

---

# WHAT WE SING

at St Bartholomew's

---

No. 1 **Communion Service in B flat & F**  
by Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924)  
sung on Sunday 7 September 2008 by the boys and men



**WHAT WE SING** is a scheme that is designed to enhance and complement the music sung by the church choirs throughout the year. We hope that it will help the whole church community to achieve a greater understanding and appreciation of the music that is heard each Sunday. It will also form an integral part of the education and training of the boy and girl choristers, helping them to understand what they are singing about and to discover the lives and stories behind the music itself.

The hope is that **contributions** will be forthcoming from many different people within the church community. We'll always be delighted to hear from those who wish to write an article for the series. Please contact Fraser Wilson or Fr Andrew McCroskery if you would like to know more.

You can find current music lists and details of future issues on the table at the back of church and also on the internet at [www.stbartholomews.ie](http://www.stbartholomews.ie). In the fullness of time we will also begin to archive the issues there too.

#### **Forthcoming issues**

Sunday 21 September: *Harold Darke* in E

Sunday 5 October: *Herbert Howells* 'Collegium Regale'

---

## **Communion Service in B flat & F** by Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924) sung on Sunday 7 September 2008 by the boys and men

*by Fraser Wilson*

One of Dublin's most famous sons, Charles Villiers Stanford was born into a musical family here mid-way through the nineteenth century. As a teenager he studied at the Royal Irish Academy of Music (which in 1848 his father had helped to found). Despite both his parents being keen amateur musicians (his father a singer and cellist and his mother a pianist), it was decided that, no matter how much musical promise the

young Charles showed, he should nevertheless study a 'serious' subject at Cambridge before pursuing his ambition of studying composition in Leipzig. So in 1870 the eighteen-year-old Stanford took up a place at Queen's College to read Classics. Like many fellow students before and since, though, he spent the majority of his time not studying for his degree but taking part in musical activities of various kinds – this was clearly where his true passion and talent lay – and his family cannot have been entirely surprised when he was awarded a third-class degree in his final exams. Thereafter Stanford was appointed organist of Trinity College, Cambridge and, in accordance with his great passion, spent a number of years in the mid-1870s studying extensively in Germany.

Stanford played a massive part in the so-called 're-awakening' of British church music. He invested a huge amount of time and energy not just in composing new works but also in reviving interest in the masterpieces of earlier times; for instance, he produced a new performing edition of Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, a work which hitherto had been almost unknown in these islands. As professor of music at both Cambridge and the Royal College of Music, Stanford's work and teaching had a profound effect on all those who came after him. A list of his former pupils reads like a *Who's Who* of early twentieth-century English music: Holst, Vaughan Williams, Ireland, Wood, Howells...

In the field of church music his compositions stand out as one of the greatest achievements of the past two centuries. They are extremely varied and wide-ranging, and served to inspire a whole generation of musicians to return to the church and to offer their talents there. In addition to various settings of the morning and evening canticles, there are six complete Services – consisting of settings for Communion, Mattins and Evensong – which in themselves were very influential and are remain much-loved today. Some of them – the Service in A, for example, which our boys and men sing regularly at Evensong – almost have the feel of a

symphony, with the organ being used in a very orchestral way and the choir singing to great extremes of dynamics and emotions.

Today's setting, that in B flat, is a very early work – the earliest of the Services – and it is not quite so ambitious in its scale as some of the later ones. As with the other services, material is adapted and re-used throughout, giving a feeling of unity. You may well notice this if you listen closely. Unlike some settings of the Gloria, which begin with the priest intoning 'Glory be to God on high' (or the Latin equivalent, 'Gloria in excelsis Deo'), this one sees the full choir make a rousing impact with the loud, spirited first section. In the second section, which begins with the words 'O Lord, the only-begotten Son Jesu Christ', Stanford uses the voices in pairs: boys and altos echoing tenors and basses, all singing the same music. The effective technique of starting a phrase in unison and then branching the parts out (as at 'Thou that sittest at the right hand') is one which later composers such as Howells made great use of. The final section ('For thou only art holy') begins with the same material that we heard at the start and builds to a glorious climactic 'Amen'.

The Sanctus consists almost entirely of long sustained chords in the choir punctuated by a recurring rhythmic theme in the organ part. The Amen is identical to that of the Magnificat in B flat. In the late nineteenth century it was not customary to sing the Benedictus and Agnus Dei, so these two sections were not set to music at the time. In 1909, by which time he had also written further Services in the keys of C and F, Stanford composed settings in the key of F which could be used with all three Services. So the next time we sing Stanford in C, you will hear the same version of these!

We will see that much of the music to be featured over the coming weeks and months owes a great debt of gratitude to Stanford: he was one of the towering influences on the church music of the last 150 years. After a lifetime of endeavour and inspirational musicianship, he died in 1924 and is buried next to Henry Purcell in Musicians' Corner, Westminster Abbey.