
WHAT WE SING

at Saint Bartholomew's

No. 8 Tu es Petrus

by Robert Pearsall (1795 – 1856)

sung on Sunday 28 June 2009 by the Clyde Chorale



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. Past issues are archived there, too.

Tu es Petrus

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by Tim Thurston

The name Pearsall will be known to most choral singers as the arranger of one of the best-loved Christmas Carols, *In dulci jubilo*, for solo octet and five-part chorus, forever associated with the choir of King's College, Cambridge who frequently include it in their Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols on Christmas Eve. Indeed, few of his other works are ever performed nowadays.

He was born in 1795 near Bristol into a wealthy family and practised as a barrister until, aged 30, he suffered a stroke and was advised to live abroad. This allowed him to devote himself to his musical and antiquarian interests and he moved to Mainz in Germany where he studied composition and became caught up in the Cecilian movement which favoured a return to unaccompanied choral singing including Gregorian Chant. Although he continued to be based in Germany he paid frequent visits to his wife and three children in Bristol where he founded the Bristol Madrigal Society and composed many part songs and madrigals in imitation of the style of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English composers such as Thomas Morley.

In 1843 he acquired a castle on the shores of Lake Constance in Switzerland and became deeply involved with the nearby Benedictine Community of St Gallen, founded in the seventh century by the Irish monk Gallus, a follower of St Columbanus. Pearsall composed Latin motets, a *Tenebrae*, some Lamentations and a Requiem which he considered his finest work, and helped in the editing of the renowned tenth-century St Gallen Gesangbuch. His compositions also included some Anglican church music, a "Ballet/Opera", a lost symphony, songs, duets and chamber works. Although he separated from his wife she nursed him during his final illness and three days before his death in August 1856 he was received into the Catholic Church.

The portrait on the front cover of this leaflet was painted by Pearsall's daughter Philippa Swinnerton Hughes in 1849 and hangs in the National Portrait Gallery in London.

Tu es Petrus (Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my Church) is a beautifully crafted work in eight parts. Pearsall originally composed the music in 1840, setting verses by Beaumont and Fletcher – "Lay a Garland

on her Hearse of the Dismal Yew”, Aspatia's Song from *The Maid's Tragedy* from 1610. The style of the music is very much of a seventeenth-century motet and Pearsall himself set the sacred text.

Lay a Garland is included in a number of choral compilations – and there are many renditions on YouTube. The only recording I can track down which also includes other music by Pearsall is a programme of madrigals and partsongs by him and Armagh-born Charles Wood on Priory Records PRCD622.

Tu es Petrus,

Thou art Peter,

et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam,

and upon this rock will I build my church,

et portae inferi non praevalent adversus eam,

and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,

et tibi dabo claves regni caelorum.

and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.