

The Church Music Society exists to facilitate the selection and performance of the music which is most suitable for different occasions of Divine Worship, and for choirs of varying powers. It expresses no partisanship for any particular style of composition, nor any particular ecclesiastical standpoint, but wishes to gather, and to make available for use, the best music of all styles—old and new, simple and elaborate.

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MUSIC IN VILLAGE CHURCHES

By

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MUSIC IN VILLAGE CHURCHES

TWO things are to be avoided in planning the music for a simple village service—dullness and elaborateness. Let us at once divest ourselves of the deep-rooted idea that all village services must be modelled upon those in cathedrals; it is the pit into which many fall, and it is the main cause of the failure to inspire worshippers, or add to the dignity of the worship. Let us frankly admit our limitations in the number and balance, as well as in the quality and compass of the voices; in the lack, as a whole, of musical education in either choir or congregation; and, having admitted our limitations, let us consider our advantages. The chief advantage is the stability of the congregation as opposed to the fluctuations and constant changes in many towns. A personal acquaintance with the family and family history and circumstances of each member of the choir, and probably of the congregation too, should encourage a feeling of friendliness and clanship which is not to be found in a more heterogeneous town parish. There is also, usually, the advantage of a small organ, instead of the huge instrument, with rows of solo stops, which has lured many a young organist into an entirely wrong conception of his position and duties.

The reverent rendering of the service can best be obtained by perfect understanding and co-operation between organist, choir, and congregation; and to ensure this there should be agreement as to the primary and supreme consideration that should govern all our effort, which is: that it should be worthy of the worship of Almighty God. That is to say, as worthy as it is possible for us to make it by sparing no pains or trouble. This is the true and only touchstone by which to test alike the matter and the manner of our church music. The faithful application of this test

will eliminate the tawdry, the sentimental, the cheap, the dull, and the vulgar. It will retain, nay, in villages, of which we are now treating, it will put in the first place, the simple; and will add thereto the dignified and the beautiful. Two minor considerations too often usurp the place of determining factor, and, in doing so, are the principal causes of the present degradation of our church music: they are (1) the desire to attract people to church by means of the music; and (2) the desire to impress them emotionally when they get there. Neither of these desires can wholly be set aside; but the wrong turning has been taken when either or both rule the musical situation.

Great difficulties beset the path of those who earnestly wish to raise the standard of the music for which they are responsible. Often they feel insufficiently trained on the technical side to discriminate between good and bad; and often, again, the tests of beauty, dignity, and simplicity become inoperative through a familiarity which has staled the ear and the mind; or through the paralysing effect on the judgement of old and dear associations. It requires a real effort to *think through* to the simple, the dignified, and the beautiful; and resolutely to set aside what falls below this unshakeable ideal. Faithful pursuit of this ideal may involve further the setting aside of such music as is claimed in all sincerity to 'do people good'. Here the issues are so complicated, and the very real dangers so little understood and so greatly under-estimated, that the authority, ecclesiastical as well as musical, of the Archbishops' Committee on Music in Worship must be invoked, and their considered conclusions reproduced: 'Other music', says the Report, on page 10, 'really stirs religious feeling; but even so it must be tested further before it can be finally approved. To stir religious feeling may do good, or it may do harm. Therefore again the question arises, What is the

effect of that? Now the effect will be satisfactory only if the stir reaches beyond the emotions and touches the will, and leads to genuine spiritual effort. Otherwise we are confronted with emotionalism, and emotionalism is a serious danger. . . . The congregation that goes home fired by either music or sermon to fresh effort has gained something valuable; but the congregation that has merely had one sensation the more, devoid of any definite outcome, goes away weakened in its power to make any good effort, and less capable in the future of effective reaction to genuine religious stimulus. This danger of emotionalism is greatest at mission services . . . for here unworthy, and really deleterious music has, unfortunately, an almost unchallenged sway. The effect is that the real work of conversion is often sacrificed to an attempt at being popular, and this warning may be given the widest possible application. How many times the net result is some "hearty services", but no lasting outcome! This, indeed, must be the case if those people who most of all need protection against the enervating influence of emotionalism are systematically delivered over to it. The Committee feels obliged to utter a serious warning and protest on this subject.' Such music as we would advocate must and should stir true emotion, a noble, humble, sincere emotion; not a vague yearning, nor even a facile tear.

