Upbeat

The Newsletter of
the London Gallery Quire
No.13 March 2016

Gallery Quire Sings In Gallery

By Alan Franks

The London Gallery Quire perfomed a programme of Christmas music at the National Portrait Gallery, on December 18th 2015.

This was different. Not the music, drawn as always from the Quire's ever-expanding repertoire, which at the time of writing stands at five hundred and twenty seven; no, it was the venue, which is not so much a place of worship as a temple of visual art.

It was a prestigious booking in what has become a vibrant centre not only of portraiture but also music and performing arts from a wide range of styles and traditions. The day before we were there the place had hosted not only Sir David Cannadine's lecture on Winston Churchill's pastime of painting but also a live set by resident DJ Eddie Otchere.

We were in Room 20, which is a prosaic name for such a momentous space. Smaller than some of the cavernous churches we visit, it's true, but with as big an audience as I have ever seen in my five years with the Quire. Bodies in the aisles, no less. We also had the strange experience of being observed by the great and good of the past, for there on the walls hung such imposing portraits as that of the Anti -Slavery Convention of 1840 by Benjamin Robert Haydon, while at our backs was assembled, on Sir George Hayter's canvas, a packed House of Commons in 1833, a year after the passing of the Great Reform Act. You could almost imagine the Earl of Aberdeen, Montague Bertie and sundry Russells getting ready to bray at a wrong note . As there were none, these gentleman remained silent throughout the concert.

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Doctor's Notes.....

I'm Sorry, But....

ISBs are what we call quire members who, through other commitments, feel unable to sing or play for one of our services or concerts. But sometimes the quire as a whole has to give an ISB. We are always looking for new congregations and audiences for our particular repertoire. We are equally pleased to return to sing for old friends. Unfortunately sometimes we find ourselves having to say to requests for us to sing, "I'm sorry, but …".

The most common reason for an ISB is when we are given too short notice. Typically, a minister, music director or other church official will notice a forthcoming festival or anniversary in a few weeks' time, and think, "Let's invite those West Gallery people, with their joyful music; that would fit in nicely." There have been odd occasions when we have been able to help, but usually we need far more notice than that. As I write we are more or less booked up until the end of the year. So if you'd like us to sing for you, please look at your 2017 calendar and suggest a date.

The next most common reason is a request from a church or organisation which is outside the London area. Our members come from all directions for our fortnightly meetings in the City of London, often from afar. For us to ask them to sing outside the M25 ring is likely to generate too many internal ISBs.

And the third reason relates to requests for fundraising charity concerts. As Musical Director I receive quite a few of these, usually by email. We have given some of these in the past, and are pleased to do so for any worthwhile charity. But we feel that a reasonable division of labour is for us to provide the music, and for the charity to provide the necessary administration. All this is made clear on our website. What most charities seem to hope for is that we are willing do both the music and the administration, and we don't usually hear any more.

A request for us to sing a Sunday morning service won't necessarily get an ISB, but such services do present us with problems. Many of our members have prior loyalties to their own churches, and will become individual ISBs. Furthermore, the Eucharist which so many churches like to celebrate every Sunday morning nowadays does not at all well suit our repertoire, which was intended primarily for Matins and Evensong.

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Gallery Quire Sings In Gallery

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Not that we wanted for applause. In fact we were singing from a page contemporary to theirs, for at that time, in the decade before Victoria, our own musical forbears were still in full voice, with the band all string and wind, and the organ yet to assume dominance.

We did several items from early in the Quire's nineteen years, including Thomas Clark's setting of Charles Wesley's Lo! He comes with clouds descending and William Knapp's While Shepherds Watched, scandalously obscured all these years by the relatively plodding standard melody of Old Winchester. We also did a fine new setting of Henry Ramsden Bramley's The great God of Heaven is come down to earth, by our resident serpentiste and deputy conductor Kathryn Rose.

When we'd done, a number of people in the audience wondered why the version they had just heard of While Shepherds had not become the most regularly used. It is, said one, like a series of fireworks going off. I don't think our Georgian counterparts would have jibbed at that.

Next Term's Dates

Rehearsals

April 6, 20 May 4, 18
June 1, 15, 29 July 13

Performances

Sunday 10th April 6pm
Evensong St Mary's Rotherhithe

Saturday 4th June Lunchtime
Concert St James's Bushey

Saturday 2nd July 7 pm
Concert at St Andrew's Leytonstone

Sunday 24th July Evensong
St Mary Magdalene East Ham

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Doctor's Notes....continued

We would probably jump at a chance to sing Matins, for which we have some splendid music which rarely gets used. Non-conformist Communion services are easier for us to accommodate, but our preference is for evening services.

So, just as we try to organise our activities so as to minimise the number of internal ISBs, so we ask for our friends' help in avoiding the external ones. By far the most important thing to do is to book us as early as you can.

How Did It All Start?

By Adrian West

We like to think of West Gallery music in terms of the musical peasants in Thomas Hardy's stories; but Hardy was recording the final stages of a tradition which had begun to ossify (except in circles where Methodism had instilled a new energy into music). Hardy says nothing about how that kind of singing came to village churches, or about the way new items were acquired and learnt. This article is about how it all started.

To begin with the religious background: the seventeenth century had seen extraordinary religious and political ferment – it was often hard to disentangle the religious from the political – and by the time of the Glorious Revolution most people had had enough of it. In the Church of England, not a few regretted that the freedom to interpret the scriptures and disseminate one's opinions had ever come about. So the Church settled into a period when questions of doctrine were put on the back burner and disputes were avoided. Addison voiced the general view when, in an essay in the *Spectator*, he complained that if he asked the way to St Anne's Street some Puritan would ask him who made Anne a saint and box his ears, but if he then asked someone else the way to Anne's Street that person would box his ears and accuse him of disrespect. Anything approaching zeal was deprecated. Those who encouraged moderation were called by the unlovely name of Latitudinarians. Many, including Dr Johnson and Jane Austen, disliked what they called "enthusiasm". "Sir," said Bishop Butler to John Wesley, "the pretending to extraordinary revelations and gifts of the Holy Ghost is a horrid thing – a very horrid thing!"

As far as Dissenters were concerned, they tended to keep a low profile. With the Restoration and the new constitutional arrangements with William and Mary, they were excluded from any real power, and were merely "tolerated". They were subject to significant discrimination - for example, they were unable to take a university degree, a restriction to which they responded by forming what were known as "Dissenting Academies". So much for the religious setting. In the next issue I will say something about developments in hymnody at the beginning of the eighteenth century.