



The ENGLISH ANTHEM COLLECTION: 1

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alto

To ascribe the rise of the English anthem to the political and religious changes associated with the Reformation is far too simple. Though the emphasis on the vernacular in the liturgy is new and overwhelming, the musical cross-currents related to the composition and provenance of those works grouped together as ‘anthems’ are both complex and interrelated. There is a risk of placing too much emphasis on the Reformation itself: many of the stylistic experiments, interchanges and advances in the later 16th century English anthem are part of primarily musical and aesthetic changes. They owe their origin to factors that are international and transcend the barriers of sacred and secular: they are as much fruits of the late Renaissance as fruits of the English Reformation.

The liturgical placement of the anthem is precisely specified in the *Book of Common Prayer*: it follows the third collect, and as such is an addition following rather than an entity within the offices of Morning and Evening Prayer. In this it corresponds closely to medieval practice where for at least six hundred years before the Reformation additional antiphons, suffrages, memorials and commemorations had been appended to the principal offices especially in cathedral, collegiate and monastic churches. The best known of these earlier antiphons (or anthems) are those sung in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary at the end of either Vespers or Compline, and in England there was a long tradition of polyphonic performance of such ‘votive antiphons’ which reached a musical peak in the late 15th and earlier 16th centuries with works whose virtuosity (and insularity) corresponds closely with the spectacular achievements of late perpendicular English architecture.

The liturgical precedent for the English anthem in pre-Reformation practice is matched by musical factors. Although Cranmer’s remarks related to the setting of the English litany (1545), and isolated injunctions from cathedrals such as Lincoln (1548), imply that the introduction of the vernacular into the liturgy was coupled with a directive for composers to set the texts in an easily intelligible, syllabic style, the musical evidence is more complex. Undoubtedly composers in England (and elsewhere in Europe) turned from devotional texts to setting biblical passages and especially extracts from the book of Psalms. Not only did the same composers set both English and Latin texts (in the case of Byrd, Tallis and others, throughout their lives), but many of the stylistic traits are common to settings in both languages. Though syllabic settings of English anthems are associated with the Edwardian period there are earlier Latin masses by both Tallis and Taverner that employ a similar experimental style, and later Latin works (e.g. Tallis’s *O nata lux* 1575) in the same manner. The syllabic style is represented in this anthology by a comparably late example:

Farmer's setting of the Lord's Prayer versified by Sternhold and Hopkins from East's volume of metrical psalms (1592).

A number of these works were better suited to domestic devotions rather than to the public liturgy. Farmer's *Lord's Prayer* is one example, and it may be that Sheppard's *Our Father*, set in motet style at considerable length, was used as an instrumental work on the evidence of some of the sources in which it is found. The macaronic text of *Nolo mortem peccatoris* suggests a domestic context, possibly related to the tradition of the 15th century carol: its ranges and harmonic archaisms have led to speculation that it is an early work, possibly too early to be by Morley (the unique source is Myriell's *Tristitiae Remedium* 1616).

Secular song influenced the early anthem: Tallis's *Purge me, O Lord* occurs in Mulliner's organ book (16th century) with the title *Fond youth is a bubble*. Both this and Farrant's *Hide not thou thy face* adopt the formal outline ABB, typical of contemporary English part-songs. Features of musical texture and vocal declamation were taken over into verse anthem from the consort song (normally scored for solo voice and four viols). Byrd's *Teach me, O Lord* is an early and straightforward example of a festal Psalm (with Gloria) set in this manner: Morley's *Out of the deep* is a fully fledged verse anthem which demonstrates the assurance of late Elizabethan musical expressiveness in this genre.

By far the most important compositional device of the late Renaissance was the development of the technique of polyphonic composition based on successive points of imitation. It allowed composers of vocal music to shape musical points that reflected the accent, outline and affect of each phrase of the text they set, but more importantly it allowed them to generate ongoing abstract musical composition free of scaffolds (e.g. cantus firmus). The roots of this imitative style are found in the Low Countries composers from the time of Josquin and it is especially suited to the motet. Significantly, perhaps, one of the earliest English anthems to attempt this technique is by a Netherlander who worked for many years at the court of King Henry VIII: Philip van Wilder's *Blessed art Thou* is a cautiously imitative setting of a metrical version of Psalm 128. Far more confident and expansive is Tye's *I will exalt Thee* which is set in two separate parts and employs elementary word-painting ('descend into the pit') and a greater variety of vocal texture, especially in the latter part of the anthem.

