



MUSIC @ SAINT BARTHOLOMEW'S

[HTTPS://WWW.STBARTHOLOMEWS.IE](https://www.stbartholomews.ie)

DECEMBER 2020



WELCOME!

Welcome to this issue of *Music @ Saint Bartholomew's*, which is coming to you in unprecedented times.

As we go to press, the Irish authorities have just announced that choral singing will not be permitted as part of worship over the Christmas period. For the last few months we have welcomed groups of up to six masked and socially-distanced singers at our services, and it is truly a shame that this has had to stop.

During October and November, members of our choirs came together with Tim and Anne Thurston to film a Sequence of Carols and Readings that was broadcast via Facebook on the evening of Sunday, 6 December. You can read more about this on page 19. Those who missed it live can find a link on our parish website; we plan to keep it available on demand indefinitely.

The cancellation of our annual Christmas concerts has had a very significant effect on choir finances, making the Friends of the Choir scheme more important than ever. If you're interested in joining up, please speak to our parish administrator or visit our website for further details.

Our music costs in the region of €60,000 per annum to maintain, and that figure would be substantially higher were it not for the many people who volunteer their time and skills at no cost. If you have an idea for a post-COVID fundraising event, and better yet, if you're prepared to run it, please do get in touch.

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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 Megan MacCausland 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 <https://www.stbartholomews.ie/>

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NEW TRAINING SCHEME

During the summer of 2018, we devised a new chorister training system that caters to the specific musical needs of each choir member. Previously, the choristers spent their full rehearsal every Wednesday and Friday evening moving between stations to work on various bits and bobs. I decided to instead restructure the entire schedule to allow every chorister to receive training in theory of music, vocal and physical technique, aural training, and liturgical repertoire every two weeks without so much moving about.

A typical Wednesday rehearsal structure is shown in the box below. Each group comprises two to five choristers so that we can keep a close eye on each person's progress. The groups work through a carefully planned grading system that is designed to make training practical and accessible for everyone, from the youngest probationer to the most talented choral scholar. In addition to this schedule, Fr. Andrew is able to see each group once a month to answer any questions they may have with regards to the liturgy we have at Saint Bart's.

At the end of each term (or two terms, depending on the time of year), each chorister is examined and assessed on the following criteria:

- Liturgical singing, which includes a hymn, a psalm, and various settings of our liturgical repertoire I have prepared with them.
- Written music theory, which they have studied with Andrew Johnstone.
- Vocal exercises based on the Royal College of Music's teaching methods and the pedagogical compositions of Italian composers Nicola Vaccai and Giuseppe Concone.
- Aural skills, which they have studied and acquired through using the EarMaster app with the assistance and guidance of Sarah and Luke, two of our choral scholars.

Progress is marked by a colour hierarchy, much like the way belts are used in karate. Each chorister is awarded a specially designed silver

5:00pm: Boys' full rehearsal
 5:30pm: Boys' break
 5:40pm: Boys split into four groups- Boys' Group Session 1
 Week 1: Andrew Group 1, Lucy Group 2, Luke/Sarah Group 3, Tristan Group 4
 Week 2: Andrew Group 3, Lucy Group 4, Luke/Sarah Group 1, Tristan Group 2
 6:00pm: Boys' Group Session 2
 Week 1: Andrew Group 2, Lucy Group 3, Luke/Sarah Group 4, Tristan Group 1
 Week 2: Andrew Group 4, Lucy Group 1, Luke/Sarah Group 2, Tristan Group 3
 6:20pm: Girls' Group Session 1
 Week 1: Andrew Group 1, Lucy Group 2, Luke/Sarah Group 3, Tristan Group 4
 Week 2: Andrew Group 3, Lucy Group 4, Luke/Sarah Group 1, Tristan Group 2
 6:45pm: Girls' Group Session 2
 Week 1: Andrew Group 2, Lucy Group 3, Luke/Sarah Group 4, Tristan Group 1
 Week 2: Andrew Group 4, Lucy Group 1, Luke/Sarah Group 2, Tristan Group 3
 7:10pm: Girls' break
 7:20pm: Girls' full rehearsal
 8:00pm: Finish

Saint Bartholomew's medal with the correspondingly coloured ribbon, which they wear with pride at each service. The different colours are shown below.

