

ST OSWALD'S PARISH CHURCH, DURHAM

MUSICAL NOTES – FEBRUARY 2026

The choir's repertoire this month goes between two extremes; we start the month with pieces by two living composers (John Rutter and Margaret Rizza), before jumping back to some of the earliest music still surviving in the Anglican choral tradition, with composers like Tallis, Farrant, and Loosemore providing an appropriate solemnity as Lent gets underway. Not much room for a prolonged introduction this month, in part due to our Ash Wednesday service on the **18th February**, but see the back page for a note on an anthem by Gibbons – a peculiar case of “one song to the tune of another”!

David Harris, Director of Music

THIS MONTH

Sunday 1st - Candlemas

Parish Eucharist, 11.00am

Anthem: Song of Simeon

Music: Margaret Rizza (b. 1929)

Text: Luke 2: 29-32, adapted Mary Holtby (1925 – 2021)

*Lumen ad revelationem gentium;
illumina tenebras nostros, Domine.*

*A light to lighten the Gentiles;
Lighten our darkness, O Lord.*

*Lord, set your servant free,
fulfil your ancient vow,
and peaceful let the parting be
which seals that promise now.*

*A radiance unconfined
to change of time or place,
he is the hope of humankind,
the glory of our race.*

*For here the child of light,
the world's salvation lies,
and on the nations lost in night
I see his dawn arise.*

Voluntary: Toccata and Fugue in C
anon. (18th-century Italian)

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Evening Prayer with Hymns, 6.00pm

**Voluntary: Piano Sonata no. 14 in C sharp minor, 'Moonlight': 1st mvt,
op. 27 no. 2: I**

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827)

Sunday 8th – Second Sunday before Lent

Advent Carol Service, 6.00pm

Anthem: A Gaelic Blessing

Music: John Rutter (b. 1945) Text: William Sharp (1855 – 1905), John Rutter

*Deep peace of the running wave to you,
Deep peace of the flowing air to you,
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you,
Deep peace of the shining stars to you,
Deep peace of the gentle night to you,*

*Moon and stars
pour their healing light on you,
Deep peace of Christ
the light of the world to you,
Deep peace of Christ to you.*

Voluntary: French Suite no. 5: Gigue, BWV 816: VII

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 – 1750)

Evening Prayer with Hymns, 6.00pm

Voluntary: Prelude in G flat major, op. 23 no. 10

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873 – 1943)

Sunday 15th – Sunday next before Lent

Parish Eucharist, 11.00am

Anthem: *O nata lux*

Music: Thomas Tallis (1505 – 1585)

Text: Office hymn at Lauds of the Feast of the Transfiguration

*O nata lux de lumine,
Jesu redemptor sæculi,
Dignare clemens supplicum
Laudes precesque sumere.*

*Qui carne quondam contegi
Dignatus es pro perditis,
Nos membra confer effici
Tui beati corporis.*

*O Light born of Light,
Jesus, redeemer of the world,
with loving-kindness deign to receive
suppliant praise and prayer.*

*Thou who once deigned to be clothed in flesh
for the sake of the lost,
grant us to be members
of thy blessed body.*

Voluntary: Messe pour les Paroisses: Offertoire sur les Grands Jeux
François Couperin (1668 – 1733)

Choral Evensong, 6.00pm

Preces and Responses *Magnificat and Nunc Dimitis with Fauxbourdons*
Thomas Tallis (1505 - 1585) Carolus Andreas (1550 - 1627)

Anthem: O Lord, increase our faith

Music: Henry Loosemore (c. 1607 – 1670)

Text: anon.

*O Lord, increase our faith,
strengthen us and confirm us in thy true faith;
endue us with wisdom, charity, chastity and patience,
in all our adversity. Sweet Jesus, say Amen.*

Voluntary: *Voluntary* in C

Thomas Tomkins (1572 - 1656)

Wednesday 18th – Ash Wednesday

Eucharist and Imposition of Ashes, 7.00pm

Anthem: *Lord, for thy tender mercy's sake*

Music: Richard Farrant (c. 1525 - 1580)

Text: from Lidley's Prayers (1566)

Lord, for thy tender mercy's sake, lay not our sins to our charge, but forgive that is past and give us grace to amend our sinful lives; to decline from sin and incline to virtue, that we may walk with a perfect heart before thee, now and evermore. Amen.

Voluntary: Chorale prelude on 'Aus der Tiefe rufe ich', BWV 745

Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714 - 1788)

Sunday 22nd – First Sunday of Lent

Parish Eucharist, 11.00am

Anthem: *Drop, drop slow tears*

Music: Orlando Gibbons (1583 - 1625)

Text: Phineas Fletcher (1582 – 1650) – see CP #106

Voluntary: Suite du premier ton: Plein jeu

Pierre du Mage (1674 – 1751)

Evening Prayer with Hymns, 6.00pm

Voluntary: *Intermezzo no. 1*

Manuel Ponce (1882 - 1948)

FEATURED PIECE

Drop, drop slow tears

Music: Orlando Gibbons (1583 – 1625)

Text: Phineas Fletcher (1582 – 1650) – see CP #106

The pairing of this composer and text is a familiar one. The poem is most commonly found in hymnbooks (including our own *Common Praise*) set to Gibbons' SONG 46 – a tune written for George Wither's collection of *The Hymnes and Songs of the Church*, published in 1623. ('Drop, drop slow tears' is actually number 47 in that collection, but the tune is also used for the beginning of the previous hymn, and the modern version of the tune takes its name from here.)

This is a different setting, however, though like SONG 46, the music was originally attached to different words. It's an example of *contrafactum* – the substitution of a different text to a vocal work, with little or no change to the music itself. This is very common with hymns in particular, where texts and tunes are often written centuries apart but with standard metres, enabling something of a mix-and-match approach to hymnody. The choral-humour focused social media page *In Quires and Places where they Meme* (which, yes, is a real thing) has posted some truly egregious examples of this over the last few years, billed as *Cursed Carols* (try, for example, singing 'Thine be the glory' to the tune of 'In the bleak mid-winter').

The original text of this piece is a poem of unknown origin called *The Silver Swan*, depicting a swan's first and last sorrowful song as its death approaches. (The legend of swans singing only as they are about to die dates back at least to Ancient Greek times, and is where the term 'swan song' comes from.) But its exquisite craftsmanship led church musicians to seek an alternate text, simply to have the excuse to sing it more often. A quotation from Samuel Sebastian Wesley appears at the end of the piece in the volume our choir sings it from, the *New Church Anthem Book*: "This little piece is not exceeded by any foreign work of the kind. It should have been an Anthem, as it deserves a better fate than occasional performance by a Madrigal Society."

Fortunately, Fletcher's poem suits the music perfectly, and not just in terms of metre; the character is also satisfyingly similar, maintaining the mournful yet beautiful tone of the swan song as the poet laments over the temptations of sin, and repentantly prays for the deep floods of Christ's mercy to wash away all fault.