

The Church musician in 21st Century London

Why do we do it??? We have talent & we enjoy it! I suspect that many of us have many talents, and in order to be a successful church musician we no doubt have to use skills in which we have never been trained. Non musical skills are almost as important as our musical ones.

Lucky – age of music – films, ipods, advertising, classic fm. Vivaldi is practically a household name. We're not in the age of words - 'soundbite' dumbing down, few great orators in parliament

Inspiration - Idea of musical 'Saints' – Bach's music speaks of God as much as anything else - what we do inspires others not what we say.

Outreach – one of best tools in church.

Responsibility as leaders through hymnody and psalmody we teach

Theology – the sick and the dying quote hymns & psalms

Children's songs @ Sunday school

Scientists are beginning to reveal the huge possibilities we have in our brains (think of music therapy for instance or even patients with Alzheimers who can't remember anything but can remember all the words of a song)

Why do we sing?

Natural – to be human is to sing

Dancing/singing is the most natural way to celebrate birthday, party, wedding.

Endorphins from singing. – you do feel happier physically & emotionally!

Talent

Audit your own talent/skills - do we focus on strengths or address weaknesses

Pairing of talent: e.g. venues/people/location, good catering, daytime venue or not, good parking, accessible, church which is open in the daytime etc

Don't underestimate the talent in your church

e.g. choristers/choir are a team. Football analogy. You don't only need musical talent (i.e. strikers) to run your music programmes. In fact where there is good use of non-musical skills programmes seem to thrive! Why do we all get so bogged down on difficult people who moan at us – let's enable and give voice to those who are nice people, who are patient people, the people who smile a lot, those who encourage us, those who are wise.

In fact one great opportunity from music is that it can bring people from many walks of life with many different skills together. (stage managers, poster designers, programme designers, fund raisers).

Mentoring

Best practice might be 'cell groups' which clergy create as a support network at college

Perform to each other

Texas. – one of the best university choirs listened to high school choirs. When did any of our choirs last go en masse to listen to another choir? I've never worked with a choir who did this.

How are we generous of spirit? Two-way communication

Training

How often do we feel we can't see the woods for the trees?

Cf Training of doctor not reading/training who'd eventually 'dry-up'

 Magic Day (time management course)

 Magic day for your musicians? St Paul's Diocesan choir was partly one possibility – to sing great music in a famous building with a fabulous acoustic & stunning organ

 Use your magic day to learn a new skill

 e.g. Sibelius skills, (HW needs to learn Power point presentations!)

 getting to know a new hymn book etc.

 invest in training as most pressure situations are short term issues.

 Resources – online database/online libraries researching repertoire, who has time to know everything? Talk to friends, most good ideas come from copying others.

Very lucky in London to have immense resources. You all probably have a major musical luxury weakness – buying CDs, going to concerts, ipods. Mine is buying scores – I love to have the complete set of x. y & z anthems or organ music 'just in case'. How much do you spend on this? Why don't you spend a bit of it on something else which might help you more?

Problems or opportunities from working with other people/musicians

a) Defensive? I'm not!! 'invisible crossed arms' in a room!

- 'We have to sing Anglican psalms'

- ultimatum if you introduce Rite A = disappearance of choirs.

- inclusive language, 'thee or thou language' – 'I'm off'

- Handel & operas banned thus was born the Oratorio which led to Messiah.

- Haydn's charm & tact in the Fairwell symphony.

Cromwell – music banished from church? Music changed middle classes took up domestic music.

b) Let's also not pretend to be mini cathedrals, Oxford movement created this theory that all churches were mini robed choir places, not the case – see Thomas Hardy or the New Oxf'd book of carols

c) Totem poles – 'music matters'. The blame game – 'people don't go to church because of the music'. Really?

Its basically a good news story, everyone cares, but it may not always feel like it when you are fighting your corner!

- d) Our nature – to be critical in order to learn, lack self confidence, critical of others. Choir masters need to create a good atmosphere for others to flourish
- e) People are busier, families are more spread out so the idea of attending church 48 weeks per year is almost not possible for normal parishioner, is it reasonable to expect church musicians to do this? (especially in view of the relatively poor professional pay we get)

But similarly how are we going to present this as an opportunity?