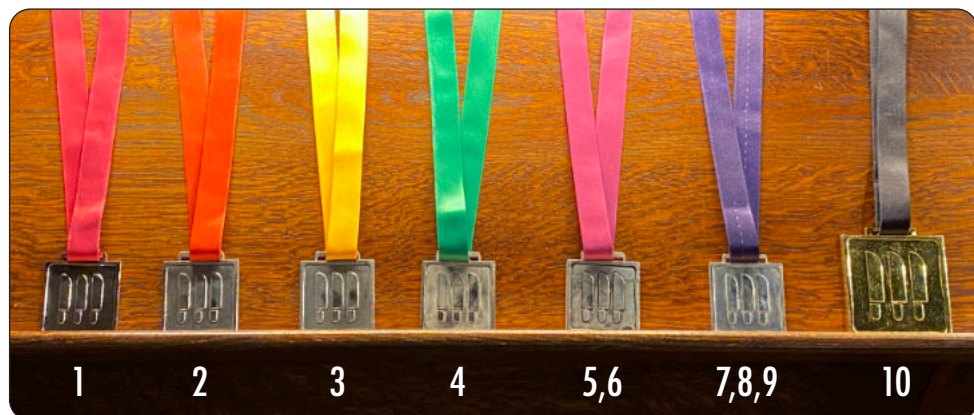
As a chorister progresses through each grade, the curriculum increases in complexity and difficulty. For instance, the Pink grade is designed for probationers, who are asked to study 'Hark, the Herald Angels Sing'; two verses of a simple psalm; and a simple and oft-sung setting of the Kyrie. They are also asked to complete an excellent music course designed especially for our choristers by Andrew Johnstone, entitled 'Keys 2 Theory'. I use the EarMaster app, which is outlined in a separate article (see across) to upload basic aural training tests that the students can work through at their own pace and which I can then download and assess once they are all completed. The vocal exercises that Lucy Champion rehearses with them are very easy to start with and are a great way for them to get comfortable with singing in small groups.

As an extra incentive, each chorister is awarded a monetary scholarship based on their grade and attendance at rehearsals and services. Bonuses are awarded for completing a

grade and the various tasks assigned to them. Once a chorister has achieved Blue 3, they are invited to study as a choral scholar. Every choral scholar is expected to sing at all services and attend extra rehearsals on Sunday afternoons. The choral scholars form the backbone of Evensong each week and must excel in all the areas required of a choral singer. They also move through an additional graded system from Black 1 to Black 5, being awarded a special gold version of the Saint Bartholomew's medal and silver stripes to the black ribbon as they achieve their grades. Each Black level is assessed by an external examiner.

A chorister who achieves the Black 5 level is awarded a special enamel Saint Bartholomew's medal. The idea of the Black levels is to challenge the choral scholars with some of the most demanding settings of choral music in the repertoire and to prepare them for a professional career in liturgical singing. At this stage both Luke O'Reilly and Sarah Colgan have attained their first Black level, and they were well on their way to achieving Black 2 before Easter—that is, until COVID-19 happened.

Unfortunately the pandemic has necessitated pausing all regular



rehearsals and sung services. When we are permitted to restart, we will revive the rehearsal schedule above and repurpose it to adapt to the more restrictive conditions for singing. This includes keeping small numbers in each singing ‘pod’, stationing the groups through a one-way system, and keeping the choristers physically distanced whilst singing. We have purchased four brand new iPads at great expense, but they will allow the choristers to individually work through their EarMaster exercises (and they can be disinfected quickly between each group). We have purchased four individual examination tables that can be used for theory work in the spacious surroundings of the north transept, and

we will erect a marquee outdoors for the small amount of singing that we will be doing. The latter is, of course, less than ideal, but it means that we can at least start chorister rehearsals in some capacity.

The year 2021 will be one of rebuilding, as much of the excellent work with our new probationers over 2019 and 2020 will have been cancelled out (not to mention that many of our senior boys aren’t able to reach the high notes any more—such is the circle of life!). However, we are all greatly looking forward to the challenge and I’m confident we can reattain the superb standard of music making that we have always been so lucky to have at Saint Bartholomew’s.

EARMASTER

In 2015, a colleague of mine showed me an intriguing ear training program available to purchase and download on PC called EarMaster. He insisted that it had helped him train important skills such as sight reading and chord recognition, skills that every professional musician needs to keep at the top of their game. I experimented with the early version of this and decided to try it with our choristers. Unfortunately, the product at that time wasn’t fully developed or suitable for our needs. It was difficult to use in a classroom or remote-teaching situation and the interface left a lot to be desired with regards to guiding younger children through the lessons.

However, when I looked into it again three years later, I discovered it had been fully updated with modern conveniences. It now provided apps

for iPhone and iPad that were identical to their PC and Mac counterparts, it supported cloud storage and syncing between devices, and its streamlined interface allowed effective navigation within the application. There was also an enormous number of new exercises catering to every level, from absolute beginner to professional musician. At the same time, it offered teachers a place to upload custom-made exercises and tests, which students could download and complete in their own time. The latter made it ideal for our new chorister training scheme, detailed on page 3.

