



Chair's Update January 2023



Federation of Cathedral Old Choristers' Associations

Come and celebrate something big

The 12th century was a frantic time for building places of worship to the glory of God. Many of our cathedrals and churches lay claim to coming into existence during this time. This year it is the turn of my home church and the place where I sang for 40 years as a treble and tenor. the Collegiate Church of St Mary, Warwick, celebrates the 900th anniversary of its founding and also that of its choir. I am thrilled, honoured and excited beyond words that the Federation will be holding its Annual Festival this year, in Warwick, as part of the celebrations and I do hope you will be joining us.



Attached with this newsletter you will find the formal invitation to attend the Festival from the Director of Music at St Mary's, Oliver Hancock, together with the booking form and details of how to enrol for the events of the weekend. You can use this [link](#) to book on-line, which is the preferred method, but you can also email or post your booking. Whichever way suits you best, do please book early as there is limited space at the banquet.

A full weekend of entertainment awaits you in Warwick in September. In addition to Choral Evensong, a fish and chip supper and Choral Compline on Friday, on Saturday there is a guided tour and talk to introduce you to St Mary's, the Church of Treasures, an organ recital given by St George's Chapel, Windsor Assistant Director of Music, Luke Bond and of course, the Festival Banquet, which is being held in the stately surroundings of the 18th century Court House.

Warwick is a pretty medieval market town with plenty on offer to encourage you to visit. It is the home of one of the finest medieval castles in the country and Robert Dudley's, Lord Leicester Hospital should have reopened to visitors by the time of the Festival after significant renovations. Accommodation is limited in the centre of town but there should be sufficient if booked early. A list of suggestions is include in the invitation.

Unlike many of the choirs with which our members are linked, St Mary's draws its choristers from local schools in both the private and public sectors. This doesn't detract from the quality of music delivered as part of the worship in the church or in concert. This is evidenced by the frequency the BBC invite St Mary's to broadcast Choral Evensong on Radio 3 and other services and will be doing so in October – for the second time this year, by its cannon of recordings which have achieved critical acclaim and its performances in other places, both in the UK and abroad. Many past Directors of Music - including Paul Trepte (St Edmundsbury and Ely) who with his wife, Sally, will be our guest speakers at the banquet - and Assistants have gone onto significant appointments and many choristers have forged professional musical careers.

For those of us who have been - and still are - involved with music making at St Mary's, know Warwick to be a special place and hope that you will join us in September to experience some of its magic.

A crowning glory



Only a short time ago we were swept away by the glorious pomp and ceremony of the coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla and, above all, by the wonderful service delivered by Westminster Abbey. During the day of the coronation, I came across the following which had been reposted by a friend on Facebook. I regret that neither I or they know by whom it was originally posted

but I reproduce it here, without apology or editing because I think it expresses, to the letter, what we feel about choral music in liturgy and why it is so important to us. If you know who wrote it, do let me know.

Tomorrow, The King will be crowned.

As part of the day's events, there are no sporting competitions. We will not celebrate with athletic prowess, though there is much of that in this country to celebrate.

The King has not commissioned new literary works in honour of the occasion, even with the wealth of talent in the writing community. There are no - as yet - films to mark the occasion, cinematic genius writ royal, despite BAFTA's recognition of our film industry's remarkable output. What the country and the world will find at the heart of tomorrow's liturgy is music. Twelve new pieces of music have been dreamed into existence, and will be presented to the world. Yes, there may be easy targets for derision among musicians (I'm looking at you, Andrew) but when the world tunes in out of mild curiosity at what the small island floating away from Europe is doing this weekend, with circumstantial pomp, it will see a country that focuses on, and celebrates music.

Nearly half of the new commissions are sacred choral music. A Welsh Kyrie by Paul Mealar, a Gospel Acclamation (featuring a gospel choir - I see what they did there) by Debbie Wiseman, an anthem for Queen Camilla by Andrew Lloyd Webber, a Sanctus by Roxanna Panufnik, and an Agnus Dei by Tarik O'Regan. The work done by the composers in creating these works will echo round the Abbey with the time and energy and expertise of singers and musicians performing them. This speaks not only to the many hours of preparation for this specific service, but also to the countless time spent bringing each and every musician to the default high standard that such an occasion as a Coronation can be met, yes, with awe at the majesty of the event, but with absolute professionalism. Professionalism from the oldest lay clerk (who is going to retire a very happy person) to the youngest, freshest, most cherubic chorister, who is about to live the story with which they will bore their grandchildren.

And, at the very start of the service, after the choir has sung Parry's I was glad, but before anyone else speaks - not the Dean of Westminster, not the Archbishop of Canterbury, not The King himself - one still small voice will ring through the Abbey: a chorister's. For one moment, the entire world will focus on a representative of our world - this sacred choral music world we inhabit and love so much. And then for the rest of the service the choir will do what they do every day: peerless singing of world-class music. They do this at what will be the most important event of their lives until the next one.

That next most important event will be the next regular everyday, garden variety, weekday Evensong. Because, and this is the kicker, they are all important. The music you are singing is, at that point you are singing it, the single most important thing you are doing. For a short time tomorrow, a light shines on choral music. The world will hear this music that we know and love and, because it will be part of the day's peculiarities, they might not think twice about the music they hear. Or maybe - just maybe - a child somewhere will hear the music, and be hit with that same gut punch we were, when they realise that the thing they need to be is right there in front of them: on the screen, wearing a cassock and an itchy ruff.

Here's to the choristers, lay clerks, organists, conductors, composers - and all the rest who tomorrow will show the world that when, in our music, God is glorified, we glimpse a moment of heaven.

Vivat Rex Carolus!

Compliance with governance

If you were at last year's AGM held as part of the Annual Festival or read my piece in last year's Once a Chorister magazine, you will know that the Federation had an issue with the Archbishop of Canterbury's continuance as our Patron. We were advised that he was unable to maintain his relationship with us as we lacked a safeguarding policy. After much discussion and advice provided by others, the Executive Committee resolved to write a policy, which is now available on our website. The question remains as to whether we need a safeguarding policy, other than everyone else has one, and what should be included in it. We borrowed and edited a policy from another organisation which we felt best fitted our needs, but we have no idea if it has any effect. Any feedback would be helpful.

When I asked what member Associations were doing, from the few responses I received, most seem to rely on the policy of the Cathedral/chapel etc. to which their association is related, whilst others had no idea what might be required of them and have gone away to consider further.

I understand that the Church of England may have issued new measures to ensure all organisations associated with Cathedrals are governed by the policies of the Cathedral. I have received nothing, formally, from the CofE and, to my knowledge, the Federation has received nothing.

If you are able to shed any light on any of this or would like to share how your Association manages its governance, legal status and policies, I am sure others would find an open discussion very enlightening.

To do list!

1. We are still seeking new members for the Executive Committee
2. We are still seeking offers to host future Annual Festivals
3. Now is the time to start thinking about articles for the next issue of Once a Chorister magazine due out in December 2023. Copy deadline – end of October

Nick Hodges
Chair



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You are receiving this newsletter because either we have you on our database as the contact person for your Association or we have had some contact with you personally i.e. in the "Meet the Chairman" sessions. I would like to continue to write to you but if you do not wish to receive further communications from me, please reply to the email to which this newsletter was appended with REMOVE in the subject line. Contributions to any discussions mentioned in the newsletter may be sent to me, Nick Hodges, at the email address shown: or to the Honorary Secretary at secretary@fcoca.org.uk.