

Halley's Comment

Paul Halley – Annual Report of The Director of Music St. George's Anglican Church, Halifax, NS January 26th, 2009

It has been 18 months since I took up my duties as Director of Music at St. George's on Sunday July 1st 2007. The choir now consists of 25 regular choristers of whom 6 also sing in the Chapel Choir at King's. Since we have enough chairs in the sanctuary to accommodate 24 singers it's probably just as well that on a typical Sunday one or two members of the choir are either sick, or in distant lands, sipping rum punches on a deserted beach (or both.) However, should a stunning tenor or bass want to join the ranks we'll definitely make room. We have changed our rehearsal nights from Thursdays to Wednesdays allowing those of us coming from King's Evensong an hour and a bit for sandwich chomping (courtesy of Janet Ross' sherry fund, the music budget and Paul Rogers' "Good Food Emporium" restaurant) instead of the half hour scramble we had last year. These sessions take place at the apartment of Nick Halley and Liz Kobes and involve the odd gin and tonic for the more mature chompers.

Speaking of Nick, I am eternally grateful for his presence here in Halifax. He plays for the Monday and Friday services at AST, he sings, conducts, and is starting to play the organ at the King's services, and he serves as my assistant at St. George's. As of January of this year, Nick no longer has to divide his Sunday morning time between King's and St. George's and is now with us every Sunday, not to mention every other choral service. Those of you who memorized the Music Director's Report from last year will recall the top two items on my wish list – another very good tenor and a very good organ scholar. Nick has more than fulfilled the first of those wishes and is well on the way to fulfilling the second, since he is currently practicing the organ like a fiend. He made his accompanying debut at our recent Nine Lessons & Carols service on the Taverner "God Is With Us" – an accompaniment that more than makes up in volume what it may lack in length. Nick's talents also extend to arm-waving, much to the satisfaction of those members of the choir who look at that kind of thing.

I want to publicly thank all the members of the St. George's Choir. Not only do they sing beautifully, but they are extraordinarily willing and committed (perhaps, in light of the time they spend at St. G's they should be committed) and they are a lot of fun. They also look pretty terrific since Laurelle LeVert and Sarah Stevenson went to a great deal of trouble organizing and labelling the cassocks and surplices, purchasing new ones, refitting old ones and generally cracking the whip on issues of laundry, hygiene and general decorum. This only resulted in the departure of a couple of choristers.

Additional Eucharists

Aside from the normal round of Sunday 10:30 AM Choral Eucharists, the choir sang many additional services throughout the year, more perhaps than any other church choir in Canada, excepting the all-professional ones. Looking at this list, as well as the "Special Events" schedule will no doubt inspire you to offer your condolences and sympathy to any choir members you find wandering about. We are currently considering installing a few camp cots in the Music Office for the use of those singers who feel it is simply not worthwhile trying to get home between services.

Choral (and non-choral) Evensongs

We have continued our practice of once-a-month Evensongs and except for those occasions when we are visited by blizzards, pestilence and frogs, we have been happy to see more and more people in attendance.

Aniko Lewton-Brain with her lovely voice and violin has continued to lead the music in the non-choral Sunday Evensongs. During Advent and Lent she also puts together a quartet of voices for what are known as "Small Choir" Evensongs, which refers to their number, not their physical stature.

Additional Holy Week Services (not Eucharists)

I should mention at this point that Holy Week 2008 was, to say the least, a mixed blessing. Being one of the earliest Holy Weeks in living memory, it hit me like a ton of bricks. Trying to manage the music at both St. George's and King's (who inconveniently hold their Holy Week festivities at exactly the same time), made me sick – I got the flu. However, my son Nick Halley came for a visit, arriving on Good Friday. He took one look at me and decided to move to Halifax to make sure I never looked like that again. This is known in "1066" parlance as "a good thing."

Other Events

In order to justify the proposed acquisition of the aforementioned camp cots I added a few items to the choir's schedule.