We proceeded to purchase enough licenses for the whole choir—around €500 worth to cover two years of training—and integrated the EarMaster exercises into our new training scheme. EarMaster employs

various approaches to teach the many musical skills needed by a chorister. For example, the beginner's course introduces students to basic concepts and tests them with simple assessments, such as an A/B quiz in which they are asked to identify the larger of two intervals (the distance between two notes). The size and complexity of the intervals increases as the student progresses, and they must answer seven out of ten correctly in order to pass. Another exercise might ask the student to sing back the interval presented on the screen, which the program then analyses and gives feedback on a scale of one to five stars. Other exercises challenge the student to identify a chord as major or minor and whether or not a scale matches the notes displayed on the screen; still others involve a more tactile approach, such as clapping back rhythms displayed on screen. The variety is endless and our choral scholars quickly found themselves being able to identify the various church modes and clap along to complex rhythms, skills that would have been more difficult to master without the app. On a personal

level, I found a challenge in the jazz course, which progresses beyond the general exercises and eventually demands that the user distinguish a dominant 7 (b9, #11, b13) in a field of about fifty other chord variations (simple when you know how, of course).

Pleased with the scope of the app, we decided to add an element of competition to incentivize the choristers' use of it. For every exercise completed, a chorister was awarded five cents—not a huge amount on its own, but over time this added up to substantial awards for those who frequently worked on the exercises in their own time. At the end of the year, the prize of a brand new iPad awaited the chorister who had progressed the most. Luke O'Reilly and Sarah Colgan were neck and neck right up until the literal eleventh hour until Luke finally pulled ahead with 775 exercises completed. Many congratulations to both of them, as they're both reaping the benefits of the enormous amount of musical skills learned through this competition!



CHORAL TRAINER

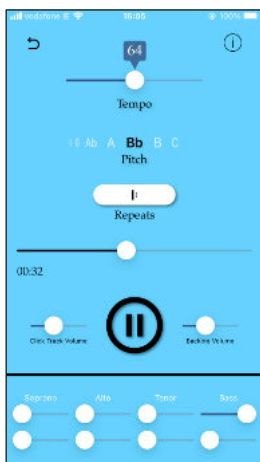
One of the duties of any choral director is to help their choir members learn music in their spare time by producing backing tracks and line-learning tools. This might involve recording an accompaniment at home, a task that is anything but quick and simple. The separate needs of sopranos, altos, tenors, and basses already necessitate multiple recordings, but even that doesn't cover all bases. Different pitches may be required for different ensembles, or perhaps a slower version of a piece may be needed for those who cannot read music quickly. This made me wonder if there might be a better way to do it—surely there's an app for that?

In December 2018 I started to formulate an idea: would it be possible to write an app for mobile phones and tablets that would allow students and teachers to not only access the accompaniments for their singing exam pieces, but also enable them to change the pitch and tempo to suit them? How about providing the app for free and charging a very small amount per piece which they can then keep on their devices, or a monthly subscription that opens access to the whole collection? It was an ambitious idea from someone who didn't own the requisite computer hardware, let alone have any experience coding apps for mobile devices. I approached the Royal Irish Academy of Music in January 2019 with my idea. It would require

recording the academy's entire vocal syllabus from grades one to eight—231 accompaniments with separate vocal lines played on the piano, which the user could switch on or off to assist with learning their lines.

I started learning how to code from scratch on 30 December 2018 and RIAM Accompaniments was launched in the App Store exactly nine months later on 30 September. Since then, it has been downloaded over 3000 times. With 2020 becoming the year of

working from home, the timing of the app was especially fortuitous. No doubt it has been extremely useful for singing students all over the world. However, the original plan was to help our own choristers learn our choral repertoire! Using RIAM Accompaniments as a foundation, I extended the functionality to include up to twenty individual vocal lines, as well as separate metronome and



accompaniment tracks. The volume of each track is individually adjustable, along with control of overall pitch and tempo. Users can see the sheet music of each piece with the click of a button and keep track of where they are in the piece with a bar number calculator. All of this is available without having to mess around with cloud storage providers like Dropbox or Google Drive—instead, our entire choral repertoire is accessible at the click of a button from a database that I can update remotely and instantly.

THE SOUTHERN CAPITAL

The boys and adults had exceptionally lucky timing earlier this year, squeezing in a February weekend trip to Cork just mere days before the full gravity of the COVID situation became known in Ireland. On a hired private coach, we departed Dublin at 9:00am on Saturday, 22 February and headed straight to Fota Wildlife Park in Carrigtwohill. There, we were treated to a guided tour of the incredible attractions at the zoo, including a behind-the-scenes look into the giraffe enclosures. The boys had the legs walked off them well before we checked into our hotels! Our accommodations were split between the Belvedere Lodge and the Clayton Silver Spring Hotel, both located just east of the city centre. Little did we know that this was going to be the last group event for the choir before

lockdown, but we celebrated each other's company all the same with dinner in the Clayton for the boys, parents, adult singers, and guests of the choir.

