



Hyfrydol



No. 128

St Swithun's Choir e-newsletter

February 2025

Welcome to a new year

The year commenced for the choir with a funeral towards the end of January, for Helen Booth.

We had a very good attendance at the first rehearsal – 28 choristers. Phil was in fine form and James Allington appeared to enjoy himself, and entertained us, on the organ. Louise was missing and no-one seemed to know where she was. We have had an email from her, from London, where she is staying with friends, singing in a local church choir, and competing at the Crystal Palace 5km run and winning a medal.

Looking back at 2024

We have never kept an account of all the hymns and anthems sung in a calendar year, but taking an average of an anthem, and four hymns each week, over 47 weeks, and the extra services, we can estimate over 50 anthems and more than 200 hymns. Some will have been repeated as the occasion demands, and there were occasions other than regular services where more anthems and more hymns were sung. It all adds up to an impressive list.

The list of extra services is made up of:

- Two Evensongs, one in Lent, the second in September;
- Five funerals, including that of our Patron, Allin Cousens;
- Our eleventh annual Swiz *Messiah* presentation,
- Our third annual *Celebrating the Psalms*,
- Our tenth Foundation concert

We have scoured the history books for a full list of past concerts:

- 2012 Choruses from Musical theatre
- 2013 Bach *Cantata No. 140*
- 2014 A Night at the Opera
- 2015 Haydn's *Creation*
- 2016 The Best of British
- 2017 Bach *Cantata No. 80* sung liturgically on a Sunday morning
- 2018 Magnificent Mozart
- 2019 Faure's *Requiem*
- (2020 & 2021 COVID)
- 2022 Brittain's *Ceremony of Carols*
- (2023 away in Salisbury)
- 2024 Haydn's *Nelson Mass* and Mendelssohn's *Elijah* excerpts

- Our umpteenth annual Huguenot service;
- A midweek Evensong at St James, King Street, in the city
- Our traditional Christmas lessons and carols presentation at the Gordon Quarter.

Some members of the travel committee put a lot of work into planning a 2025 choir trip to New Zealand. We had invitations to sing at cathedrals in Auckland, Wellington and Nelson in July. The days of dead time between gigs and the hesitancy of some members of the choir to commit lead to the plan being dropped.

What can we expect from 2025?

Despite our not proceeding with the New Zealand excursion, we have a busy program. Easter is late this year – Sunday 20 April (the latest possible date for Easter is 25 April; the last time it fell then was in 1943). Rehearsals for *Messiah* commence on Thursday 20 March. A few days before that, we have our Lenten Evensong service.

The draft program includes a weekend visit to Bathurst to sing services in the cathedral on a Sunday. We are also fishing for an invitation to sing at St Alban's church, Leura. St James' King Street would like to have us back again, and we shall be very happy to return there for one of their midweek Evensong services.

The Foundation Concert this year will be held in August. Phil has yet to decide what will be on the program. He has toyed with the idea of a Michael Tippett program, but more recently he has been thinking of Gilbert and Sullivan. Whatever he decides, it will be a challenge!

"Celebrating the Psalms" will feature again. No doubt Peter Hamilton will come up with a new set of psalm settings. You will see on the draft program at the end of this issue that "Celebrating the Psalms" is the program that we shall present at Swiz, and also take on tour beyond the parish.



Martin Luther on music

We are always very pleased to receive suggestions from readers about topics we might cover in Hyfrydol. For this one we can thank Lynne Bullock.

Luther himself, wrote:

"Music is a fair and lovely gift of God which has often wakened and moved me to the joy of preaching. St Augustine was troubled in conscience whenever he caught himself delighting in music, which he took to be sinful. He was a choice spirit, and were he living today would agree with us. I have no use for cranks who despise music, because it is a gift of God. Music drives away the Devil and makes people gay; they forget thereby all wrath, unchastity, arrogance, and the like. Next after theology I give to music the highest place and the greatest honour. I would not exchange what little I know of music for something great. Experience proves that next to the Word of God only music deserves to be extolled as the mistress and governess of the feelings of the human heart. We know that to the devil music is distasteful and insufferable. My heart bubbles up and overflows in response to music, which has so often refreshed me and delivered me from dire plague."



Luther (1483-1546) wrote hymn texts and also composed tunes. The hymn and the tune with which we are most familiar is No. 523 in *Hymns for Today's Church – A Mighty Fortress is Our God*. Of course, the version in HTC is a paraphrase by Michael Perry – *God is our fortress and our rock*.

Luther's hymn is based on some elements of Psalm 46, but it is not a full paraphrase. Luther himself offered this overview of the biblical text, some of which is reflected in his hymn:

"The 46th Psalm is a psalm of thanks, sung by the people of Israel because of the mighty deeds of God. He had protected and saved the city of Jerusalem, in which was His dwelling, against all the rage and the fury of all the kings and the nations and preserved their peace against all warfare and weapons. And, in the manner of the Scriptures, the psalm calls the character of the city a little stream that shall not run dry, as opposed to the great rivers, seas, and oceans of the heathen—their great kingdoms, principalities, and domains—that shall dry up and disappear.

