



Advent Choral Day

Three choirs and three churches in Chelsea and Belgravia

Tuesday 28 November 2023 (LJ 130)

A day-long sequence of performances, talks and refreshments, our London Choral Days showcase top-flight professional choirs in appropriate, attractive and often little-known buildings. For this iteration, the audience moves between the venues on foot.

The three churches we have selected are located in Belgravia and Chelsea, among the most handsome and salubrious residential districts in London. (During the 19th century, St Peter's Eaton Square was reputed to yield the largest Sunday collection of any church in England.) Architecturally and decoratively, St Peter's, St Mary's Bourne Street and Holy Trinity Sloane Street are all of a high order, though all are very different from each other.

This much, however, they have in common: an exceptional musical tradition. We have the privilege of hearing three of the finest church choirs in London, staffed by professional singers most of whom have busy careers in other choirs and consort.

The days are conceived not as three discrete concerts but as an integrated, over-arching musical experience in which the individual parts illuminate and enlarge upon what has gone before. The musical theme of the day is Advent, which is well provided for with choral compositions from throughout the ages, and Christmas is only a month away.

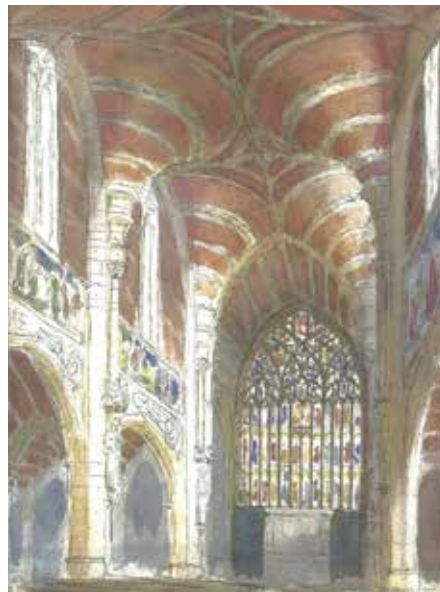
Concerts

ST PETER'S EATON SQUARE

A third of a mile long, Eaton Square is one of the largest of London's 'squares' – an extended oblong in this case – and is one of the grandest. It lies at the heart of the 200-acre Five Fields estate which since 1677 has belonged to the Grosvenor family, later Dukes of Westminster. Development began in earnest in the 1820s; the Church of St Peter was begun in 1824.

Externally, this is a Greek Revival church with an austere magnificent Ionic portico by the architect Henry Hakewell. Fifty years later the interior was given a sumptuous High Victorian makeover, but that and the surviving original features were largely destroyed by fire (arson) in 1987. The refurbishment by the Braithwaite Partnership resulted in a light and airy interior which well blends old with new, a Georgian space with slender steel columns, well crafted woodwork and a gold mosaic apse.

The choir, under the inspirational directorship of Andrew-John Smith, is one of the very finest



in London. Their programme today ranges from the Renaissance in Spain and England via German Romanticism to Herbert Howells and Arvo Pärt.

PROGRAMME: **Sheppard** *Verbum caro factum est* — **Josef Rheinberger** *Deus tu convertens* — **Brahms** *O Heiland, reiss die Himmel auf* — **Howells** *A Spotless Rose* — **Pärt** *Magnificat* — **Guerrero** *Alma Redemptoris mater* — **Juan Esquivel** *Veni, Domine* — **Byrd** *Ecce concipiet Virgo* — **Whyte** *Exaudiat te, Domine*

ST MARY'S BOURNE STREET

St Mary's was founded with a markedly different congregation in mind from that of St Peter's – the poor of the district, among whom domestic servants were prominent. Begun in 1873 on a site cleared to build a tunnel for the District Line (rumblings below are still faintly audible), the cost was a fifth of that of St Peter's. The architect R. J. Withers produced a simple but noble red-brick Gothic design.

Its humble carcass, however, was progressively adorned in the late 19th century and throughout the 20th. There were architectural additions by H.S. Goodhart-Rendel, working in a by-then highly unfashionable High Gothic idiom, and the accretion of Anglo-Catholic fittings, furnishings and works of art. These form a distinguished collection even by High-Church London standards.

The church is also famous for its choir, which consists of eight professional singers.

Plainchant is a speciality. The director is Richard Pinel, whose former appointments include director of music at Jesus College Cambridge and St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle.

PROGRAMME: **Hildegard von Bingen** *O Vitrus Sapientiae* — **Bach** *Nun Komm, der Heiden Heiland* — **Byrd** *Rorate Caeli desuper* — **Plainsong** *O Adonai* — **Tallis** *Audivi vocem da caelo* — **Plainsong** *O Radix Jesse* — **Franz Biebl** *Ave Maria* — **Plainsong** *O Clavis David* — **Bach** *Nun Komm, der Heiden Heiland BWV 661* — **Plainsong** *O Oriens* — **James MacMillan** *O Radiant Dawn* — **Plainsong** *Rex Gentium* — **Matthew Martin** *Adam lay ybounden* — **Byrd** *Tollite portas* — **Bach** *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme BWV 645* — **Plainsong** *O Emmanuel* — **Richard Rodney Bennett** *Out of your sleep*

HOLY TRINITY SLOANE STREET

John Betjemen dubbed the church of Holy Trinity 'the Cathedral of the Arts & Crafts movement'. Paid for by Earl Cadogan, the landlord of much of this part of Chelsea, building started in 1888, though embellishment continued well into the next century. The architect was John Dando Sedding, succeeded after his death by Henry Wilson; William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones were among the many leading artists and craftsmen who contributed a range of fittings and artworks.

A Gesamtkunstwerk of architecture, sculpture, metalwork, painting and stained glass – and, for you, music –, it is a place of staggering beauty, so it beggars belief that in the 1970s the church was closed and scheduled for demolition. (It now regularly achieves three-figure Sunday congregations and is a busy venue for concerts and other events.)

Music was important from early in its history. The financial carnage wrought by the coronavirus pandemic led, initially, to the disbanding of its excellent choir, and then to revival in reduced form. We are pleased again to invite Oliver Lallemand, former director of music, and his new Sloane Square Chamber Choir, an ensemble of twelve singers which includes some members past and present of Holy Trinity Choir, to this very special London Day.

PROGRAMME: **Byrd** *Vigilate* — **Sven-David Sandström** *Es ist ein Ros* — **Elizabeth Poston** *Jesus Christ the apple tree* — **Adrian Peacock** *Venite, gaudete!* — **Edward Bairstow** *Let all mortal flesh* — **Gibbons** *This is the record of*

Advent Choral Day
continued

John — Mendelssohn Sechs Sprüche — Parsons
Ave Maria — John Joubert There is no rose —
Victoria Alma redemptoris Mater à 8

Practicalities

Start: St Peter's, Eaton Square, SW1 (10 mins on foot from Victoria, Hyde Park Corner or Sloane Square stations). Concert begins 11am. Doors open twenty minutes before.

Finish: Holy Trinity Sloane Street, SW3 (3 mins from Sloane Square Station) – the concert finishes by 5.20pm, drinks follow.

Walking: four short walks between venues together amounting to little more than a mile.

Price: £240. This includes a three-course lunch and afternoon refreshments as well as exclusive admission to the three concerts, programme booklet, and the services of a number of members of staff.

Audience size: between 100 and 150.

Booking: you do not need to complete a booking form for this event. Please call us to book over the telephone, or book online at www.martinrandall.com.