Protest may also be entered against the singular anomaly, not infrequently to be found, of musical decisions being given over to the self-confessed incompetent, to the exclusion of the musically instructed. Who does not know the voluble objector who concludes all his criticism with, 'But of course I am hopelessly unmusical', and who is yet the ultimate arbiter in the choice, for example, of hymn-tunes? The musically gifted, whose souls, for some unexplained reason, appear to be less valuable, are either

shelved as tiresome and negligible cranks, or, if less articulate, quietly shelve themselves, and become permanently estranged from worship by what has been termed 'the muck they hear in church'.

We cannot remember too often that the greater part of the music heard in worship receives far less pains and attention than is given to the preparation of any concert; and that only too often is it true that 'such sounds would be tolerated nowhere but in church'. Too often a complacent 'we do our best' is thought enough to condone all lack of trouble and effort, and is tantamount to saying 'we don't mean to try to do better'. It is not enough in the worship of Almighty God to make a devastating noise with the best intentions. Marvellous reform will follow from the observance of even such elementary rules as:

Avoid scooping—'the greasy slide'—either up or down. Never, by any manner of means, take breath in the middle of a word.

Get your upper notes from the right place; that is, drop down on them from above, instead of pushing them up from below.

Two or three minutes every week spent in clear vowel-production on a comfortable note can be superintended by the most untechnical of advisers. The invaluable little treatise by Dr. Moody, *A Choir-Boy in the Making* (Oxford University Press, 2s. 6d. net), is indispensable for those who are uncertain as to their capacity to instruct.

As regards the actual ordering of Morning and Evening Prayer, the following suggestions have been issued by the Committee of the Church Music Society, and are here reprinted:

1. Vestry prayers and their amens should be said in a natural voice without note; the organ should not be played while the bells are ringing.

2. No hymn should be sung as the choir enters or leaves the church. The most suitable place for a procession is at the end of evensong, before the Blessing.

3. The service should begin directly the choirs are in their places, without additional prayers.

4. Until the end of the first Lord's Prayer the Service should be said, not sung.

5. It is desirable that no note on the organ be given for the opening versicle; but if it is necessary, the use of quiet diapason tone is best.

6. The Sarum unison responses, or the harmonized ferial responses, both published by the Society at 1½d., are strongly recommended.

7. An office hymn may be inserted either before the Psalms or before the Magnificat.

8. If Anglican chants are used, simple ones with low reciting notes are best. *In all chanting, the rhythm of the words should govern the music.* Some form of antiphonal singing (e.g. trebles and men; choir and congregation; cantors and people) is advised.

9. Florid settings of the Canticles should be avoided. Tones or chants are better, with descants or *faux-bourbons* for some of the verses if desired.

10. There is no reason why the Creed and the Lord's Prayer should be sung on a note, even when the versicles and responses are so sung.

11. The versicles and responses should be sung simply and without *rallentando*. The last response is not the conclusion of a part of the service, but leads up to the Collect for the day.

12. No anthem should be attempted unless the requisite parts are complete and well balanced.

13. Some variety should be introduced into the singing

of the hymn: as, for instance, verses in unison, in harmony, unaccompanied both in unison and harmony, men only or trebles only; and, when they are available, with descants or *faux-bourbons* by a few voices.¹

14. All prayers after the third Collect, and their amens, should be said, not sung.

15. A voluntary can sometimes be substituted for the hymn which is usually sung during the collection.

16. There should be no singing after the Blessing; and the organist should play quietly while the choir returns to the vestry.

Some further general hints, and amplification of these, may here be given.

UNISON. The use of unison, or rather of singing in octaves, is often overlooked, and has great value, especially (and this should be noted and relentlessly acted upon) when one of the four parts is lacking. Were the ideal more often attained of much of our singing being unaccompanied, the deplorable holes left by the absence of the alto or the tenor part would be instantly noticeable; and it is not to the credit of a choir to trust to the organ's volume of sound to cover up deficiencies. But continuous unison singing is only obtained at the cost of discomfort to some or other of the voices; and often at the loss of interest and co-operation on the part of the choir-men. As an acid test of melody it is of the utmost value, for a poor, monotonous, or aimless hymn-tune has its weaknesses exposed (when the ear is not dulled by familiarity) by being sung in unison, stripped of all cloying and disguising harmonies. Freely used in hymn-singing as a contrast to harmony, or as the basis of a descant, unison singing adds greatly to the general effect.

