

DEVELOPMENT OF CHURCH MUSIC

PAUL HALE RECTOR CHORI

The musical excerpts were taken from the CDs listed at the end of this summary.

The Christian Church was in origin Jewish, therefore it is not surprising that its musical roots come from Jewish tradition. A psalm is a song. St. Augustine said, "He who sings, prays twice."

From early times, plainsong was used for singing the Office, i.e. the prayers said or sung in Latin at set hours of the day. It is still regarded as the principal musical style for the Roman Catholic Church. Plainsong, monophonic music, i.e. a single line of music, has been the music of the Christian Church for roughly half its existence, about 1,000 years. Counterpoint and harmony only began to develop in the Middle Ages.

All music had to be learnt and memorised. About the C12 singing in more than one part began to develop: organum, singing a part above or below the plainchant melody.

Guido of Arezzo (born c. 990) began to develop notation, how to write music down on a staff, which is really like a "musical staff to hold you up."

This was the era of the building of the great cathedrals and abbeys. Particularly in the Netherlands, Burgundy, Italy and even in England early counterpoint developed and so did the Choir Schools. 1248 in Southwell: there were 16 vicars choral (priests who sang), 6 choristers, 2 thurifers, a school of song and a school of grammar, each with its own master (a vicar). At Ottery St. Mary in East Devon, when choristers' voices broke, they could be admitted as Secondaries and could ultimately become vicars choral, who were required to memorise all music required within a month of their admittance, or lose part of their stipend.

C15 Archbishops' visitations accused Southwell Song School and Choristers of unsatisfactory Singing, because there was no-one sufficiently skilled to demand a satisfactory standard and proper discipline.

Early polyphony, as sung in Southwell, was plainsong harmonised by the choir. Eg. John Taverner c. 1490-1545: Dum transisset sabbatum.

Gregorio Allegro's Miserere was composed for the Sistine Chapel, and was not written down until Mozart heard it and wrote it down from memory afterwards.

Churches in France and Germany were more resonant than the nave in Southwell. Then new ceiling, put in after the fire in 1711, was lower and panelled, which improved the acoustics. Ewan Christian's restoration in the C19 of the earlier roof destroyed this advantage. The Quire has acoustics which make the music come alive.

The Renaissance in England was a wonderful educational environment. English composers were moving on.

Taverner 1490-1545 Gibbons 1514-1572 Byrd 1543-1623

Purcell 1569-1695 was the first English composer not limited by earlier musical tradition. This was the time when boys were pressed into the choir of the Chapel Royal. One boy was taken from Southwell. The Chapel Royal was not a building: it was a group of singers who accompanied the Sovereign wherever he went. It continues to exist today but only functions in public on Maundy Thursday. In the past, membership guaranteed a musical career.

Musical style was changing, largely due to the influence of France under Louis XIV. Music began to use new instruments: eg the violin, viola and cello supplanting the viols and gambas.

Southwell Choir had been disbanded under the Commonwealth in the C17. After the Restoration a new organ was rapidly acquired (1661) and by 1663 the Choir was once more almost up to strength. Pay per annum:

Vicars choral: £15 Singing men: £10 Choristers: £2

The skills required to print music were developed in the Low Countries. Byrd and Tallis petitioned for the first licence to print music in England. Hitherto, music had been very expensive. To ensure against financial loss, publishers had invited cathedrals to subscribe money for specific numbers of copies before they were

actually printed. Therefore much music continued to be copied by hand, so that a chorister worked from a copy of his part only, not from a complete score, as today. Consequently some parts of some works are now missing.

At the end of the C17, Handel was the main influence on English music. This led to composers writing in the Handelian style. For example, William Boyce 1711-1779, St. Paul's chorister as a boy, became Master of the King's Music in 1755; one of the first to conduct in the modern manner, but with a roll of parchment. Elegant, polished anthem: " Turn thee unto me".

The C19 influence was Mendelssohn 1809-1847. Responsible for a revival of the music of J S Bach. Up to this time, English organs did not have pedals. In mainland Europe large organs, placed in the west end of large ecclesiastical buildings, had pedals in order to produce a sufficient volume of sound in the lower registers. Southwell was one of the first churches in England to instal a pedal board. C19 saw a rejuvenation of church music. The Oxford Movement and the Cambridge Ecclesiologists drew music back into the Sanctuary. Music galleries went out. Revival of the liturgy, and, with it, of the music.

Parish choirs really developed now, helped by Novello's low-priced publication of sheet music. This in turn led to the development of the great choral festivals. One in Southwell in the 1870's.

Late C19: Stanford	1853-1924
Elgar.	1857-1934
John Ireland	1897-1962 ("It is a thing most wonderful")
Herbert Howells	1892-1983—a series of canticles, now staple cathedral music.

Development of the carol:

Not much used in churches until Vaughan Williams (1892-1958) began to collect them, which led to the Oxford Book of Carols : part of a movement to get away from Victorian music. "A spotless rose " Herbert Howells.

C20 Royal School of Church Music founded. Ran choristers' courses which were tremendously popular. Wielded great influence. Most parish choirs were and are affiliated. Now inter-denominational and organised in areas.

C20 Also Kenneth Leighton (born 1929 and died young) "Lull, lulla, thou little tiny child." John Rutter, one of the most popular of living composers.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS.

We do not know what the Minster Choir sounded like in times past. Attempts to do so with reference to choirs generally have been made by trying to interpret the choristers' mouth positions, but have been of questionable success.

Nowadays, the usual ratio in a cathedral choir is 16 boys: 6 or 12 men. Boys' voices used to break later. This meant that senior boys produced a greater volume of sound and were more experienced choristers, so that a lower ratio of boys was possible.

Congregational participation: was limited in the past because members of congregations would only know a limited number of tunes. Point of interest: the church at Ossington had and has a barrel organ with three barrels of tunes. They have a modern organ installed below it nowadays, but prefer the barrel organ.

REFERENCES:

CD's used to illustrate this talk, all made by the Southwell Choir.

The Lord is my shepherd.

O come let us adore Him.

O clap your hands together.

It is a thing most wonderful.

Come, come my voice.

Books:

Music of the English Church by Kenneth R. Long pub. Hodder & Stoughton.

English Cathedral Music by Edmund H. Fellows pub. Methuen.

Southwell Schools by James pub. 1927 (out of print).