Tye's two-part organisation was a common feature of contemporary Latin motets both in England and abroad, and the motet provided a more direct source for English anthems: a number were adapted to be sung to English words. Two examples of these contrafacta are included: **Byrd's *O Lord, turn Thy wrath*** with its second part *Bow thine ear* (which has continued to be a favourite over the centuries) is a direct translation of *Ne irascaris / Civitas sancti tui* from *Cantiones Sacrae* (1589), a penitential motet which refers unashamedly to the plight of Roman Catholics in Elizabethan England. In the case of **Tallis** there is no textual correlation between *O Sacrum convivium* (*Cantiones Sacrae* 1575) and *I call and cry*, but there are indications in the musical setting that unusually the English version may have existed first.

The stylistic sources and guises of the early English anthem are varied and disparate. By the end of the 16th century they had fused to provide the basis of the great blossoming witnessed in the work of Byrd, Gibbons, Tomkins, Weelkes and their contemporaries in the first quarter of the 17th century. Nevertheless, the first maturity can be seen not only in a work like **Morley's *Out of the deep*** but on a small scale in **Tallis's** exquisitely shaped *O Lord, give Thy Holy Spirit* or more expansively and extrovertly in **Byrd's** recently rediscovered *Exalt thyself, O God* with its confident imitative motives and bold changes of texture. .

As this anthology moves on, the emphasis is on anthems intended for use in regular choral services in cathedrals and collegiate foundations, rather than on occasional music. As such, the collection emphasises full anthems, and excludes those with accompaniment for ensemble or orchestra. Much of the repertory included here has continued to be performed by choirs since the time it was first written and circulated, in spite of changes in musical style and taste.

The high point of Renaissance polyphonic composition was achieved in England in the early years of the 17th century, and **William Byrd** is the father-figure. His setting of *Sing joyfully* probably dates from the late 16th Century, but its clear formal articulation and bold declamation of the text show a modernism that foreshadows the 17th Century. A more serious music style is apparent in the setting of *O Lord, in Thy wrath* by **Orlando Gibbons**, while *O Lord, I lift my heart* is a miniature in the part-song tradition. The madrigalian style apparent in some of Byrd's writing is even more striking in the music of **Thomas Weelkes**. Dramatic power and rhythmic energy exude from *Hosanna to the son of David*. Of sterner, but no less vibrant stuff, is *O Lord arise*. Two

extremes of **Tomkins**' style are included here: David's lament for Saul and Jonathan *When David mourned* with its careful declamation and superbly judged climax, and the jubilant *O praise the lord*, a contrapuntal tour de force for 12 independent voice-parts.

The Civil War and the Commonwealth entirely disrupted church music. At the Restoration, the King encouraged new styles from Italy and France, but a synthesis of old and new can be seen in the works of John Blow and his pupil (and colleague) Henry Purcell. The influence of the old imitative tradition is evident in **Blow's** *My God, my God*, and in **Purcell's** *Hear my prayer*. **Purcell's** *I was glad*, and *Remember not Lord, our offences* show two sides of the more modern declamatory style. The imitative and declamatory idioms come together in *O God, hast Thou cast us out*, an anthem on a larger scale in three distinct sections (the second verse). **William Croft's** *God is gone up* is also in three sections (the second verse) and attempts the same synthesis of styles.

In *Lord, let me know mine end*, **Maurice Greene** may adopt the walking continuo bass typical of so many Italian opera arias, but he uses it for the background to highly expressive, contrapuntal choral writing framing a central treble duet. **Boyce's** *O where shall wisdom be found?* follows in the tradition of the substantial verse anthems of the 17th Century, and pre-figures the large-scale anthems of Samuel Sebastian Wesley. No less striking is the polyphonic setting of *O Lord, look down* by **Jonathan Battishill**, with its growing passion and intensity.

Then, a new style: **Thomas Attwood** studied with Mozart, and a combination of the periodicity of the Classical idiom, and the regular phrasing induced by metrical hymn texts can be heard in his setting of *Come, Holy Ghost*.

Much scorn has been poured on 19th century English music, and on English church music above all. Its sentimentality and its spinelessness, its dependence on foreign models and its lack of taste have been ready targets. But it was an important period in its own right. For the Church of England as a whole there were new directions, be they Tractarian or Evangelical. Church buildings were erected and restored at a rate unknown since the 15th century. And within the music of the church there were less startling but important changes too. In the first half of the century the English organ which had changed little since the early 17th century began to respond to foreign influence. Pedals were added to many existing instruments in cathedrals, and new organs were conceived on a far larger scale and in a more Germanic style. The spread of cheap music printing through the

house of Novello brought sheet music to many churches. Choral endeavours flourished in many quarters. *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, chanted psalms, and plainsong, were explored with zeal in parish churches as well as cathedrals.