It was back to work the next day to sing the services in the cavernous acoustics of Saint Fin Barre's Cathedral. Our organist Dr. Johnstone had been practicing all day on Saturday in order to prepare the smorgasbord of amazing music we would be performing at the services. The magnificent four-manual organ in the cathedral was recently rebuilt by Trevor Crowe, who also designed and built our own organ in Saint Bart's, so Andrew had an easy time (and quite a lot of fun, of course) filling the building with thunderous music. The morning's offerings included Vierne's *Messe Solennelle* and Mawby's *Ave Verum*.



After a group lunch in the Flying Enterprise, located around the corner from the cathedral at Sullivan's Quay, we returned to sing Evensong. The programme was a simple one, set to Dyson in D with the responses of Rose and Moore's mini-cantata, *All Wisdom Cometh from the Lord*. Pádraig O'Rourke gave the organ some serious competition with his baritone solo in the latter, and the boys sang superbly all day—you'd never know some of them had been up all night playing Fortnite!

The cathedral treated us to a reception after Evensong. With a long return journey ahead and school the next morning, it wasn't long before we were back on the road. All told, it was a successful weekend, with many friendships made and renewed. We cannot know for sure when the next choir trip will be, but after the year we've had, we will be all the more thankful when that time does finally come.

Alexander's memory of the trip:

'Going to Cork to sing was an amazing experience. We got to visit a zoo in Fota Park and met wild animals walking about which was incredible. We saw lemurs in the grass, kangaroos

walking along the path, and birds just sitting around. I even got to stroke a giraffe.

We spent a long time there and had a really good lunch. After that we went to Cork City and found our B+B, which was really nice as the rooms were so big and spacious. We went to a hotel that night and had a great dinner there and then headed back to watch movies in our rooms. The next day we got up quite early and went to practice in Saint Fin Barre's Cathedral.

The cathedral was so gigantic and impressive. When we sang the sound seemed so strong. It felt a bit harder than our normal singing practice but was still a lot of fun.

Tristan was really good helping us get through our pieces. Then we went to have our lunch in a cool pub and had fish and chips with extra helpings.

After lunch we returned to the cathedral and sang in the service, which was an amazing experience. I'll always keep those memories in my head.

When it was all over we headed back to Dublin by bus. We were all very tired but happy.'







ORGAN VIDEOS

When Ireland went into lockdown for the first time nine months ago, Andrew Johnstone had just finished practicing Bach's *Prelude and Fugue in D minor (BWV 539)*. He asked if it might be possible to record it for online circulation. I took it a step further and asked him whether we might move the goalposts and make a video instead. This was the genesis of what has turned into an enormous project over the course of the year; as this magazine goes to press the video library associated with the parish Facebook page has accumulated over fifty videos and just shy of 60,000 minutes of viewing—and both numbers continue to rise.

The first few performances were filmed using a compact camera balanced precariously on church

furniture. Stacks of hymn books were the most flexible option, albeit one prone to collapsing at inconvenient times. An ornate candle stand weighing roughly as much as a small elephant was more reliable, but onerous to place. When balanced on the choir stalls, the base of this unit had a protruding metal bar; walking into it without blaspheming became a recurring challenge.

The sound quality from the camera wasn't at the level that we needed, but fortunately we were able to take advantage of the church's built in recording system purchased by the choir fund in 2019. It was a relatively straightforward task to overdub the raw footage with the better sound, although getting everything perfectly in sync was time consuming.



Our first “hit” was published in time for Easter. Andrew performed the *Sortie in B flat* by Lefébure-Wély with the able assistance of his dog, a Kerry blue terrier appropriately named Dingle. This four-and-a-half minute recital drew over 2000 minutes of viewing and over one hundred likes, a sizable percentage of which apparently originated from a fan site for Kerry blue terriers. Following this, I started thinking about what we might be able to do to really extend our audience.

In May, a timely grant from the Church of Ireland enabled the purchase of a tripod, which made life considerably less painful and opened a range of new possible angles for filming. This was put to immediate use, both in the weekly service videos and in what was to be our most elaborate production so far: a version of the *Star Wars* suite arranged for two organs by Stuart Nicholson, the organist of Saint Patrick’s Cathedral. Tristan Russcher acquired an Obi-Wan costume and used the Force to pull out the stops (in more ways than one) in a few places. I dug out my old DVDs (and a DVD player...) for research purposes before creating video storyboards inspired by those in the movies, and the work paid off: we saw 12000 minutes of views and 350 likes—and, most importantly of all, the vicar didn’t complain about us using the parish Facebook page to promote a competing religion.