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| June 22, 2008 | "In The Round" – a fundraising concert of music featuring the choir and solo trumpeter Curtis Dietz. |
| September 29, 2008 | St. Michael and All Angels - The Elora Festival Singers, an all-professional ensemble from Ontario and their conductor Noel Edison presented a workshop for young conductors in the afternoon and followed it up by singing gloriously for our Festal Eucharist that evening. |
| December 6, 2008 | A Concert of Music for Advent at St. Mary's, Crousetown. |
| December 7, 2008 | Advent Lessons & Carols |
| December 28, 2008 | Parish Christmas Party & Carol Sing-Along |
| December 31, 2008 | Nine Lessons & Carols. This New Year's Eve celebration was followed by a rather lovely champagne reception in the Parish Hall. |

Funerals

It has now become the custom to provide a small choir for funerals at St. George's. Thanks to the generosity of the Rector, we are able to pay one or two pros so that we can be sure all the parts are covered, since many of the choir members are unable to spring themselves loose from work or school in the middle of a weekday. This programme has met with much positive response, not only from parishioners but also from the many visitors who attend these funerals. It is considered part of our "outreach."

Summer Choir

For the second summer in a row we had a sizeable choir at each of our Sunday 10:30 AM services during the summer. This group consists of regular members of the St. George's Choir and guest singers from other churches who are officially "on vacation". More on the "wish list".

The Organ

We now have a new person in charge of organ maintenance and tuning. His name is Robert Hiller and he is one of the top people at Casavant. (*Orgues Létourneau* do not have maintenance people in the field.) Robert tunes, repairs and rebuilds many of the larger instruments in the Maritimes. Robert is often assisted by our own Brian Start when things get complicated.

The Library

Thanks to Sarah Stevenson and several other volunteers, the music library continues to become better organized and efficient. It has now been completely moved from the room behind the rear gallery in the church to the Music Office in the Parish Hall.

Publicity

Perhaps the most encouraging development for the music programme at St. George's this year has been the establishment of the St. George's Publicity Committee, chaired and hosted by Cheryl Bell. There is no doubt that the significant increase in numbers attending our special services and events is

due to the work of Cheryl and her committee. They are a practical group applying sound New Testament theology in their efforts to get lights out from under bushels and dig up buried talents. I view them as critically important to the growth and therefore health of the parish.

Coming Up

The choir has been invited to participate in *The Three Churches Festival* in Mahone Bay this summer. They will present a concert on Friday August 21st and will repeat this concert at St. George's on Sunday August 23rd. They have also been asked to sing in the *Musique St. Bernard* series in September. Both of these invitations are signs of the growing reputation of the choir and are a tribute to the fine quality of their singing.

The choir will also present the second annual "In The Round" fundraising concert on Sunday June 21st at 7 PM. We are threatening to call this one "Round Two" unless someone comes up with something better.

Without doubt the most exciting new development on the Halifax music scene will be the establishment of a new **Men & Boys Choir** directed by Nick Halley. This programme is in the works at the moment requiring vast amounts of time and energy on Nick's part. More news will follow. It is very much hoped that this new group, pending the approval of the Parish Council, will be "in residence" at St. George's, taking advantage of the church's location in order to attract boys from the North End.

Also in the works is the wonderful possibility that *Tempest*, the early music ensemble directed by David Greenberg, might also become a group in residence, again, pending Parish Council approval. This project is in the earliest stages of discussion and I should probably keep it under my hat – or bushel – but I'm having difficulty containing myself. They are a first-class ensemble.

Wish List

- 1) Since the summer choir seems to have become something of a fixture, I would like to add to our "summer awareness" programme the possibility of having the church kept open during the day so that visitors can enjoy its fine architecture and history, learn more about its programmes, and possibly drop something in the collection box, once we've had one made. This would involve student "guides" and therefore grants etc. St. John's Lunenburg do this quite successfully. Would it be worth talking to someone there or at least exploring this opportunity?
- 2) The choir needs a set of kneeler cushions – the wooden kneelers they have now are noisy, impractical and dangerous, and therefore only sporadically used.
- 3) Since we seem to be using the upstairs galleries more and more for singers and instrumentalists, I would like to consider removing a few pews upstairs in order to accommodate these musicians. I gather the fire regulations preclude our using all the pews upstairs in any case.
- 4) A new or rebuilt Parish Hall – I know people are working on this.
- 5) Pianos – we had none last year and that hasn't changed. Ideally one for the Parish hall and one (concert-worthy) for the church. I'll just keep putting this item on the annual wish list.

Finally

Many thanks to Andrea Lee for her great work on so many fronts in the Parish Office, and especially for her fine eye for detail which results in our handsome bulletins. Andrea and I will be working on further improvements in the bulletin layout.

I would particularly like to thank the rector, wardens and parishioners, and the "Friends of St. George's" who support the music programme at St. George's so willingly and with such generosity of spirit. It is a rare and fine thing you do.

Sincerely,

Paul Halley