



Upbeat

The Newsletter of the London Gallery Quire

New Version - November 2012 - No. 3

Doctor's Notes:

The Problem with Psalms

Here's a conundrum for you. What do these hymns have in common?

- *All people that on earth do dwell*
- *Let us, with a gladsome mind*
- *O God, our help in ages past*
- *The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want*
- *Through all the changing scenes of life*

The answer is that none of them is a hymn; they are all psalms, metrical psalms from the Elizabethan Old Version, John Milton, Isaac Watts, the Scottish Psalter, and the New Version of Tate and Brady (1696) respectively. Other metrical psalms still in common use include *As pants the hart for cooling streams*, *Jesus shall reign where'er the sun*, *Joy to the world, the Lord is come*, and *O worship the King*. Two of the foregoing may surprise you; how come Jesus is mentioned directly in a psalm? These are examples of Isaac Watts' Christian reinterpretations of the Old Testament psalms.

In the West Gallery period metrical psalms formed the main musical repertoire of many churches, and the majority of the repertoire consists of psalm settings. In our efforts to try to persuade churches to use West Gallery music as part of their regular worship, metrical psalms do meet some sales resistance, some ministers or music leaders imagining that they have no relevance in modern worship. I hope that the above list demonstrates otherwise.

Two particular reservations about the reintroduction of metrical psalms have been expressed to me. One is that they have questionable theology. I am not qualified to comment on that matter, but the practice amongst West Gallery quires was in any case to sing only selected verses, often the first four. Most metrical psalms surely have some verses which are acceptable to modern theological taste.

The other reservation is that the language is archaic. The New Version and Watts' language are less archaic than the Old Version and Scottish Psalter; nonetheless, it is a charge that must be acknowledged. I don't know what is to be done about it, unless some diligent English scholar is willing to undertake a wholesale revision of (say) the New Version. Scotland is where metrical versions of all 150 psalms are still sung regularly, and the Scottish Free Presbyterian Church published in 2003 *Sing Psalms*; metrical psalms in modern language. How far they will pass into general use remains to be seen. Meanwhile, we shall continue to try to open minds with the psalms that we have.

Francis Roads

The Joy of West Gallery Music

I think I have been looking for West Gallery music all my life, most of the time without realising. It's the devout yet exuberant directness which is so exhilarating compared to the pomposity or sentimentality of the later Victorian era which became the hymn landscape of our youth.

I grew up surrounded by hymns. Brought up in a devout Plymouth brethren congregation (of a very uncontroversial, normal evangelical type), we sang plenty of Sankey, Watts and Wesley, either unaccompanied (still to my mind one of the most moving ways to sing hymns) or to the uncertain sound of a harmonium. These foot pedal powered small organs were curious, clanking wooden contraptions comprising keyboard and stops, knee-operated volume control flaps, and foot pedals to pump the air. They were usually played by slightly manic elderly ladies who seemed to be moving all their extremities in different directions at once. Although musically not too polished, the congregation sang the hymns heartily and actually meant what they were singing – two key ingredients of good hymn handling.

After that it was at my C of E Junior school in south London that I came to know most of the main repertoire. We had assembly every day with a hymn – Holy Holy Holy, Jerusalem, Dear Lord and Father, When a Knight won his Spurs, Lord of the Dance etc.

One hymn opened my eyes to the gap between the familiar verses we often sang and what the author had actually first written. The hymn was 'He Who Would Valiant Be'. Our red school hymn book had two versions – Percy Dearmer's 'Since Lord Thou Dost Defend' and below it, in italics, as if it was something unofficial and possibly illicit, John Bunyan's original 'Hobgoblins and Foul Fiends'. We 9 & 10 years olds were asked to choose which to sing, and to a boy/girl we voted for the original. This wasn't just cheeky schoolchildren wanting to sing 'Hobgoblins!' in assembly – somehow we sensed that the other version was sanitised, made safe, tamed. We wanted the raw bite of the original.

And I have sought that ever since. For me one of the great pleasures of the West Gallery repertoire is exactly this – direct, sometimes blunt, often poignant words and music that have not been tidied up or dumbed down by anyone since the time they were written. And to sing them for real in services, with a group of singers and musicians who sing and play with heart as well as voice, is very special.

