

Music Notes 2017 – Trinity IV

The mass this Sunday is by Josef Rheinberger (1839–1901), who although he spent most of his adult life living and working in Munich, was in fact born in Vaduz in Liechtenstein. When he died, he was buried in Munich, but Rheinberger's grave having been more or less destroyed in the Second World War, his remains were translated back to his town of origin.

Despite the following story having been told previously in these notes, it is worth repeating, as it is an eerie prefiguring of current events concerning so-called “fake news”, and the alleged threat to our democratic institutions of foreign agencies feeding misleading stories and slanted attitudes into our democratic processes.

During the last years of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, the life stories of a number of prominent individuals were – to put it nicely – elaborated upon by a writer called Andrew de Ternant (1860–1937). He wasn't just interested in music, contributing numerous articles about composers to several learned journals, but also sowed confusion among scholars researching the lives of writers such as Conrad and Dickens. Only later did it become apparent that he had built an entire career, and won himself considerable esteem and recognition, by inventing thousands of events that had, in fact, never taken place. For example, he assured a biographer of Claude Debussy that the composer had, to his certain and personal knowledge, made a hitherto unrecorded and unknown trip to Vienna in order to meet as many of the important musical figures there as possible. This included Brahms, who appeared to have been so amused by his French visitor that he abandoned his habitually gruff manner, embracing Debussy, referring to him as “my boy” (there might have been a clue there for the observant), and generally palling around with him, taking him to see his “favourite opera”, Bizet's *Carmen*, which he had apparently already seen at least twenty times. It shed an entirely new light on both men, but, alas, it was all invention.

In the case of Rheinberger, de Ternant wrote an extensive article in *The Musical Times* in 1926 in which he purported to transmit details of Rheinberger's “Private Life”. From this, one is able to learn that the Rheinbergers (he had married somewhat late in life, and the couple lived very happily – this bit is true) liked to entertain guests on Mondays and Thursdays, because – something of a *non sequitur* – as strict Roman Catholics, they would not serve meat on a Friday. Nevertheless, Rheinberger was apparently an excellent cook, having been personally trained by the legendary French chef Charles Franqueville, “formerly a chef in the service of Napoleon III who was interned in Munich during the Franco-German war”. News of the excellent dinner parties cooked by the composer, de Ternant stated, reached no less a place than the Royal Palace in Munich, where the King of Bavaria was intrigued to know how such feasts could be possible. Rheinberger allegedly divulged the secret

of his training under regal inquisition, and Franqueville was duly hired by the palace. The entire article is very entertaining, clinging on to a bare outline of truth: Rheinberger and his wife were very happy, and her death in 1892 did leave him disconsolate and very lonely. His life was not that of a typically bohemian artist, but rather characterised by a Bavarian love of a good home, decency and order. Indeed, something of this comes across in his well-balanced and elegant music. Still, relics of de Ternant's mendacious elaborations still turn up in even quite scholarly studies, where people – especially those not emanating from the UK, where de Ternant's name is perhaps better understood as a red flag – have come across the article and quote from it generously.

Rheinberger is known especially for his two organ concertos and 20 sonatas. The latter were intended to be 24 in number, one for each key in a kind of *Well-Tempered Clavier* structure, but alas left incomplete as a cycle at his death. His music is undoubtedly romantic, yet balanced with a keen interest in classic counterpoint and an elegant approach that makes it particularly well-mannered music. This Sunday's mass, his opus 151, bears the name *Missa St Crucis*, but is also known just as his *Mass in G* for four voices. Written in 1882, every bar is characteristic of his measured, well-crafted musical language, unfussy and – as they say – deceptively simple. This can all sound like damning with faint praise, but it does work wonderfully well. The secret is to give oneself over to the music's civilized qualities and let them work their magic.

Variety being the spice of life, we will have something unusual at the Offertory. In place of a choral motet, there will be the first performance of a new work for organ, *Still* by Thomas Carling (b.1997) that has been commissioned by *Choir & Organ* magazine for Rupert Gough and Royal Holloway, University of London, where Rupert is Director of Choral Music and College Organist, when he is not being our Director of Music. Carling is a student at the Guildhall, having studied earlier at Wells Cathedral School. Those who follow Rupert's career will know that Rupert was previously Assistant Organist at Wells for some eleven years. Carling has been studying composition at the Guildhall with the composer and teacher Paul Whitmarsh who – in this somewhat small world of ours – also teaches composition at Wells.

