

Music Notes 2017 – Trinity VIII

The setting this Sunday morning is a unison mass – the *Missa Puerorum* – by the German composer Josef Rheinberger (1839–1901). (In unison means that all the voices sing the same melody throughout.) This mass is one of eighteen that Rheinberger left us, and falls by his own definition into a category known as *Gebrauchsmusik* or *Utilitarian Music*. The term refers to music that is meant to be primarily useful in some specific context, setting this as a priority over musical innovation, which frequently means that the work is technically and stylistically simple, and often that it can be performed readily by talented amateurs rather than by professional or semi-professional choirs. Rheinberger composed his setting expressly in order not to be too challenging for a choir of unison trebles. Together with Rheinberger's other works of this kind, it became very popular in his own lifetime, entering the repertoire of many smaller churches, where a line of only a few smaller singing persons was available, but the resources for a full four- or more-part choir did not exist. It dates from 1871 or 1872, and the music publisher Carus declares that it is a "2" in terms of difficulty, without explaining the range to which this measure belongs.

All the usual sections of a mass are present in the setting, including a *Credo* (which we do not, of course, use), showing that, even if this setting is just for solo voice or unison singers, the composer did not regard it as being a *Missa Brevis* – although it is quite brief. Rheinberger definitely considered it a full mass setting. Moreover, Rheinberger adds an additional and unusual component, a setting of the text *Verbum supernum prodiens*, which he describes as the *Graduale*. This refers to a specific liturgical point in a Eucharist. In our services, this comes between the first – usually Old Testament – lesson and the Epistle. This moment is known as the *Graduale*. After the Epistle, and before the Gospel, we have the *Alleluia*. However, the old Tridentine mass only had two readings, Epistle and Gospel, and the *Graduale* and the *Alleluia* were *both* sung in between the two. So, Rheinberger created a *Graduale* with a fixed text when this setting was used, which would then have been followed by the *Alleluia* appropriate to the day. In fact, we always sing a hymn in place of the *Graduale*, so there isn't even a free slot for this in our liturgy. Instead, the *Verbum supernum prodiens* will be sung as the motet at the Offertory.

Verbum supernum prodiens, incidentally, is a eucharistic hymn by the thirteenth century S. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), born 102 years after St Bartholomew's Priory was founded. The last two verses of this hymn are its best-known and most often performed part, providing the words of the *O Salutaris* that is sung at the beginning of *Benediction*.

The canticles at Evensong are a relatively unusual setting from the Tudor period by the composer Thomas Hunt (1580–1658). Born in Canterbury to a tailor father,

Thomas became a chorister at the cathedral and studied the organ, eventually becoming organist to Richard Bancroft, who was first Bishop of London and then Archbishop of Canterbury. Unless the majority of Hunt's compositions have been lost with the passage of time, it appears that his output as a composer was relatively modest. There is a six-part madrigal (*Hark! Did you ever hear such sweet singing*) and a four-part Full Service – i.e. one containing all the canticles for Morning and Evening Prayer as well as for Holy Communion. Apart from this, there is evidence of an anthem, *O light, o blessed Trinity*, in that the words are listed in an anthem book, but without music.

You may be aware that there is a connection between Wells Cathedral and our parish through Rupert Gough, our Director of Music; he was once Assistant organist there. It therefore filled my little heart with joy to discover that there is a contemporary manuscript listing an anthem *Put me not to rebuke* by *Thomas Hunt, Organist of Wells*. Alas, a little research has revealed that this is actually by someone called Thomas Wilkinson (1575–1612), and that there is no evidence that Thomas Hunt was ever Organist at Wells. The manuscript is, alas, simply wrong.

The anthem is *Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts* by Henry Purcell (1659–1695). This forms the final part of his music for the funeral of Queen Mary II, eldest daughter of James II, but also wife of the robustly protestant William III, who was the third King of that number in *both* Oranje, whence he came, *and* of England and Ireland, countries which he acquired by technically invading to depose his father-in-law. Of course, this invasion was actually by invitation from an elite group of British politicians, and William duly arrived with 35,000 soldiers and other followers in tow. James realized the game was up and fled to France. William and his entourage were duly welcomed to London and the seat of government by an enthusiastic population, leading to these events being known as the *Glorious Revolution*. William, unwilling to be dependent on either his wife's claim to the throne or her long-term survival, negotiated (with her active support) a deal, whereby they would rule jointly, and whereby his status as monarch would survive her demise. For him, this was just as well, because on 28th December 1694 she was carried off by smallpox, leaving him in sole charge of the throne after all.

Just going back for a moment to their accession, accepting the throne down south did not mean acceptance of the separate throne of Scotland, and the Scots took a little longer to decide that James was no longer their king, and to offer William and Mary the opportunity to succeed him. At this point, William III of England became also William II of Scotland. This means that, assuming that *our* Prince William eventually ascends to the throne, *and* that Scotland at that time still shares a monarch with the rest of the United Kingdom, a similar numerical inconsistency will occur: William IV “down here”, and William III “up there”. Interestingly, as Mary and her husband were famously regarded as virtually indivisible monarchs during their joint

reign, the expression *William and Mary* became well-established as a description of their period in our history, and it is applied to describe furniture and architecture originating during their reign. Indeed, in *1066 and All That* by Sellar and Yeatman, they are just a single monarch called *Williamanmary*, with *England Ruled by an Orange*.

In spite of not always having an easy time, the joint reign was not unsuccessful, and Queen Mary's death in 1694 was the cause of an extraordinary outpouring of public grief and a funeral of great splendour in Westminster Abbey. Purcell provided the music, and especially a setting of the funeral sentences of the Anglican Burial Service. To form the ending of the work, there is first an affecting passage for solo voices and instruments, followed by a subtle and very moving four-part setting for choir of the same words (but different music) with – on the original occasion at least – an accompaniment of *flatt mournful Trumpets* – not generally replicated in modern day performances. Some thirty years later, the composer William Croft (1678–1727) composed a new setting of the funeral sentences, but when he came to this part of the text, he did not write a new setting, instead he directed that Purcell's setting should be sung. He wrote: *The reason that I did not compose that Verse a-new is obvious to every artist.*

Eight months after Queen Mary's funeral, mourners returned to Westminster Abbey for Purcell's own funeral, his life cut far too short. As he was laid to rest in the north aisle, his funeral sentences, including this anthem, were sung again, this time for their own composer.