Tristan decided that the best way to follow up that success would be to do something for four organs, and so he created his own arrangement of the

Back to the Future theme. We obtained a whole series of props for the video—a copy of Grays Sports Almanac, a “Save the Clock Tower” leaflet, a hoverboard, a calculator watch, ridiculous footwear, two different costumes, and the coup de grâce: a loan of a genuine, roadworthy DeLorean that we were allowed to drive up to the church doorway. (In deference to the laws of said vehicle, our first attempt to film it was stymied when it broke down; a melted wiring loom rendered it inoperable for almost a week until replacement parts could be sourced and installed.)

Those who have watched the video (available both on our Facebook page and our YouTube channel) will have seen the car driving out of the church as the bells chimed the hour. This was not an edit; rather, it was exceptionally lucky timing (there’s probably a flux capacitor joke here...). The flash of light and thunderclap as the car disappears into the distance were added digitally using stock footage of a thunderstorm. It wasn’t possible to be enormously creative with the main shots given that we had four Tristans on screen in parallel, but we did manage a few special effects, including the organ sequencer counting up to 88 and a costume change for the 1885 theme from *Back to the Future III*.

Plans are already afoot for at least one additional performance next year, this one possibly involving both Andrew and Tristan in the same video. Watch this... space.

Richard Bannister

Our videos are available at the below links:

<https://www.stbartholomews.ie/youtube>

<https://www.facebook.com/saintbartholomews>



JohnJoe Dunne Fantastic Whilst you were lost in the music as was I, you left your car door open 😊🙏🥰

Like · 1 Reply · 🍷 1



Peter Parshall Just the best fund raising idea! Well done everyone!

Unlike · 1 Reply · 🍷 2



Lucy Champion Seriously imaginative and wonderfully entertaining! **Congratulations** all involved!

Like · 1 Reply · 🍷 1



Simon Stroughair This is heavy.

Unlike · 2 Replies · 🍷 2



David O'Shea Tristan, this is one of the best things I've ever seen. The sequencer!!

Like · 1 Reply · 🍷 2



David Butler My backs aching just watching him get out of the car

Like · 🍷 2



Vicki Hastie David Fenton an elaborate project just to get a chance to sit in that car 🤔

Unlike · 1 Reply

DE LOREAN



JOIN THE FRIENDS OF THE CHOIR!

The new membership year for the Friends of the Saint Bartholomew's Choir has just begun! Please consider joining this worthy scheme. All donations will be used solely for the maintenance of our choir and musical tradition.

The membership year runs from 1 September 2020—31 August 2021, and we offer two schemes:

Standard (€75 per annum)

Benefits include:

- Acknowledgement by name in all choir concert programmes
- A complimentary copy of any new recording produced by the choir
- All issues of *Music @ Saint Bartholomew's* magazine published while your membership is valid

Gold (€150 per annum)

Benefits include:

- All standard benefits
- Two complimentary tickets for all choir concerts held at Saint Bartholomew's (or complimentary drink vouchers if the concert does not have an admission charge)



Music has been a key feature of worship at Saint Bartholomew's since the church's consecration in 1867. Many former members of our choirs have gone on to successful musical careers, undoubtedly helped on their way by the free education provided at our church.

The choir costs the church in the region of €60,000 per annum to run. This amount would be substantially higher were it not for the support of the Friends of the Choir, plus the many individuals who volunteer their time and experience at no cost.

As we continue the fight against Covid-19, the choir needs your support more than ever. If you are able to help us keep our musical tradition flourishing, please pick up a Friends of the Choir membership form at the back of the church. We also accept online subscriptions through our website. Please visit www.stbartholomews.ie and click the Friends of the Choir link beneath the Music tab.

Thank you for your support!



2019 CHRISTMAS CONCERTS

Having experimented with altering the programming of our annual Christmas concerts in 2017 and 2018 by allowing a few of our regular pieces to be ‘furloughed,’ I received a mixed/ lukewarm reception. Our resident poet and soprano Susie Spratt reacted in verse, reproduced across.

So, I went back to the drawing board and did something that every choir director dreads: allowing requests from the choir. This resulted in a slightly more ‘mainstream’ concert programme with Vaughan Williams’ magnificent *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* at its centre, which featured Padraig O’Rourke as the baritone soloist. We also performed revivals of crowd favourites from Stopford (*We Three Kings*), Chilcott (*Away in a Manger*), and Adam (*O Holy Night*). For a bit of variety, we were honoured to present the Irish premiere of *The Song of the Ox*, an arrangement that combines words by the poet and Saint Bartholomew’s congregant Nicholas Williams with music by Dr. Andrew

Johnstone. It was commissioned in 2018 by choral director Colm Carey and the choir of the HM Tower of London’s Chapel Royal of Saint Peter ad Vincula. The text is a depiction of the Nativity from the perspective of an ox.