¹ For guidance in the choice of hymns see the Church Music Society: Occasional Paper, No. 9 (6d.).

RESPONSES. The organ accompaniment of responses, if it must be used, should be light and quiet. The singing of amen should be crisp and on a low note: a low note being also adhered to in monotoning the prayers. Careful listening will reveal how deplorably few of the congregation think it necessary to give their combined assent in this way to the prayers, owing to the inconvenience of being expected to sing it on an uncomfortably high note. The rule, very seldom observed, is that amen should never be sung when the prayer is not monotoned; and never, as given in suggestion 14, after the prayers following the third Collect.

CHANTING. The great reform of the moment is in the direction of eliciting instead of obscuring the sense of the Psalms. Many newly pointed Psalters have been issued, differing, indeed, on small points and in methods of marking, but all united on the great fundamental principle of singing the Psalms as they are intelligently read. As will readily be seen, this cuts at the root of the generally accepted pointing, throwing the accent, as this does, on unimportant words and syllables: 'the Name of the Lord', 'IN the day of battle', 'ERcording to Thy word'. The rules given are in every case the same: read through the verse with the right emphasis; monotone it with the right emphasis; transfer this emphasis to the melody of the chant. Fit the music to the words without gabble or hurry, *never* the words to the music.

Beauty as well as comfort in singing the Psalms is immensely increased by antiphonal singing; and it is a thousand pities that more village choirs do not understand and practise this. The taking up of verse after verse from the opposite side gives an effect of answering one another, such as has been practised from the earliest times. It also avoids the strain and the tendency to squall resulting from

a long Psalm sung straight through by all the voices. Varieties of antiphony, such as alternating cantors and people, or trebles and men's voices, are liable to be misunderstood and disregarded by the congregation. Indeed, it is difficult if not impossible to drill them into observing the elementary antiphony of alternate sides; but the choir, at least, can effect this, with refreshment to both voice and ear.

CANTICLES. The *Te Deum*, as is well known, presents the greatest difficulty. When sung to two or more Anglican chants, the one place where it is essential that the change should be made is at the close of the original hymn, 'Make them to be numbered with Thy saints: in glory everlasting', the following verses being merely versicles and responses, and are best treated as such. This method is to be found in Dr. Nicholson's *Free Chant Canticles* (Faith Press, 1s.), where a special and very simple chant form is used, to the great advantage of the rendering of the canticle. The other change should be made, and (if a double chant is used) the second half of the verse repeated at verse 13, the close of the first section, before beginning the section addressed to the Lord Jesus; and not, as is too often the case, repeating half the chant at verse 9.

In singing the *Benedicite* it is a relief to use such settings as group together the verses: this method is suggested also in the Revised Prayer Book. The tripping, waltz-like chants in triple time are to be deprecated.

The *Nunc Dimittis* gains in impressiveness by treating the second and third verses as one. The unhappy effect already alluded to of prolonging the reciting-note on the first syllable of 'according' can and should be obviated in this, in every Gloria, and in the numerous other occasions when a light syllable comes on the reciting-note, by not striking it immediately, but letting the accent fall as it were

on a rest, and continuing lightly and quickly on an up-beat. This satisfies the instinct of rhythm without sacrificing the proper emphasis.

HYMNS. This subject is so large, so important, and so controversial that it cannot be dealt with fully here. It is fully, sympathetically, and authoritatively treated in the Report already referred to, *Music in Worship* (S.P.C.K. 1s.), the portions especially dealing with it being reprinted as an Occasional Paper of the Society, No. 9 (6d.). One paragraph only shall here be quoted: 'It becomes plain that what is involved is not merely a question of *musical* worthiness. More is at stake; and here we may suggest that critics who have been content simply to attack certain composers, schools, and trends of musical thought have failed to present their case in its fullness, and therefore have not convinced their defenders. Even if (stretching a point) the musical worth of the compositions in question be conceded, what we are really groping after is ultimately a matter of religious psychology. The Christian religion is a sincere and noble religion. Does this or that tune convey a sincere and noble impression? If not, it is giving a false impression, even an actual misrepresentation of the Christian religion.'