- i) Job share or train up a youngster to help. Being away can be a new opportunity, we all get stale in our home territory so being away every so often could be considered a benefit to the church (when it is done sensibly!)
- ii) people too busy to sing regularly, ‘lapsed singers’ are a golden opportunity for project choirs (Xmas concert, Lent project), if they liked it once they’ll like it again – good potential customers!!
- f) PC gone mad/health & safety/child protection – like most things these are reactions to abuses in the past. No easy answers here, we suffer at St Paul’s as much as anyone else I’m sure! But it should make us eager to develop good practice 2 avoid future over reactions - though in some cases there are too many badly trained people implementing rules which are more extreme than necessary.
- g) Music/muzak (choir anthem during communion). Do we ever gain from issuing ultimatums? Suggest a change of location for the anthem - Present it as a fresh outlook or to avoid staleness...
- h) Money/payment of lawyers/accountants ‘pro bono’. The huge irony here is that we are all fundamentally not in this job to earn lots of money! I think what we all mostly crave is the respect of being professionals. (cf lawyers doing ‘pro bono’ work). I know there are exceptions, but we wouldn’t ask a dentist or doctor to spend Sunday mornings treating the congregation. The argument about ‘volunteer flower ladies’ is ok in the sense that they also give up time, but I think the biggest misunderstanding of our jobs is to do with appreciating how much preparation & training we have done, over many years. Also the fact that we buy much of our own music too. Sadly musicians have been in this semi-vocational limbo for many generations & I don’t see any easy or quick answers. Just take comfort from Bach who would sympathise with us all!
- i) honestly assess how many hours we do (but bear in mind we love our jobs so will do extra for free). However it will take time to make progress but if we never start we will never get there. Look at best practice – Germany, Scandinavia & USA for examples. USA church music, more right wing country than us, more chance of being fired, but AGO gives you the right to attend the annual 2/3 day conference, minimum fees, churches get blackballed if you are sacked wrongfully, some professional structure. Many of you may not consider yourselves professional musicians by payment, but I think you are by attitude and hard work. On the bright side remember that your hard work is

appreciated but Brits are always reluctant to express any emotion – real hard work is difficult to hide!

- j) Lack of on the job training – compare with proportion of training in normal jobs.
- k) Cultural imperialism – is Classical music the right & proper music for Church? No. But the excellence you would expect to attain striving for the best classical performances is the example I think we should follow in other styles.
- l) This country has a rich history. Here are some bodies who can help you:
Historical bodies – RSCM, RCO, COA, ISM, IAO, when compared with AGO in USA.

Suggestion: we don't need more things, we need better and more relevant things.

What can musicians offer which is distinctive?

Music is a different language to words, not just an enhancement. Let's not be frightened of this but celebrate it.
musicians sense balance of service 'feel' highs & lows.

Don't be ashamed of explicitly musical devices – they happen with great effect in concerts;
Range of styles, fast slow fast, contemporary 'hard piece' of music set up with something a bit lighter. Translations, programme notes. Are we doing this with our hymnody? Our psalmody? Our choir music? Are we ensuring that there is a varied diet in our repertoire & style for our musicians & congregations?

Favourite hymn = favourite tune or favoured tune
Last hymn at service = most critical moment. Words important yes, but NB how music is a major part of everyone's life

(example - Waterloo – Abba song.)

Who is really thinking of Napoleon, Belgium, war or of the great victory.
Are we who help design liturgy sometimes overestimating the observations of the congregations?
does the familiar Abba song really conjure up words or is it more like smell? Smell = time and place, music can also do this, let's not be frightened of a good tune/good rhythm just for its own sake.

Mnemonic effect of music

What do these 3 themes conjure up to you **Examples**
(Mendelssohn wedding march, Adeste Fidelis, Air on a g string Bach) – all 3 'contexts we remember are adapted from the probably original intention.