In the words of its musical composer: “Williams’s poem characterises the Nativity ox as a draught animal and therefore—it goes without saying—an emasculated one. Accordingly, the ox’s part is assigned to the special timbres of the highest male ‘contra tenor’ voice, while the music assimilates to a genre traditionally associated with that voice, the Elizabethan verse anthem. In the repeating music of the first three verses, the story is told almost entirely by the contra tenor soloist, the chorus serving only to repeat the final couplet for rhetorical emphasis. The music of the fourth verse is a variation in which the chorus reaffirms aphorisms overheard by the ox, and his ultimate assertion that faith defies knowledge.”

THE SONG OF THE OX

An ox am I, a simple beast,
Of animals the very least.
My life is hard with endless work,
I pull and strain and dare not shirk.
Six days I toil and suffer blows
In blist’ring sun or driving snows.
Yet I have had my share of mirth,
For I was present at His birth.

One winter’s night a wandering pair
Were housed with us from who knows where.
The night was cold, the wind was raw,
The woman laid her down on straw,
And silently before the morn
Her radiant infant son was born.
Yes, I have had my share of mirth,
For I was present at His birth.

From angels having heard his fame,
That very night some shepherds came,
And later strangers brought him things—
Astrologers they were or kings.
Their gifts were incense, myrrh and gold
Whose meaning hasn’t yet been told.
Yes, I have had my share of mirth,
For I was present at His birth.

I hear men say the baby boy
Was born to bring his people joy,
Health in sickness, sight to blind,
And grace and peace for all mankind.
If that be true, I cannot know,
Yet I believe it must be so,
For I myself feel blissful mirth
From being present at His birth.

CHRISTMAS AT SAINT BARTHOLOMEW'S

'Twas months before Christmas, when Tristan, he starts,
To draw up the list of carols for Bart's.
He's anthems and songs and pieces to find,
When a daring thought crept into his mind.

He grinned to himself, his pencil hovered,
Then he shouted out loud, "I'm really not bothered!"
And struck from the list with carefree delight,
That Bart's old favourite, 'O Holy Night.'

Rumours spread quickly through Dublin 4,
Father Andrew raised eyebrows and said, "Are you sure?"
The emails came in, petitions were drafted,
And virulent letters to papers were crafted.

Twitter was flooded with plaintive tweets,
As Ulsara residents took to the streets,
To march for what they knew were their rights,
To Christmas and their O Holy Nights.

Tristan was stalwart, stood quite undeterred,
"We've Britten," he said, "and we've Tallis and Byrd,
And an arty piece in 17 parts,
That's never been heard before in Saint Bart's."

The girls were in a state of distress,
"Put it back in the programme! Oh do say yes!"
They yelled at Tristan who nodded and smiled,
And started the bars to 'Mary's Boy Child.'

"The basses," said Robin, "are quite okay,
"For Holy Night's really had its day."
"It'd be less trite if we sang it in French,"
Piped up Andrew again from the organ bench.

The show was over, mince pies were soon,
They clapped politely, though not over the moon.
When one lone voice whispered feebly, "Encore!"
"Ah," said Tristan, "so you want just one more?"

The place was suddenly filled with light,
The faces of all grew merry and bright,
For the opening chords brought cheer and delight
As the choir launched straight into 'O Holy Night.'

The front row lady was weeping and choking,
"Of course," shouted Tristan, "I was only joking!"
And off they went with forté and fight,
To the final top notes of 'O Holy Night.'



VIRTUAL HALLELUJAH

One of my first real tests as a choral director during the COVID-19 lockdown was the creation of a ‘virtual Hallelujah’. The idea was new at the time—each chorister would record themselves singing the “Hallelujah” chorus from Handel’s *Messiah* and send the recordings to me to put together. I thought it would give the choir something positive to focus on and to keep us together in the absence of rehearsals and services.

