

# Hyfrydol



No. 123

St Swithun's Choir e-newsletter

August 2024

## This month

We shall be “Celebrating the Psalms” this month. Peter Hamilton has put together another varied program of psalms and psalm-related and psalm-inspired music for our congregation’s inspiration. The program includes a couple of real Psalms sung to Anglican chants, congregational hymns paraphrased from identified Psalms, spoken readings, and anthems built up around verses of Psalms. The evening will conclude with the regular High Tea put on by Choir members.



## July

We expanded our repertoire last month with one new hymn and two new anthems. The hymn is the subject of a separate item below. The anthems were:

- Malcolm Archer’s *Good Christians all rejoice and sing*;
- *O God, your goodness*. This is one of six poems by German poet Christian Gellert that were set to music by Ludwig van Beethoven.



## Elijah

We have written previously about Haydn’s *Nelson Mass*, the first half of this year’s Foundation Concert. The second half of the concert program will feature highlights from Felix Mendelssohn’s oratorio *Elijah*.

*Elijah* is based on the story of the prophet as it is told in the Old Testament Books of 1 and 2 Kings.

Very briefly, the prophet Elijah predicts a drought; punishment for those who worship the false God Baal. This includes Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab.

After Elijah calls upon God for help, Baal is proved to be a false god in very dramatic fashion. Elijah persuades the people to repent – and to kill Baal’s prophets. Their faith is rewarded with storm clouds and rain. But Jezebel is furious, and forces Elijah into exile.

Alone and helpless in the wilderness, Elijah is consoled first by angels and then, after a mighty storm, an earthquake and a fire, by God himself.

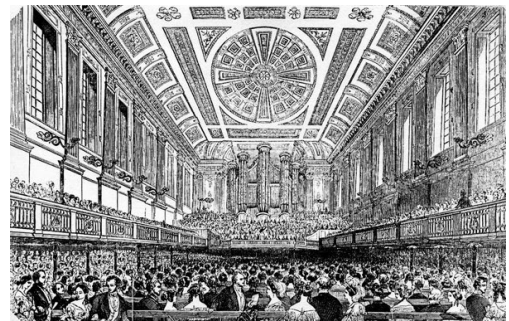
Following his trials, Elijah is whisked up to heaven in a fiery chariot. His return is prophesied, and the story ends with a profound reflection on the glory of God and a triumphant “Amen.”

It seems that Mendelssohn was very keen to produce the work after the success of his earlier oratorio, *St Paul*, which premiered in 1836. He worked with a couple of librettists over following years, but when the Birmingham Festival committee commissioned him to produce a new oratorio for a performance in 1846, he had the necessary incentive to finalise the work.

Two thousand people attended the premiere performance of *Elijah* in Birmingham’s Town Hall, with Mendelssohn himself conducting. There were close to 400 performers with an orchestra of 125 and a choir of 271 singers. All 60 altos were men; Mendelssohn in a letter would refer to the “bearded altos.”

To quote a review published in *The Times* shortly afterwards, “The last note of *Elijah* was drowned in a long-continued unanimous volley of plaudits, vociferous and deafening ... never was there a more complete triumph; never a more thorough and speedy recognition of a great work of art.”

**Mendelssohn conducting *Elijah* in Birmingham Town Hall**



The whole cantata takes over two hours, rather too long for our Foundation Concert. The selected highlights include part of the story from the Book of 1 Kings, and excerpts from the books of Joel, Deuteronomy, Exodus and Job, Psalms, Isaiah and Matthew.



**How shall I sing that majesty**

We introduced this hymn to the congregation last month. Being new to most, it was received with a mixture of emotions.

But the text is not new. It comes from a volume of poems published in 1683 by John Mason who was one of the earliest poetic hymn writers of the Church of England. Originally a priest of the Anglican church, he became a ‘dissenter,’ administering no sacraments and choosing to focus instead on preaching. One commentator wrote: “The frame of his spirit was so heavenly, his deportment so humble and obliging, his discourse of spiritual things so weighty, with such apt words and delightful air, that it charmed all that had any spiritual relish.”

He was Rector at Water-Stratford, not far from Oxford. One night, about a month before his death, he had a vision of the Lord Jesus, wearing on His head a glorious crown, and with a look of unutterable majesty in His face. Of this vision he spoke; and preached a sermon on the parable of the ten virgins which he called *The Midnight Cry*, in which he proclaimed the near approach of Christ’s Second Advent. A report spread that this Advent would take place at Water-Stratford itself, and crowds gathered there from the surrounding villages. Most extraordinary scenes occurred, singing and leaping and dancing. The excitement had scarcely died out when the old man passed away, still testifying that he had seen the Lord, and that it was time for the nation to tremble, and for Christians to trim their lamps. His last words were, “I am full of the loving kindness of the Lord.”

**Coe Fen**

Mason’s hymn originally had fourteen stanzas, but only four now remain. It contrasts God’s heavenly glory, splendour and majesty with the inadequacies and frailties of humanity. Its renewed popularity stems from its having been set to a tune composed by Ken Naylor while he was music master at The Leys School in Cambridge (1953-80). He named the tune *Coe Fen*. Coe Fen is the semi-rural meadowland open space between the school and the Cam River. The tune has since been described as “one of the outstanding hymn tunes of the 20th century.” We trust that the hymn’s popularity with the St Swithun’s congregation will build as we sing it more often.



**A note of thanks from Marcia**

Dear Choir,  
 Thank you for singing at the Huguenot Service recently. So many of you! Your beautiful music made a great contribution to the worship and I am very grateful indeed.  
 Love,

Marcia Cameron  
 25.6.24



**Choir Calendar for 2024**

Day	Date	Time	Location	Service/activity
Saturday	17 Aug	5 pm	Swiz	Celebrating the Psalms
Saturday	14 Sep	5 pm	Swiz	Evensong
Wednesday	25 Sep	6 pm	St James, King Street	Evensong
Saturday	26 Oct	7:30 pm	Swiz	Foundation Concert
Saturday	30 Nov	5 pm	Swiz	Advent Evensong
Monday	9 Dec	12:30 pm?	RNSH?	Carols
Sunday	22 Dec	9 am	Swiz	Lessons & carols
Tuesday	24 Dec	10 pm	Swiz	Christmas Eve
Wednesday	25 Dec	8:30 am	Swiz	Christmas Day

