***The Crystal Ball***

*Music for March 2023*

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his month sees a couple of deviations from our normal pattern; more on that below. But we start in conventional enough style with a lyrical masterpiece by Brahms, his *Geistliches Lied*. This ‘spiritual song’ sets a consolatory text by the German poet Paul Flemming, beginning ‘Let nothing ever grieve thee’, in characteristic Romantic style, ending with a rapturous Amen; it can be appreciated on its own terms, but the fact that it also incorporates an ingenious canon adds another element of pleasure.

So much for 5 March. The following week we have something rather different: *As water to the thirsty*, a hymn-anthem arrangement by John Barnard, which we added to our repertoire last year. As is usual in such arrangements, the vigorous melody is presented in different guises (unison, harmony, descant) to give a very satisfying unity to the whole.

Now for the first of our deviations. On 17 March, St Patrick’s Day, there will be a Choral Eucharist according to the use of the Book of Common Prayer at 7 pm; this will give us a chance to perform parts of the *Mass for Four Voices* by the great English composer William Byrd (which we sang at the cathedral on New Year’s Day) in liturgical context here (if not quite the context that the composer would have expected . . .). The service will also appropriately include Bob Chilcott’s gentle *Irish Blessing* as the communion anthem.

Then, of course, we have Mothering Sunday (or Refreshment Sunday, or Mid-Lent Sunday; take your pick) on 19 March, when we honour the Mother of God with a setting of *Ave Maria*. Arcadelt’s well-known version almost certainly started life as a secular song, but has long been established in this form; and its simple tunefulness remains very attractive.

Finally – and this is our second deviation – Choral Evensong this month will be replaced by a candlelit ‘Celebration of the Annunciation’, which will take the form of a sequence of music and readings to mark the ‘morrow’ of that feast (which occurs on 25 March). This will include an arrangement of *The Angel Gabriel* by Sir David Willcocks, Richard Rodney Bennett’s *Out of your sleep* and even a contribution by Succentor wearing his composer’s hat, as well as other suitably seasonal material.

That concludes this month; but I must mention here that on Palm Sunday evening (2 April) there will be a rare performance of *The Passion of Christ* by Sir Arthur Somervell (OU). More details in our weekly notices.

***Succentor***