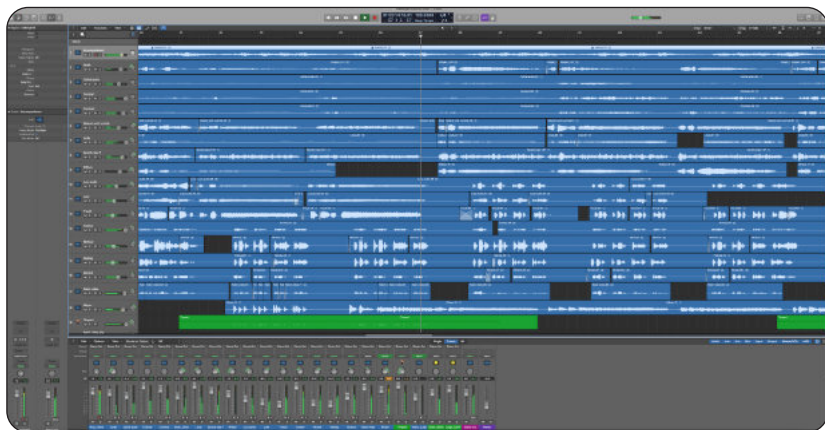
I recorded the accompaniment and each vocal line at home on a sampled digital organ and provided every member of the choir with instructions for how to use it with my Choral Trainer app. After practising they recorded themselves singing; most used another phone or a tablet, but some had already settled into COVID life and used their makeshift home recording studios instead!

After the choristers had submitted their vocal recordings to me by email, the next stage was compiling them all into my audio editing software of choice, Logic Pro X. Each submission had to be aligned, chopped,

and balanced with each other in order to give the effect of a choral ensemble. I was unfamiliar with this process, as it was my first attempt at a virtual choir and we were one of the first groups to attempt anything like this in lockdown.

Twenty or so hours of learning-by-experimentation later, the four minute track was complete. The aim was to publish the recording on our Facebook page, but audio on its own doesn’t really work on social media. Luckily, however, some of our choristers had been extra brave and taken videos of themselves singing, so it was over to HitFilm Express to put things together. With the help of a few stills of toilet rolls, Mr. Tayto, and a socially-distanced Easter bunny, our virtual interpretation of Handel’s “Hallelujah” was ready to go live. It premiered on Easter Saturday and currently stands at over 3000 views on Facebook.

Many thanks to all our singers who contributed to the video. We were all in unfamiliar territory, but together we managed to wrangle the situation into something constructive, creative, and fun.



2020 CHRISTMAS VIDEO

There is something inherently sinful about performing Christmas music in October. Nevertheless, those walking past Saint Bartholomew's in the run-up to halloween may have heard the refrains from well-known carols, as nearly thirty members and friends of our choir came together to produce a broadcast-quality service that was streamed online on the evening of Sunday, 6 December.

The accompanying readings were selected performed for us by Tim and Anne Thurston, who maintained dignified composure throughout the filming process despite the occasional thud of a firework going off outside.

The requirement to maintain social distancing at all times forced us to film in small groups over the course of seven evenings: one for readings, one for prayers, one for the organ voluntary, and four for the choir.

It was decided early on that this project presented a unique opportunity to showcase our beautiful church to a broad audience, and to make the most of this opportunity, all eight musical entries were filmed in different parts of the building. This introduced its own challenge: our built-in recording system is focused on the choir stalls, and singing in other locations comes across as distant and muffled.

The solution was to use a battery-powered field recorder. Tristan remixed its output to an incredible standard – so much so that following the broadcast Facebook marked a considerable portion of the video (incorrectly) as potentially containing copyrighted material. (Those looking very closely at the footage may notice

this recorder in shot during the Britten—this was a deliberate choice used to get the best possible sound from the four singers standing at the altar.)

Shooting high quality video in low light conditions generally requires high-end equipment well beyond the budget of the average Church of Ireland parish (and, for that matter, its parishioners!). Fortunately we were able to achieve a good result using a middle-of-the-road digital camera and Neat Video, a software package that can do amazing things with grainy footage. Though computationally expensive (each individual shot took the better part of an hour to process on a high-end workstation) the end result came out better than we could have ever hoped for.

The individual clips were then brought into Final Cut Pro, where they were synchronised with the finished audio and manually subtitled. The final step was to individually remove a few “stuck pixels” from the footage; with that done, the finished video was checked, rechecked, and eventually uploaded.

As we go to press the finished video has been watched from start to end by over fifty different people, and a further three hundred have watched smaller portions. We've had positive comments both within the parish and from beyond, not least former director of music Peter Parshall, who described it as “A triumph!”.

We are indebted to everyone who made this possible. With luck this will be a once off and we'll be able to come together once again in 2021.

Richard Bannister





BONUS CONCERTS

Since our last magazine, we have performed in a number of concerts outside of our usual schedule. In 2018 (in what feels like many, many decades ago), I was asked by Pipeworks to present a concert for their festival that summer. Pipeworks, which began in 1980 as the Dublin International Organ and Choir Festival, is a celebration of Ireland's organ heritage. Its yearly calendar of festivals, recitals, and concerts have earned the country a highly esteemed place on the international organ scene, and it was an honour to be invited. In 2018, the festival's theme was 'France 100'—a celebration of the last one hundred years of French organ and choral music. The French Romantic era is rife with amazing music, and we were only all too delighted to put a programme together!