Still is a response to a painting by the Saatchi exhibited artist, David Brian Smith (b.1981). Carling reveals (in the current issue of *Choir & Organ*) that he *first came across [Smith's] work in the Saatchi Gallery and was blown away by the colour and imagination of it. In Still, the water is the focal point, both the source of light in the painting and a reflection of that source. The filmic drama of the scene is really heightened, but it becomes wonderfully calm almost by accident. I've tried to draw on the dramatic contrast he achieves between the benign landscape and the enthralling light of the water, while*

maintaining the wonderful calm of his painting. The visceral colour, as well as the wonderful sense of calm David conjures up is something that seemed immensely musical to me.

The canticles at Evensong are from *The Short Service* by the English composer Thomas Morley (1557–1602). Many people think of him entirely as a secular composer, because his contribution especially to the school of the English Madrigal was so remarkable. Indeed, even during his own lifetime he was more popular for his secular music than anything else. Nevertheless, he was a pupil of the great William Byrd (1539–1623), became organist of St Paul’s Cathedral, and made notable contributions to the sacred repertoire alongside his many secular works. He was also an early music publisher, having obtained one of those printing patents that could transform commercial life for a well-placed musician in those days. Byrd and Tallis had long held such patents from Queen Elizabeth I, and it is good to see that Morley joined in. It was a lucrative business, even if the market was comparatively small in those days.

Morley’s debt to his teacher is very visible in this Evensong setting, with large sections being very closely related to Byrd’s own work in this genre. In fact, in both borrowing from, and imitating, his own teacher, Morley was simply reproducing what Byrd himself had done with *his* teacher, Thomas Tallis (1505–1585), whose *Short “Dorian” Service* had provided the model for Byrd’s *Short Service*. Some of this cascading imitation may have been a sign of appreciation, reverence for the teacher in each case, or even friendly competition, but we should also consider the circumstances under which this was taking place. At last Sunday’s Solemn Eucharist, we heard Tallis’s *Mass for Four Voices*, and the noticeable quality about that is how far the composer had already departed from the compositional language of his forebears such as Tye (1505–1572), Taverner (1490–1545), and Sheppard (1515–1558). The mass, written in Queen Mary’s reign after the oppressively Protestant years of Edward VI’s period on the throne, shows signs of having been strongly influenced by the more restrained musical language that was expected, – nay, demanded – by the then rapidly reforming Church of England. The return of Catholicism under Mary did not mean that composers instantly threw over this newly developed musical language, and Tallis clearly believed that he could as well use it for a Catholic mass setting as for an English anthem.

Nevertheless, this was a fairly abrupt departure from the previous thread of English musical style, distinctive though that had been from its mainland counterpart. Politics, and the effect of politics on all aspects of church life, was now driving compositional language quite directly. So, all these composers, Tallis, Byrd, Morley, and numerous others, were, in effect, minting a new musical language for use in the church. Curiously, secular models now started to infect liturgical music, with the word painting of madrigals often being used to illuminate anthems and settings. This was not something that could easily be done in a vacuum, and composers were busy learning from one another throughout this whole period. The imitating, “nodding” in

one another's direction, and downright copying were part of a mutual creative process, out of which the Anglican choral tradition was developing. At this stage, it could still be somewhat "dry" in its musical language. Nevertheless, hidden in here are the roots of a tradition that is still going strong today.

The anthem is *Sing we merrily* by another English composer, Adrian Batten (1591–1637). As a boy at Winchester Cathedral, he left his mark literally by carving his name and the date 1608 into the wall of Bishop Gardiner's chantry, which either makes him a graffiti artist or a vandal, depending on your mood. For some reason, his name always seems to convey the idea of a bluff, jolly cove, whose music can be expected to be on the boisterous side. This anthem — one of the many surviving, although the bulk of them are rather infrequently performed and many unpublished — fulfils that expectation delightfully. Attack and vim are built into the music itself, and there is ample word painting in this relatively brief piece with plenty of variety. It is an ideal summer evening anthem, upbeat and cheery.

Later in life, Batten came to London and was first at Westminster Abbey and then at St Paul's Cathedral. It must be a fact that he would have known the Priory Church — at the very least from the outside; but surely, he must also have ventured inside as well. The same must have been true of the other great composers in London, including Byrd and Tallis. When we hear Batten's music this Sunday evening, it will be interesting to think of him wandering around S. Bartholomew's, though with his graffiti days unfortunately somewhat behind him. Even the primmest of us likes really *old* graffiti.