S S Wesley wrote on a large scale, revealing the influence of foreign composition. Behind this, there is not only the English oratorio tradition inherited from Handel but the more contemporary impact of Spohr and Mendelssohn. Both anthems included here were composed at Hereford. *The Wilderness* was written for the opening of the new organ, and the bass aria is a *tour de force* with its virtuoso pedal part. Around it the anthem assumes the scale of a small cantata.

Ouseley's writing looks back to an earlier age. The largely homophonic texture of both anthems heard here is typical of his period, but the use of harmony and especially of suspension is reminiscent of late Renaissance music. **Stainer** may have lacked the technical control of his near contemporary Stanford (whose music opens Volume Two of this collection), but there is undoubted power in his setting for double choir and organ of *I saw the Lord*, and evidence of his practical knowledge of choral effect.

Whatever the flaws of the repertory of 19th century church music, there are striking moments in many of the best works, and overall there is a body of music that displays attention to formal planning, compositional craft and careful declamation of text. This is a repertory that belongs to a Church that is building on solid and optimistic foundations, the product of composers with a strong pedagogic element in their careers.

The unaccompanied partsong was widely cultivated in Victorian England, and it forms the starting point for the unaccompanied anthems by Parry and Stanford. **Charles Wood's *Hail gladdening light*** is scored for two four-part choirs, and depends on spatial antiphony. Wood's accompanied anthems are both conceived on a relatively contained scale. Both display the assured craft of a composer working in the period after Brahms. **Stanford's *The Lord is my shepherd*** is a larger work written some 30 years earlier (1886). It too bears the influence of the Viennese symphonic tradition.

The 20th century was a period of rapid musical change, and – for all its conservatism – English

music reflected that change. Though there was nothing avant-garde to be found in the repertory pre-1960 of this anthology, there are important signs of modernism. Alongside this is the tradition and craft of choral writing most easily identified in the unaccompanied works of the organist-composers – Bairstow, Stewart, Harris and Rose.

The background of chant and, more generally, of modal melody, is important in a number of works included here. The improvement in choral singing in the 20th century and the desire to be free of the organ are also apparent: a large proportion of these pieces are unaccompanied. A wistful lyricism is present in a number of the works, notably those by Ireland, Vaughan Williams, Finzi, Holst, Howells and even Walton. More robust are those by Bairstow, Stewart, Joubert, Rose, Britten and (in a restrained context) Harris. To see post-war works by Joubert and Britten in this second category may be no surprise, but it is significant that this more positive aesthetic is adopted by the organist-composers.

Cutting across the divisions of style, idiom, resource and aesthetic is the choice of texts. There are three categories: translated hymns, 17th century texts (prose and verse), and biblical texts. Of the hymns translated from Latin, Bairstow set 19th century translations, but **Vaughan Williams** *Whitsunday Hymn* is one of a group of Coverdale settings, and **Joubert** set a 16th century version of the Compline hymn *Te lucis*. The number of 17th century texts reflects the attention accorded to this period of English literature at this time (1900-60). Both Finzi and Holst set poems by Henry Vaughan, Stewart chose George Herbert and Harris the prose prayer by John Donne. Of the biblical texts, **Walton** used the *Song of Songs* (a ready source for a wedding anthem) for *Set me as a Seal*, Ireland turned to St John, and Britten drew on the antiphon for St Peter's day (a compilation of texts). Both Howells and Rose turned to the Psalms (Howells to Psalm 42, Rose to Psalm 149 but in the Authorized Version).

There is not space here to discuss the music itself in detail, but it seems important to single out one composer for comment. Set against the international stature of Vaughan Williams, Holst and Britten, it is easy to underestimate the modernism of Howells. Because he has written so much for the church it has been easy to pass over his contribution to the exploration of musical expression in England. Howell's understanding and treatment of voices, organ, modal melody and harmony, and acoustic are widely influential and original.

As a collection, the early 20th century anthems seem distant from the liturgy (all the music stands up regardless of a liturgical context), let alone from the turmoil that affected the church (from the failure of the 1929 Prayer Book to the human devastation of two World Wars). That detachment seems to be a reflection of the age as a whole rather than of the music. But beneath this surface appearance there is a discernable and deep humanity, and human spirituality. In a number of instances the spirit seems religious rather than specifically Christian, and that too reflects the age and some of the composers.

