

The Parish Church of St John-at-Hampstead

Music List ~ December 2021

Notes on the Music

Now that the season of Advent is with us, our service music naturally changes in emphasis and mood. Organ music ceases to be overtly celebratory, and much of the choral music becomes more sombre yet expectant. At the Communion services we sing the Kyrie instead of the Gloria, and at Evensong we will sing the psalms to plainchant, and adopt a version of the Preces and Responses also based on chant: I have adapted a set of Preces in Latin by Lassus to fit with BCP texts, and we will sing a setting of the Lord's Prayer dating from around the same time by Hieronymus Praetorius (in Latin), which alternates between the traditional plainsong melody and sonorous music for 8-part choir.

Plainsong also permeates other parts of our Advent music, including a setting of the Evening Canticles by Philip Moore (December 5th) composed in the 'faux bourdon' style with harmonized chant set for organ and choir, a setting of the Magnificat and a separate setting of the Nunc dimittis *in alternatim* (i.e. alternating between chant and polyphony) by two 16th-century composers, de Monte and Ortiz (December 12th), and one of Palestrina's most celebrated 'paraphrase' masses based on plainsong, his *Missa Aeterna Christi munera* (also December 12th). On the 19th December our morning music is all from the baroque period, with a mass by Domenico Scarlatti and two versions of the famous Advent chorale *Nun komm der Heiland Heiland* (itself developed by Luther from the medieval plainsong hymn *Veni, Redemptor gentium* - 'Come, thou Redeemer of the earth'), one for the organ by Buxtehude, and the other a four-part setting by the Weimar Kantor Melchior Vulpus published in 1609.

Also on 19th December we anticipate Christmas with our carol service: the Senior Choir expands to 12 singers, and we are joined by the Junior Choir. No spoilers here, though, as it adds to the excitement of the occasion when one wonders what repertoire might be included... However, I will say that the first and last items were specifically requested by two of the choir members, and there will be some local touches alongside a standard mix of music both familiar and unfamiliar.

Organists Richard Gowers and Liam Crangle will continue to help out during the month, though the music at Christmas itself will be notably more *a cappella* than perhaps is usual, since they will of course be busy at their own regular churches. A sumptuous 8-part Mass by Lassus will be sung at the Midnight service (the *Missa Bell' amfitrit' altera*, made famous in the 1970s by a recording by Simon Preston when Organist of Christ Church, Oxford), as well as Sweelinck's Christmas classic *Hodie Christus natus est* with its joyful tripe-time refrain for the word 'Hodie' ('today'). On Christmas morning we sing a Mass by David Terry, known to many for his work as Director of Music at the Oratory School. It wasn't written specifically for Christmas as far as I know, but the imitation of pealing bells in the Gloria certainly captures the festive spirit.

Geoffrey Webber
Director of Music