

The Parish Church of St John-at-Hampstead

Music Notes ~ January 2022

This year's music for Epiphany includes some familiar favourites, such as *Three kings from Persian lands afar*, arr. Cornelius, and *Bethlehem Down* by Peter Warlock, together with a less well-known anthem by the great early 19th-century musician William Crotch, Professor of Music at Oxford and the first Principal of the Royal Academy of Music. Once a staple of the English cathedral repertoire, his anthem *Lo! star-led chiefs* comes from his Oratorio *Palestine* (1812) and opens with the memorable couplet "Lo! star-led chiefs Assyrian odours bring / And bending Magi seek their infant King!". The Cornelius *Three kings* includes the Epiphany chorale *Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern* sung in the English translation "How brightly shines the morning star". A rather different take on the same chorale can be heard in Buxtehude's fine setting of the chorale for organ, BuXWV 223, which opens with the melody in the bass line in *pastorale* style, and concludes with a rousing fugato. And for a third version of the chorale, visiting organist Tim Wakerell contributes a setting by the late 19th-century German organist Max Reger.

The composer Richard Shephard died last year, and our January Evensongs include his setting of the Preces and Responses, and his *Liverpool Service* (Sunday 9th). Richard sang as a lay-clerk at Salisbury Cathedral before moving to York Minster, where he became involved in the work of the Minster well beyond the traditional activities of a songman. He eventually became a lay canon and Chamberlain of the Minster, and was also much involved in many different musical and other activities in and around the City of York. Founded in his memory, The Richard Shephard Foundation (charity no. 1189066) now exists to bring music into primary schools in Yorkshire. Unaffected by modernism, his music is lush and vocal in nature; a countertenor himself, the alto parts always have much to contribute to his rich harmonies.

A concert for the Friends on the Music on Saturday 20th marks the anniversary of the death of the great Dutch organist J. P. Sweelinck, and anniversaries of composers of English church music that occur this year include the 450th anniversary of the death of Christopher Tye and the birth of Thomas Tomkins in 1572, so we can expect some music from these composers as we proceed through the year. Unfamiliar composers that appear on the Music List this month include Giammateo Asola (d. 1609), who worked for most of his life in the church of San Severo in Venice. You won't have been there, as it was destroyed during Austrian rule in the early 19th century. Asola's surviving music shows that Venetian music in the late 16th century wasn't all about St Mark's and the *cori spezzati* tradition, since his music remained polyphonic and generally conservative in style.

A contrasting style of vocal counterpoint can be heard on 30th January in the form of music by two contemporary British composers, Michael Finnissy and Francis Pott. The Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple, which is also the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary (transferred from 2 February) marks the liturgical change of Marian antiphon at Compline to the *Ave Regina caelorum*. Finnissy's setting is typically spare and lucid in texture, whilst Pott's setting of the great hymn of praise to Christ, *Jesu dulcis memoria* (attributed to Saint Bernard of Clairvaux), gradually develops from a single line into more complex counterpoint with varied harmonic colours, based on a loose variation form.

Geoffrey Webber