In order to secure a united opinion as to the pace at which a hymn-tune is about to be sung, it is important to play over the tune, or some part of it, at the exact time at which it is to be sung. If a *rallentando* is made in the preliminary playing it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the congregation to start right, and control is lost from the beginning. The choir should stand up while the tune is played, and be ready to begin without a pause. It is well if the congregation can be persuaded to do the same, for in no other way can ragged attack be guarded against. Good 'attack', or the simultaneous beginning of

all singing is of very great importance, and the lack of it is frequently noticeable in hymns and canticles. This or that member of the choir or congregation is busy finding his or her place, and comes in at the actual syllable, no matter where, when this is done. We are all familiar with the entry in the *Magnificat* at 'nify the Lord'. An effect of care and finish is obtained when any long note at the end of a line is held to its full value, instead of being left as soon as sung.

The growing practice of omitting amen is entirely commendable. It is only really in place after a doxology, and it makes only too often an anti-climax, or even nonsense of what has gone before.

Descants—a sort of melodic embroidery by a few treble voices—give a beautiful variety; but should not be used too freely, and never to unfamiliar tunes. The important point is that the melody itself should be strongly and firmly sustained by the bulk of the choir and the whole congregation.

ANTHEMS. It is best to be very sparing with these; to use them only on special occasions; and rigidly to exclude the feeble, the tawdry, and the elaborate. Good, simple, and beautiful anthems not unsuitable for village choirs do exist. A few suggestions are included in the list of suitable music at the end of this paper.

VOLUNTARIES. When carefully chosen, these may be a great help in preparing the mind for worship, and for (so to speak) sealing the effect at the close of service; but these aims should guide their selection, and they should never be allowed to degenerate into 'a piece to be played'. A plea for a moment or two of perfect silence at the end of every service is here put forward very earnestly.

OFFICE OF HOLY COMMUNION. This great subject has been kept to the last, for much that has been said

as to the choice and performance of other music applies in the highest degree to this also. Speech rhythm should govern the singing of the *Kyrie*, as, indeed, of all parts of the Office, in such settings as are specially designed for and suitable to village choirs. Those that best express the worship of the congregation as well as the choir (for this is the ideal in the village church) consist for the most part of a few strong reiterated phrases, easily memorized, and with the completing, 'inevitable' touch that is the hallmark of true melody. The settings, on the other hand, that appear to wander up and down, without definite design or pattern, are less valuable. In many churches the right of the congregation to the Nicene Creed is secured to them by saying and not singing it; and this method has much to commend it. Neither the Comfortable Words nor the Preface should be accompanied by the organ. Amen should be either said or sung according to some definite and recognized plan. Those churches whose practice is to *say* it, seem to have inculcated best the responsibility of the congregation in giving their audible assent to what is said on their behalf.

A very important matter, often overlooked, is that by no musical devotions of any sort must the 'action' be held up. What the priest himself is doing and saying at the altar must regulate the length of the musical accessories. It is, indeed, an inversion of the relative importance of the parts that he should have to stand waiting while a lengthy Benedictus trails its way through the service; or, most common of all, while a hymn is being finished to the end, long after the Administration is over. As soon as the last communicant has left the altar, and the priest be prepared to begin the Lord's Prayer, the hymn should stop.

A.M.D.G.

MUSIC SUITABLE FOR VILLAGE CHURCH CHOIRS

HOLY COMMUNION

SIMPLE SETTING	} <i>Martin Shaw.</i>	Curwen.
MODAL		
ANGLICAN FOLK MASS	} <i>Martin Shaw.</i>	S.P.C.K.
UNISON (without Creed), <i>Hylton Stewart.</i>		
FOUR PART IN VERBAL RHYTHM, <i>Hylton Stewart.</i>		O.U.P.
IN C, unison or 4 part, <i>Nicholson.</i>		Faith Press.
IN C, 4 part, <i>Henry Coleman.</i>		S.P.C.K.
MERBECKE, ed. <i>J. H. Arnold.</i>		O.U.P.
„ „ <i>Royle Shore.</i>		Novello.
TRADITIONAL WITH BENEDICTUS AND AGNUS DEI (4 part), by <i>Vaughan Williams.</i>		O.U.P.
TRADITIONAL, WITH SANCTUS, BENEDICTUS, AND AGNUS DEI, in unison, by <i>Ernest Bullock.</i>		O.U.P.
LEY IN F MINOR (4 part).		Novello.
MISSA POPULI, unison and 4 part, <i>Drummond Wolf.</i>		Faith Press.