The last 13 pieces in this anthology of the English Anthem were all composed post 1960. It seems important that music of our own time and generation should be represented in its own right. Historically this is also an important time: within the church there have been far-reaching changes in the forms and styles of worship, and several new departures are evident in music written for the church.

Placed in a wider context, the trends in composition in the English-speaking denominations seem to be encouraging, even though the choral institutions themselves are subject to constant scrutiny and questioning relating to their function and worth. Throughout Europe the zenith of church patronage passed in the 17th century. Since that time the composers have (in general) devoted less of their time to liturgical composition. In England the Commonwealth period (1649-60) effectively broke the continuity of liturgical music with the disbanding of choral foundation and the suppression of much music in worship.

The flourish of activity that followed the Restoration of the monarchy (1660) was largely confined to Royal foundations in London. In England and throughout Europe the general preference has been for a conservative idiom in church music, often deterring those composers who were or are active Christians from writing for the liturgy. This has been particularly the case in the 19th and 20th centuries, with one striking exception: Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992) was a composer who had been at the forefront of modernism, and in all his music Christian theology and mysticism were ever-present forces.

There has, of course, been other religious music that has prospered in the Christian church (notably hymnody in the broadest sense). But, in general, each wave of liturgical reform has challenged

and weakened the place of music in worship since the 16th century. And the period since 1960 has been one of the most turbulent times of liturgical reform since the Reformation, with revisions of rites and language as well as of theological and pastoral emphasis. In carrying out these revisions, the displacement of 'art music' for trained musicians and singers has been widespread: in some Christian denominations texts and music used for centuries has become redundant almost at a stroke. Much that has replaced the 'old' music has pastoral vigour but often lacks intrinsic worth: it draws frequently on secular idioms but often in a watered-down, derivative manner.

The same criticism may be levelled at some of the traditional church music of the past century or more, but in recent years there have been more optimistic signs. Part of the challenge of liturgical reform has been that established choirs and musicians have questioned and revalued their work and role. Though there are fewer well-established church choirs, even in England, many are technically more competent than in the past. Some clergy have been enlightened in fostering the contemporary arts and music in the church; and some composers have responded.

Jonathan Harvey is a contemporary English composer of international standing, well acquainted with avant-garde techniques of composition. He is also a Christian with strong commitment to the place of music and the arts in the spirituality of the church. During the 1970s he formed an association with Winchester Cathedral (especially with the then Bishop, Dean and Organist) which led to a series of commissions. Winchester Cathedral Choir, at the same time, increased its technical capacity to sing advanced music. Some of the fruits of all this may be heard in two works written for Winchester: *Come, Holy Ghost* and *The Tree*. *Come, Holy Ghost* (1984) is a series of variations on the Pentecost hymn, and demonstrates important features of Harvey's style. Its use of a plainsong hymn melody provides modal stability (with no compromise in the harmonic language); it is written from the middle of the texture outwards; and it employs aleatoricism in the last main section. It is a taxing work with up to 16 independent vocal lines, and yet it is both lyrical and spiritual. By contrast, *The Tree* (1981) is scored for boys' voices and organ: only in the last phrases does the vocal line divide. Here again there is lyricism, but within the framework of a 12-note chromatic pitch series.

The Winchester connection also led to **John Tavener's** *Hymn to the Mother of God* (1987). Since he moved from the Roman Catholic to the Orthodox Church, Tavener's music has been affected

strongly in both aesthetic and idiom by the Byzantine tradition. This short hymn demonstrates these features. The static quality of the piece gives a sense of timelessness, and of profound, but intimate spirituality. The idiom of harmonized choral chanting is taken over from the Orthodox Church, and Tavener achieves the specific effect in this piece by superimposing the same music sung by each of the two choirs in canon.

A Winchester association persists in **Harper's *Salve regina***. This was written to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the death of the founder of Magdalen College, Oxford (William Waynflete, Bishop of Winchester and Chancellor of England) and was sung by Magdalen College Choir at his chantry in Winchester Cathedral in July 1986. It is the only work in this modern group with a text entirely in Latin, and makes use of the plainsong melody and tropes found in the medieval *Use of Salisbury* (the then modification of the Roman rite). It is included as a reminder that the original anthem (or antiphon) was a feature of that pre-Reformation Latin Rite, a song sung in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, most often at the end of Vespers or Compline. Its popularity in England led to numerous polyphonic choral settings in the 15th and earlier 16th centuries. And of all the texts sung, *Salve regina* was the most common and well loved. *Ubi caritas* (1988) was also written for Magdalen College Choir. It is a macaronic setting: the refrain of the plainsong is sung in Latin, but the verses are sung (and spoken) in English. The whole work is a decoration of a chord of F sharp major. These two works are a reminder that much of the choral repertory of the church throughout the ages has been composed by organists and choral directors for the resources available to them, and for the liturgy of the institutions they serve. Much has gone by the wayside, but the best circulates and survives.