"We, on the other hand, sing this psalm to praise God for being with us. He miraculously preserves His Word and Christendom against the gates of hell, against the rage of the devil, the rebellious spirits, the world, the flesh, sin, death. Our little spring of water is also a living fountain, while their puddles, pools, and ponds become foul, malodorous, and dry."

Psalm 46 (NIV)

- ¹ God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.
- ² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
- ³ though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.
- ⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells.
- ⁵ God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day.

⁶ Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts.

⁷ The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

⁸ Come and see what the Lord has done, the desolations he has brought on the earth.

⁹ He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.

¹⁰ He says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

¹¹ The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

The text

Luther's text, being in German, is not much use to us. There are many English translations. A familiar one is by Frederick Hedge:

A mighty fortress is our God,
a bulwark never failing;
our helper he, amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
does seek to work us woe;
his craft and power are great,
and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal.

The tune

Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott, ein gute Wehr und Waffen
Er hilft uns frei aus aller Not, die uns die Zeit hat gebracht
Und were die Welt viel teufelreich, und wolt uns gar verfluchen
So sprach der Herr zu sich, so solt uns die gelieben
Der alt böse Feind, mit dem er ist nicht gemein, ~~der~~³ Er übermüht
Der Feind diese Welt, wie saure er sich solt, thut er
Und wolt list, sein grausam Ungehug ist, auf ed ist nicht sein Lob
Und doch macht, dz macht er ist Unrecht, im rechten dem in folgen,

Listen on:

<https://youtu.be/ui7QMtXBLgY>

(Ctrl then left click – skip the ad.)

In viewing this early printing of the hymn, an important aspect to note is the style of the melody. The original shape had a dance-like, freely rhythmic quality. The earliest printings did not use bar lines. The cut-time indicator in the figures above did not mean 2/2, it was an indicator of a measured, duple-feel tempo, being roughly twice as quick (or employing notes at double value) as music marked with a C, or it was sometimes used more generically as a standard sign for this type of mensural notation. The example above is notated on a C-clef, with a flat sign indicating the B-flat of an F scale.

As the concepts of meter and bar groupings took greater hold in the world of musical composition, church musicians adapted this melody to follow suit, eventually settling on its more recognizable march-like style with even rhythms. This form of the melody was standardized by the time J.S. Bach (1685–1750) used it in his Cantata BWV 80.

We actually sang the hymn to Luther’s original tune, years ago when the RSCM midwinter dinner came to Swiz:

195 EIN FESTE BURG 8 7 . 8 7 . 5 5 5 6 . 7 *M. Luther 1483-1546 (1528)*

Psalm 46

1

A mighty fortress is our God,
 A trusty shield and weapon,
 Our faithful helper in all need,
 Our stay, whate'er may happen.
 The old evil foe
 Now means deadly woe;
 Deep guile and great might
 Are his dread arms in fight;
 On earth is not his equal.

2

With might of ours can naught be done,
 Soon were our fall effected;
 But for us fights the valiant one
 Whom God Himself elected.
 Ask ye: Who is this?
 Christ Jesus it is,
 Of Sabaoth Lord,
 And there's none other God;
 He holds the field for ever.

Just a little easier to read!



Draft Choir Calendar for 2025

Day	Date	Time	Location	Service/activity
Thu	30 Jan	8 pm	Swiz	Rehearsals recommence
Mon	10 Feb	10 am	Swiz	David Duschene funeral
Sat	1 Mar	7 pm	Swiz	Choir social evening
Sat	15 Mar	5 pm	Swiz	Lenten Evensong
Thu	20 Mar	7:30 pm	Swiz	Messiah rehearsals commence
Sat	12 Apr		Swiz	Messiah presentation
Fri	18 Apr	9 am	Swiz	Good Friday service
Sun	20 Apr	9 am	Swiz	Easter Day Communion
Sat	31 May	5 pm	Swiz	Evensong
Sat	14 Jun		All Saints, Bathurst	Celebrating Psalms
Sun	15 Jun		All Saints, Bathurst	Two services
Sun	22 Jun		Swiz	Huguenot annual service
Fri	1 Aug			RSCM Midwinter Dinner
Sat	23 Aug		Swiz	Foundation concert
Sat	13 Sept	5 pm	Swiz	Evensong
Wed	24 Sep	6:15 pm	St James, King Street	Evensong
Sat	18 Oct		Swiz	Celebrating Psalms
Sun	26 Oct		St Albans, Leura	Celebrating Psalms
Sat	29 Nov	5 pm	Swiz	Advent Evensong
Sun	21 Dec	9 am	Swiz	Lessons & carols
Wed	24 Dec	10 pm	Swiz	Christmas Eve service
Thu	25 Dec	9 am	Swiz	Christmas Day service

Most of the fixtures after Easter in the above table are yet to be confirmed.