Phil Price

St. Andrews Enfield October 27th 2012

The irony would not have been lost on Thomas Hardy – a West Gallery concert held to raise money for the church’s organ appeal. Put another way, a group of musicians aiding the cause of the very instrument which brought the slow but relentless demise of their exuberant pre-Victorian style and drove its singers, string and wind players from the church.

Moreover, we were singing in the very place where the great Wessex author married his second wife Florence in 1910. By that time the last echoes of the West Gallery hymns so beloved by the fiddler Thomas and his musical forebears were as gone as the old century. Yet that was not the last chapter of the story, for here we were, one hundred and two years later, not only reviving the tradition but also bringing newly discovered items into the repertoire.

As a tenor just coming up to the end of my first year in the LGQ, this was a big occasion; a shortage of sopranos available that day had led to a programme in which we (the tenors) were carrying more of the tunes than usual. No complaints, at least not from within our own ranks. After all, we were only living up to the origins of our title (from the Latin tenere, to hold) and handling the melody. What’s more, here was a congregation that clapped lustily not just at the end of the performance, but after each hymn. Thrilling to sing to such enthusiastic listeners, even if there was a prosaic explanation for the applause: this was not a service but a Saturday evening concert.

There was another Dorset man of music audible there – William Knapp, who was a clergyman in Poole in the mid-eighteenth century. We sang his typically forthright “From All That Dwell Below The Skies,” and his version of “While Shepherds Watched,” whose subtle tenderness makes one long for it to replace the cliché of the embedded version. He was also responsible for the only anthem of the programme, “When The Lord Turneth Again The Captivity of Zion.”

Back came Hardy once more, or twice to be precise; no longer haunting the choir stalls but being declaimed from the pulpit. First we had a reading from his “Doing The Rounds,” and then his famous account of “Absentmindedness in a Parish Choir.” In the first of these, old William Dewy, who plays the violoncello, declares: “But I don’t care who hears me say it, nothing will spak to your heart wi’ the sweetness o’ the man of strings.” To which little Jimmy replies: “Strings forever.” This might seem like heresy at an organ appeal, but it was nothing of the sort, just a fitting introduction for an instrumental interlude by the Quire’s Garlickhythe Occasionals.

In such an upbeat programme, that relative West Gallery rarity of a minor-key hymn, Anon’s “ ‘Twas On That Dark, That Doleful Night,” exerted a powerful influence. Hardy probably never heard this one – it was found by LGQ founder Francis Roads in the Colby Manuscripts on the Isle of Man – but he would surely have been moved to applaud its glorious melancholy.

Alan Franks

Q: What is it?



A: Part of the CD Sales Pie-Chart (there isn’t enough space for the full sized version).

Dates for next Term

January 9th & 23rd
February 6th & 20th
March 6th & 20th

We will be providing music for the following:

- 27 January, Evening Service, Manor Road URC
- 15 March (Friday), concert, St. Peter’s, Belsize Park.
- 14 April, Morning Service, Highgate URC.
- 19 May, Evensong, St. Mary’s Rotherhithe.
- 8 June (Saturday), concert, St. Anne’s, Chingford Hatch

If you know of anywhere that would enjoy a visit from LGQ please contact Stella or Francis.



Some of the Quire at St Mary’s Wanstead, 7 October 2012

Solution to Crossword from Upbeat July 2012

Across		Down	
3	EDITOR	1	AMATEUR
6	METRICAL	2	ERRORS
8	GRACENOTE	4	DISCORD
10	OPUS	5	RECTOR
11	SOPRANO	7	UNDERLINING
13	EARLY	8	GENRE
14	PRESENT	9	ROADS
15	LONDON	12	PARALLEL
17	PSALM	16	OPENSORE
20	TOWN	18	MANUSCRIPTS
22	ANTHOLOGY	19	VOICES
24	NOTES	21	NATIONAL
25	PARTS	23	YOUR
27	RAISE	26	ANDREW
28	PRINT	29	TITLE
31	TENOR	30	QUIRE
32	MUSIC	31	TEXT
34	WESTGALLERY	33	COPY
35	PARTY		

Most of the words in the answers came from “Your Voices Raise”