We used a small consort from Saint Bartholomew's to perform Langlais' *Messe Solennelle* (a love-it-or-hate-it staple of our repertoire) and a rarely performed Mass setting by Jehan Alain, *Messe modale en septuor*. The titular septet refers to the scoring for instruments (string quartet and obbligato flute) and voices (soprano

and mezzo-soprano). Our budget was very limited, so Dr. Johnstone played the string parts on the organ and one of our altos played the flute on my MIDI keyboard! In the cavernous acoustic of the Whitefriar Street Carmelite Church, this combination worked perfectly. Our few sopranos and altos sounded like a chorus of hundreds.

Interspersed between the ten movements of the combined settings of the Mass ordinaries I played a number of organ solos by the respective composers, including *Le jardin suspendu* and *Litanies* by Alain and *Cinq Méditations sur l'Apocalypse* by Langlais. The latter collection of meditations are rarely performed and come from a highly experimental period of Langlais' compositional output. The second movement, subtitled *Il était, Il est et Il vient* (*He was, He is and He will come*), notably asks for the performer to place an object on an F to sustain the note through three pages of music, symbolising the eternity of Christ's Church. A pedal chord in the third movement is unplayable on certain pedalboards, including the one on the Kenneth Jones instrument in the



Carmelite church. This necessitated some manual assistance! The final movement, subtitled *La Cinquième Trompette (The Fifth Trumpet)*, is a musical depiction of the apocalypse from the Book of Revelation:

"On the sounding of the fifth trumpet, a star falls from heaven and is given the key to the bottomless pit. Here the star, with the key dangling from one of its rays, hovers over the pit, nearly obscured by the issuing smoke. From the pit, a legion of monstrous locusts with the bodies of battle horses, faces of men, teeth of lions and the tails of scorpions emerges to plague the earth." (Revelation 9).

Cheery stuff! David Leigh and Andrew were very kind to assist me with registration changes on the day, one on each side of the organ console. Finally, one of our sopranos, Susie Spratt, summed up the experience with

the poem reproduced below.

Another concert that seems like a faint and distant memory was a joint event with Sandford Church on 8 November 2019. Dr. David O'Shea is the director of music at Sandford and a longtime friend of and collaborator with Saint Bartholomew's. His idea was to combine our choirs for a performance of the well-known *Requiem* by Gabriel Fauré. The result was a choral force of more than 70 voices lifting the rafters of Sandford Church with a magnificent sound. Our own Robin Heather sang the *Libera me* solo, with myself conducting and David accompanying on the organ. The concert was so well received that we were hoping to reciprocate by hosting Sandford Church for a joint performance of Vivaldi's *Gloria* in the summer of 2020. We all know how that turned out...

THREE ORGANISTS AND SOME LANGLAIS

The rain came down, the windows rattled,
The organists through the gloom had battled.
The caliginous church awaited their coming,
The organ pipes whispered it through their plumbing.

The three approached the organ bench,
Keen with anticipation of the French –
Chords of tortured anguish soon to flow,
Their hearts were full, their faces aglow.

They poked at the ancient dinosaur,
Jangled its bones and made it roar.
Played with stops and pre-set switches,
Tried out scales and toyed with pitches.

One sat upon the hallowed throne,
But this trial was not for him alone.
His trusty comrades were at his shoulder,
And knowing this, his art grew bolder.

The crashing chords began to rise,
Amidst gasping pipes and hellish cries.
The organists gathered round aghast
As the music spoke of ideas vast.

Now was the time for the heroic three,
To work in mind-bending harmony.
One turned the pages, swung on stops
Another flung himself across the tops...

Of scales and keyboards, fingers flying,
The Langlais soaring, singing, crying.
Dancing feet on pedals leapt
As harmonies lifted, fell and wept.

A pencil – of all things – was shoved in keys
And held a note to make it freeze.
And poor old Stan just hadn't planned
To press the odd pedal with his hand,

While turning pages with his knee,
And grinning at Andrew and David Leigh.
The choir looked on stunned and amazed,
As the three went on quite unfazed.

The locusts swarmed in biblical scene,
The raging tempest nearly broke the machine.
The air in the cavernous church grew colder,
As the music told of stories older.

And after hours of this derring do,
Performed by this most brilliant crew,
The end crashed in, the show complete,
The audience cheered and leapt to their feet.

The organists quietly gathered their kit,
And hung around taking bows for a bit.
'Well,' said one, 'Fancy some grub?'
And off they headed to the pub.

