



Music Report

A regular column from St Faith's Director of Music, Robert Woods

I will sing of your love and justice; to you, O Lord, I will sing praise.

Psalm 101:1

What is the purpose of organ music in today's liturgy? What sort of music is appropriate for use during acts of worship? During advent some of you may have noticed an absence of music before the service began and I hope that you will again notice and absence of pre-worship music again during Lent. Why should the absence of music be important?

Organ music is used for a few primary reasons within the context of our liturgy. It is used to express praise or solemnity, it sets a mood before we are called to focus our minds on the worship we have come to give. Certainly before a service this is why we have organ voluntaries. During the service we have periods of organ music or improvisation, not purely for the indulgence of the organist, but because music is used to cover action within the service.

For example, should the first hymn be insufficiently long, a period of silence could occur, but instead the organist continues to play. Why? Simply because silence naturally draws our eyes only to seeing what else is going on, rather than preparing ourselves. This is similarly why we have improvised music after the gospel, and during the offertory.

At the end of the service we have an organ voluntary, but should it be viewed merely for pleasure? Is it also part of the act of worship? From my own experience, depending on which place of worship you are in, there is no correct answer to these questions. In some churches I have attended, people simply got on with their daily labours when they have been dismissed by the priest. On the other hand, I was shushed for beginning to talk whilst the organist was still playing, because some wanted to view it as an ending to their offering of worship.

What music is appropriate? I personally believe in trial by error! Not a good way to lead a musical Christian life, but I don't believe in restricting what can or cannot be done musically. Traditional music will always play a very keen and strong role as choices of music for the liturgy. New music, as well as improvised music is the way that God can move us in the present (with a little guidance and training) and allow us to hear familiar music in a live and new way.

Robert Woods

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