***The Crystal Ball***

*Music for February 2023*

A

fter the feast, the fast; Ash Wednesday this year falls on 22 February, on which more below. But before the Time of No Chocolate, we have the three Sundays traditionally known as Septuagesima, Sexagesima and Quinquagesima as a period of transition between feast and fast.

For the first of these Sundays, 5 February, we have Peter Nardone’s now-familiar setting of *I give to you a new commandment*, with its mix of newly-composed material set against plainsong; for the third of them, 19 February, another old friend, W. H. Harris’s suitably luminous setting of *Holy is the true light*, a text adapted from the Salisbury Diurnal, makes an appearance. (The final Alleluia of this piece is one of my favourite moments.) In between, we have something a little less familiar. Sexagesima Sunday has long been associated with the theme of Creation, and this has continued into the Common Worship provision; so we shall be performing the second-best-known chorus from Haydn’s *Creation*, *Achieved is the glorious work*, to celebrate it. Vigorous, tuneful and harmonically ingenious, with much interplay between parts, this is a great example of Haydn’s choral writing.

And then, as I mentioned, comes Ash Wednesday on 22 February; expect to hear parts of Byrd’s Four-part Mass, as well as Purcell’s solemn reminder of our mortality, *Thou knowest, Lord*, from the funeral music for Queen Mary, to mark the occasion.

Choral Evensong on the following Sunday, 26 February, will largely be what you might expect for a Lenten service, with plainsong responses, Farrant’s *Call to remembrance* beginning the service, and Byrd’s sober solo-and-chorus setting of verses from Psalm 119, *Teach me, O Lord*, as the anthem. The canticles, however, will be new: Moeran in D is an imaginative and lively setting from the mid-twentieth century, with some unusual harmonic twists and often making use of unison upper and lower voices in dialogue. Moeran’s music is characterised by strong melody and interesting harmony, and these canticles are no exception. (There is also a local connection: the composer was a pupil at Uppingham School from 1908 to 1913.)

After that, a certain amount of austerity takes hold, of course, as we cleanse our palates with Lenten fare the better to enjoy the celebration of Easter in April. There will be responsorial psalms; but also Byrd, Brahms and Richard Rodney Bennett, among others.

***Succentor***