CANTICLES

TE DEUM AND BENEDICTUS IN D (unison and 4 part), <i>Martin Shaw.</i>	Curwen.
TE DEUM AND BENEDICTUS IN F (unison and 4 part), <i>Martin Shaw.</i>	S.P.C.K.
TE DEUM AND BENEDICTUS IN G (unison), <i>Geoffrey Shaw.</i>	S.P.C.K.
TE DEUM IN B \flat , <i>Nicholson.</i>	Faith Press.
TE DEUM IN A, <i>Hylton Stewart.</i>	S.P.C.K.
BENEDICITE (grouped), 4 part or unison, <i>Geoffrey Shaw.</i>	S.P.C.K.
BENEDICITE IN D (grouped), <i>Healey Willan.</i>	Novello.
MAGNIFICAT IN C, unison or 4 part, <i>Vaughan Williams.</i>	Curwen.
MAGNIFICAT AND NUNC DIMITTIS IN A \flat , <i>Chas. Wood.</i>	A. & C. Black.
MAGNIFICAT AND NUNC DIMITTIS IN G, 4 part or unison, <i>Nicholson.</i>	Faith Press.
MAGNIFICAT AND NUNC DIMITTIS (unison in free chant form), <i>Hylton Stewart.</i>	S.P.C.K.
MAGNIFICAT AND NUNC DIMITTIS, to simple plainsong chants (modern notation), <i>Martin Shaw.</i>	S.P.C.K.
MAGNIFICAT AND NUNC DIMITTIS IN F (unison), <i>Henry Coleman.</i>	Stainer & Bell.
THE LITTLE PLAIN CHANT CANTICLE BOOK, with accompaniment (modern notation), ed. <i>Francis Burgess.</i>	Novello.

ANTHEMS

GIVE LAUD (Ascension or Thanksgiving), <i>Bullock.</i>	O.U.P.
TWO INTROITS: THEY THAT WAIT UPON THE LORD GOD IS A SPIRIT (Whitsuntide) } <i>Bullock.</i>	O.U.P.
COME LET US JOIN } <i>Thiman.</i>	Curwen.
FILL THOU MY LIFE }	
TO GOD, THE ALMIGHTY LORD, <i>C. Ernest Phillips.</i>	O.U.P.
THE LORD MY PASTURE, <i>Harris.</i>	Novello.
AT THY FEET, <i>Bach.</i>	Stainer & Bell.
ALLELUIA, HEARTS TO HEAVEN (Easter), Unison with Descant, <i>Stanton.</i>	O.U.P.
CHRIST BEING RAISED (Easter), 3 or 4 part, <i>E. T. Cook.</i>	O.U.P.
O COME, YE SERVANTS, <i>Tye.</i>	Stainer & Bell.
COME YE FAITHFUL, <i>Thatcher.</i>	O.U.P.
PRAISE (Unison), <i>Dyson.</i>	Arnold.
SONG OF PRAISE, <i>Dunhill.</i>	Arnold.
DROP DOWN YE HEAVENS (trebles only), <i>Statham.</i>	O.U.P.
BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART, <i>Walford Davies.</i>	Novello.
SING PRAISE TO GOD, <i>Bach.</i>	O.U.P. for the Church Music Society.
ALL GLORY, LAUD AND HONOUR, <i>Bach.</i>	O.U.P. for the Church Music Society.
JESU, JOY OF MAN'S DESIRING, <i>Bach.</i>	O.U.P. for the Church Music Society.
LORD, FOR THY TENDER MERCY'S SAKE, <i>Hilton.</i>	O.U.P. for the Church Music Society.
PREVENT US, O LORD, <i>Parry.</i>	O.U.P. for the Church Music Society.
RESPONSES AT MORNING AND EVENING PRAYER (Sarum).	O.U.P. for the Church Music Society.
THE LITANY SET TO THE CHANT OF THE SARUM PROCESSIONAL.	O.U.P. for the Church Music Society.
THE PARISH PSALTER (ed. <i>Nicholson.</i>)	Faith Press.

ADDRESSES OF MUSIC PUBLISHERS

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FAITH PRESS, Tufton St., S.W. 1.	
NOVELLO, Wardour St., W. 1.	STAINER AND BELL, Berners St., W. 1.