Many of the young people who sing here go on to be part of other church communities and choirs after they leave, and this is such a treasure in peoples' lives.

Every year I take great delight in being able to teach the boys and girls as part of Schedule E in the Voice for Life scheme. There I can see them growing, not only in their knowledge of music, but also in their own faith and understanding of the church, and of how the scriptures can inform their singing. The Voice for Life programme provides an opportunity for them to explore

faith, to make important decisions for themselves and to speak honestly of their own thoughts about God and about the church.

The choir in itself is a community too. The choristers travel with one another in the formative years of their lives, supporting one another, praying with one another and journeying with one another through good times and bad.

It is often difficult to give people a sense of just how important our choir really is and the richness that it brings to all members of our community. We should be thankful for our choir, and for all involved who give so much to make it work.

Almighty God, you have ordained that the hearts of men and women be kindled by music, and their minds attuned to your divine mysteries: grant, we pray, that all who lead your praises and direct your worship may know themselves to be part of the ministry and witness of your church, and that the hearts of all who hear and pray with them may be lifted up to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Andrew McCroskery

Salutations

Fraser Wilson was Director of Music at Saint Bartholomew's from 2008-2010. He writes with an update on his latest project.

Inspired by my time in Ireland, not least with Michael McGlynn and *Anúna*, I have founded *Albion*, a new choir here in Sheffield. The group has made numerous appearances, including on horseback at a village food festival, in some local caves, and up mountains. The focus of the repertoire is "the music of these islands" – the traditional musics of England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, and occasionally further afield. I chose to explore this incredibly rich seam of material largely because few other groups concentrate on it, allowing me to contribute something that I felt would be worthwhile. Pleasingly it has allowed me to set some of my favourite pieces including *Scarborough Fair*, the *Skye Boat Song*, and *Jerusalem* (my school song and of course a favourite at the Last Night of the Proms and at the rugby).

My writing for the group, almost fifty pieces over the last twelve months,

has been split evenly between arrangements or reworkings of existing melodies and new compositions for extant texts. New settings of Robert Burns' *My love is like a red rose* and Yeats' *He wishes for the cloths of heaven* rub shoulders with my versions of *Danny Boy*



and *Early one morning*. Then of course there has been the rehearsing, recruiting, fine-tuning, organising, promoting, financing, and management of all the singers and their work. It has all been a most challenging and rewarding experience, and I am pleased to say that *Albion* are going to celebrate their first birthday on February 9th in rude health.

In particular, I want to share with you the exciting news that *Albion's* first foray into the realm of recording took place earlier in the autumn and

has resulted in *Salutation*, a six-track EP of carols for Advent and Christmas. Many of them epitomise the ethos of *Albion*: take a familiar, well-loved carol; reimagine it; wrap it in new harmonic clothing; and perform it with good singers who will treat it with care.

This mixture of the known and the new has proved a winning formula for *Albion* so far, and *Salutation* is the first (and I hope not the last) permanent marker of what we can achieve in recorded sound. Exploiting the full range of technologies available

to the modern musician, we have released the record not only on CD (complete with sumptuous design by our very own Richard Bannister) but also digitally, for immediate download, via a number of providers including Bandcamp, Amazon, and Spotify. So if you want to sample it, and to dip a toe in the blue waters of *Albion*, it is quick and easy so to do, and it will surely enhance the Merriness of your Christmas and the Happiness of your New Year!

Fraser Wilson

Girls' Choir Solo Service

Sunday, November 25th marked a rare occasion at Saint Bartholomew's, with a solo service sung by the girls of the choir – only the second time this has occurred within the writer's memory. The service was mostly Fauré's *Messe Basse*, which the Girls' Choir has spent the last few weeks preparing. We sang the *Kyrie*, *Sanctus*, and the *Agnus Dei* as a motet. Fauré famously composed his *Messe Basse* in 1881, while on holiday in Normandy, and it is typical of his subtle style and understated approach. A few features I particularly like are

the almost call-and-response style of the *Kyrie*, and the harmonies created in the *Sanctus*. The *Messe Basse* was supplemented by choir staples taken from Merbecke's Mass setting, and Mass VIII.

The congregation were ably led through the office hymn by Robin Heather, who also sang with us in other parts of the service. The Girls' Choir hope to build on the success of this service, and take the confidence it gave us through the busy festive season.

Sally Anne MacCarthy

Carols at the National Print Museum

A small group of boy and girl choristers, joined by Messrs. Bannister, Barden and Hilliard, provided some entertainment at the National Print Museum's Christmas fair on December 6th. The museum on Haddington Road houses an historic collection of printing presses spanning three centuries, some of which the choristers were allowed to operate themselves. Thankfully, there were no breakages!

The small size of the group tested the vocal ranges

and sight-reading abilities of all the singers involved. However, they rose to the challenge, and the carol singing was well received by those listening. Particular highlights included Robert Hilliard's treble-singing, and a rendition of the *Coventry Carol* in its original three-part form by the three men present.

Our thanks to Carla and the staff at the museum for inviting us to sing for what was a fitting opening to our Christmas celebrations.

David Grealay

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Submissions

Submissions for future issues of this magazine and all enquiries about advertising should be sent to the editor.

Friends of the Choir

This magazine is sent by post to friends of the choir; for further details, contact the Administrator, Claire McIlrath on 01-6688522 or admin@stbartholomews.ie.

Future events

A full schedule of services and events is available on the diary page of the parish web site, located at <http://www.stbartholomews.ie/>.

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