Mismatch - 'jarring': The Lord's my shepherd to While shepherd's watch'

Music as a mnemonic

Read poem – one well known one which isn't

3x George Herbert poems – Let all the world & 2 other poems by Herbert

Note how much more resonance there is to the text you know. Some of us will know 2 of these texts very well from hymns & anthems. Bear this in mind when choosing hymns or music to perform, what do you want to offer people longer term. For many people the 'Let all the world' text will be known to them in more than one version, so you may find yourself comparing these with the poem for emphasis & structure. Think about this as a new way of exploring – contrasting 2/3 settings of the same words musically, or even a varied artistic exploration eg using art, poetry and music.

Child educational effect of mnemonic - Alphabet song, numbers, colours etc

Music therapy & rhyming
all used as means of teaching children with special needs

Good practice/musical connections/answers

Choirs – most of you have successful music projects, so in a way we are talking to the converted, but what makes your music programmes tick. Social or musical reward.

Ideas for events

i) Nine Carols & lessons sequence, basically ABC pattern with bidding & blessing either end, why does 'B' have to be choir singing, could be piano solo, clarinet solo, solo singer etc. Also why does this pattern only get used (mostly) for Xmas:

Key ingredients are music alternating with hymns & lessons, also processional/movement/more than one choir in some places – do this elsewhere.

ii) If you have a nice venue ask a student to do a concert there

iii) ask the choir who rehearses in your church buildings to sing something religious as a concert/service – evolve a more old fashioned 'quid pro quo' relationship where there is opportunity for growth & development.

Good practice: the RSCM & the RCO offer interesting and varied events. Exeter Diocese, Portsmouth Diocese have music advisors. Hereford has a Diocesan org training scheme. St Michael's Highgate bring in an 'expert' to tell the choir the same things that Alan is saying week in week out! – but a fresh face has major impact!

If we achieve nothing else today but for you to share a few good ideas with others, and learn some good ideas yourself & make a new friend or acquaintance then we'll have been successful.

List of diverse music and church groups & resources (mostly in London):

RCO	BBC
RSCM (Nigel Groome)	Music libraries – Barbican, Westminster
RSCM (committee Michael Turvey)	Music festivals
ISM	chamber choirs x ?
Westminster Catholic Diocese events	choral societies x ?
St Giles International Organ School (Barbican)	world famous concert halls
www.cpd.org	organ builders & consultants
Small Church choir Festival (Philip Norman)	St Paul's Diocesan Choir
CLESCO	Zone 1 professional choirs
Birckbeck E-mural	world famous orchestras
Enfield Organ Association	St Luke's – LSO outreach project
RSCM Diocesan Festival (Guy Pope)	theology courses/lectures King's College
RSCM Church Music Quarterly	Charities who support music
London organ day	St Paul's Cathedral Institute
London organ forum	
RAM (organ, choral conducting & church music)	
RCM (organ, choral conducting)	
Guildhall school of music	
Trinity College London	
London School of Music	
Birmingham Conservatoire Choral conducting	
Printed music shops & CD shops	
IAO & Organist Review	
London School of Theology ('fresh expressions' website)	
London Contemporary Church Music Festival (St Pancras Church)	
Guild of Church Musicians & Singers	
Choir & organ magazine	
Gresham College lectures	
Organ recitals.com	
Harrow Deanery Festival	
St Michael's Highgate (guest conductor)	
RSCM CD Rom	
London Diocesan Website	
RSCM Sunday by Sunday guide	
The Organ	
Neighbouring diocese: St Alban's, Chelmsford, Southwark, Oxford & Rochester & organ associations & RSCM events	
Philip Norman 'organists online'	
Contemporary organ music festival (Martin Stacey)	
Organ recital venues including: St Michael's Cornhill, St Paul's cathedral, West Abbey, West Cath, St John Sm Sq, St Stephen's Walbrook, St Martin's in the Fields	
Brompton Oratory	
Oundle organ festival for students	
Music libraries – Barbican, Westminster	
'Cathedrals' St Paul's, Southwark, All Souls Langham Place, Holy Trinity, Brompton	
People who live here or who visit regularly	
Musicians Livery company (others who offer musical support)	