

## **Stewardship Sunday 3/4 – Theme: Worship**

### **Address by Director of Music, Rupert Gough, at the Solemn Eucharist**

I ask you all, if I may, to imagine your favourite film. Now, can you imagine that film with only dialogue and awkward silences - without any music? Would it have the same atmosphere? Would the tenet of that film carry the same significance?

Now imagine this service today, with no music. How would that feel? This is, after all, about a Living Church and a ministry that comes alive in song – as the psalmist encourages us: “O sing unto God with the voice of melody”.

We heard two weeks ago about our building and how important that is to us too. These adornments, these ‘fripperies’ are, I suspect important to all of us. A church rich in architecture, art and music combine to provide the theatre that enriches our worship. We could still worship without these things but would sitting in silent prayer in a kind of conference room help us get closer to God. This may work for some but those of us brought up the Anglican tradition would surely feel lost without the warmth and richness of the atmosphere to which we are accustomed.

Prayer of course lies at the heart of our worship but these great buildings of our forebears are built to inspire, built to bring people closer to God. They are also built for music. Imagine what these great churches must have done for people’s perception of sound and music – suddenly they are seemingly surrounded by music wafting like incense - where a lone voice could fill a vast space. To somebody in the 12<sup>th</sup> century this sound must have seemed like the voice of God himself. And so our great temples of liturgy and music are designed to fill people with mystery and wonder – to draw people into the divine.

For our music to have these truly mystical powers we do need professional musicians. We want to mirror the quality of our architecture, artwork and liturgical furniture with music of equally high quality. You don’t need to have a trained ear to appreciate hearing a choir of voices when they are perfectly in tune with each other, perfectly together in both time and pitch. We also want singers capable of not just getting notes correct and in tune, but to be in tune with the words they sing. This is the beauty of the human voice. The organ (here) can move you, yes, it can create all manner of atmospheres – it even has the power perhaps to subconsciously control your mood! A voice it may have, but “It hath neither speech nor language” (to quote that loquacious psalmist again). The choral music these singers engage with can transform seemingly ordinary texts into an illustrated tapestry of sound. No instrument can perhaps touch the soul in quite the same way as a voice – that direct human connection between emotion, music and text that also makes opera a metaphysical experience for many.

It is the ideal of a perfect marriage of liturgy and music that has inspired me personally. My background in cathedrals and universities has, and continues to bring me in contact with people clearly moved by the experience of the music they hear - it can affect people most profoundly and it so often it also keeps our cathedrals and their communities alive.

I was lucky to get to know the composer Jonathan Harvey before he died. He told me his aim was to encourage people to “aspire to the boundless” through his music. I suggest that this is what we are inspired to do here at St. Bart’s. Unlike in a concert, I know all my singers here are aware that they are not here to please or entertain an audience, but to elevate the worshiper’s experience and inspire. And, if we get it right, maybe even provide a glimpse of heaven – who knows. What we do know, however, is that all of this comes at a price and it is one that the church needs help to maintain. If we want to continue to be inspired by aspirational music then we need to ask ourselves what we are doing to help this continue to happen.

So, what can you do? Naturally, we need financial support to maintain our choral tradition here. Alongside, or in place of that, why not try to bring a friend to our services? If they are enticed only to come for the music, what harm is there in that? They will still vicariously be experiencing something of Christianity and, if they yearn for more, then they may begin to move beyond the music, become more involved in the text and, perhaps more involved in our church. Such is the power, the allure that music can offer. Let us not forget St Augustine who said: “He who sings, prays twice”. We can also interpret that as ‘he who hears a text delivered through music, prays twice’.

So, may your souls continue to be elevated through the power and beauty of music and may you feel moved and inspired by the experience to pledge your support to maintain our music in any way you can.