The remaining music is by established composers, and reflects an idiom especially characteristic of the 1960s. By comparison with the underlying lyricism and consonance and the overlaying of voices and textures evident in the works discussed so far, the other works tend to emphasize clarity of line, have more forward drive, and a grittiness that even tends towards the aggressive. In some ways these features echo the brutalism of some progressive architecture of the period.

Lennox Berkeley's setting of John Donne's sonnet *Thou hast made me* was written in 1960. Though Berkeley had a preference for Latin sacred texts and made no secret of his regret at the passing of the old Latin Rite of the Roman Catholic Church, he composed a number of English

anthems of which this is one of the best. The driving, scherzo-like middle section is flanked by more wistful writing, so characteristic of Berkeley, with powerful moments of climax.

Kenneth Leighton wrote a great deal of church music for both English and American choirs, some of it deliberately functional (like the Communion Service in D), some very demanding. The moving, unaccompanied setting of *Drop, drop slow tears* comes from the choral cantata *Crucifixus pro nobis* (1961). *Give me the wings of faith* (1962) is one of his most widely sung anthems. It demonstrates his use of strong vocal lines (often paired), his organ writing, and the bold harmonic language with the frequent use of chords based on fourths.

Sir Richard Rodney Bennett is an eclectic composer and performer. The three settings of verses by Donne are comparatively early works (1965), but demonstrate the best of his highly disciplined style, here austere and yet compelling, well suited to the serious mood, and sensitive to the high literary quality of the texts.

The importance of **Howells'** restrained and individual modernism is argued above. In his later years his style changed a good deal, becoming more angular and forceful. Though he lost none of the sense of line or mood, the expression seems less languid, more astringent. The driving metre of *Thee will I love* (1970) is especially striking – far removed from the reflective mood of *Like as the hart*. And *Come my soul* (1978) is a significant example of his late writing for unaccompanied voices; and a telling text to be set by a man in his eighties.

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Magdalen College Choir

Magdalen College is one of the oldest choral foundations in England, with an unbroken tradition stretching back to 1480, Magdalen College itself having been founded by William Waynflete in 1458. The Choir retains much the same shape as it had in the 15th century, with 16 boy Choristers (educated at Magdalen College School) and 12 adult Academical Clerks (undergraduates of the College). The current Director of Chapel Music, Daniel Hyde, still retains the ancient Latin title, *Informator Choristarum*. The first *Informator* was appointed in 1481, and many notable musicians have since held this post, including John Sheppard, Daniel Purcell (brother of Henry), Sir John Stainer, Sir William McKie, Bernard Rose and Bill Ives.

Late 20th Century alumni of the Choir include Ivor Novello, Dudley Moore, Harry Christophers (Leader of The Sixteen), John Mark Ainsley (soloist and member of Pro Cantione Antiqua and Robin Blaze (star treble and later Conductor) . Participating in these recordings made in the 1980s as well as Robin Blaze are other choristers and undergraduates who have gone on to have distinguished singing careers, amongst them Paul Agnew, and Roderick Williams

The Choir's principal role is singing the daily Chapel services, at 6 pm every evening (except Mondays) in Full Term, and every Sunday morning in Term at 11 am. The repertoire of settings for Evensong and the Mass ranges from music by John Sheppard (*Informator Choristarum* in the 16th century) to modern works, including those of Grayston Ives, who is a distinguished composer of sacred music. The Choir also sings at special occasions in College throughout the year, including the famous *May Morning* celebrations, an ancient tradition dating back to 1509. Beyond the Chapel, the Choir records regularly and performs in concerts and broadcasts to appreciative audiences all over the world.

These anthem recordings were made when **John Harper** was organist, *Informator Choristarum*, tutor and fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, posts he held from 1981-90. Before that he was director of music at St Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham, director of the Edington Music Festival, and lecturer in music at Birmingham University. After Oxford he became Professor of Music at Bangor University, where he now heads the International Centre for Sacred Music Studies. From 1998 to 2007 he was director general of The Royal School of Church Music. His work has been recognised by Pope Paul VI, who made the award *Benemerenti* in 1978, and by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who admitted him to the *Lambeth degree of DMus* in 2010.

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