

MUSICAL NOTES – JULY 2025

The church's musical provision will see a major change over this summer. Our 1906 Model B Bechstein grand piano has been on its last legs for a while now, and is in great need of a major overhaul to continue to be able to give a good account of itself. This is nothing more than the usual wear and tear accumulated by a much-played instrument over the course of its life – worn felts need renewing, rusty strings need replacing, stiff mechanisms need resetting – but over the last few years in particular, it has become harder and harder to play with satisfactory musical results.

Although relatively routine, the cost of much of this specialised work is high – albeit nowhere near as high, you'll be relieved to hear, as the organ restoration a few years ago, which is by orders of magnitude a more mechanically complex instrument. However, by good fortune – and/or good providence! – an alternative presented itself; David Lancaster, our piano tuner, was looking to sell a Steinway Model O piano that he himself had recently fully refurbished, and at a lower sum than the restoration work would have cost.

This is also beneficial for a number of other reasons. While our Bechstein could be brought up to a similar standard once again, the restoration work would also take a long time – at least six months, maybe up to a year – during which alternative provision would need to be arranged. There's also no absolute guarantee of the degree of success of such work; certainly improvements would be evident, but the exact quality of the final result would still be uncertain until work was completed. Having spent an afternoon with the Steinway at David's house a few weeks ago, I can say that it is a superb instrument, vastly superior to the Bechstein in its current state; I'd even be inclined to give it the edge over the Bechstein at its full potential, having played others of a similar vintage.

We'll be arranging concerts in the autumn term to both showcase the instrument and recoup some of the funds spent – keep your eyes peeled for news of these, and also expect to see the new instrument featured in our worship more regularly. I'm very grateful to the rest of the PCC for supporting our acquisition of the Steinway, and as ever, to the congregation of St Oswald's for its continued and enthusiastic support of its musical tradition.

David Harris, Director of Music

THIS MONTH

Sunday 6th – Third Sunday after Trinity

Parish Eucharist and Baptism, 11.00am

Anthem: *The Call (Five Mystical Songs)*

Music: Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872 – 1958)

Text: George Herbert (1593 – 1633) – *see CP #405*

Voluntary: *Postlude on 'Woodlands'*

Denis Bédard (b. 1950)

Evening Prayer with Hymns, 6.00pm

Voluntary: *Träumerei (Kinderszenen)*, op. 15 no. 7

Robert Schumann (1810 – 1856)

Sunday 13th – Fourth Sunday after Trinity

Parish Eucharist, 11.00am

Anthem: *My eyes for beauty pine*

Music: Herbert Howells (1892 – 1983)

Text: Robert Bridges (1844 – 1930)

*My eyes for beauty pine,
My soul for Goddès grace:
No other care nor hope is mine,
To heaven I turn my face.*

*And every gentle heart,
That burns with true desire,
Is lit from eyes that mirror part
Of that celestial fire.*

*One splendour thence is shed
From all the stars above:
'Tis named when God's name is said,
'Tis Love, 'tis heavenly Love.*

Voluntary: *Psalm-Prelude*, op. 32 no. 1

Herbert Howells (1892 – 1983)

Evening Prayer with Hymns, 6.00pm

Voluntary: *Intermezzo no. 1*

Manuel Ponce (1882 – 1948)

Sunday 20th – Fifth Sunday after Trinity

Parish Eucharist, 11.00am

Anthem: *Jesu, joy of man's desiring* (*Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben*),
BWV 147 – X

Music: Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 – 1750) Text: Robert Bridges (1844 – 1930)

*Jesu, joy of man's desiring,
Holy wisdom, love most bright;
Drawn by Thee, our souls aspiring
Soar to uncreated light.*

*Word of God, our flesh that fashioned,
With the fire of life impassioned,
Striving still to truth unknown,
Soaring, dying round Thy throne.*

Voluntary: *Fugue in G minor*, BWV 578

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 – 1750)

Evening Prayer with Hymns, 6.00pm

Voluntary: *Waltz in F major, 'Farewell to the Piano'*, Anh. 15
attr. Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827)

Sunday 27th – Sixth Sunday after Trinity

Parish Eucharist, 11.00am

Voluntary: *Keyboard Concerto no. 3 in A major: 2nd mvt*
Thomas Arne (1710 – 1778)

Evening Prayer with Hymns, 6.00pm

Voluntary: *Consolation in D flat*, S. 172 – III
Franz Liszt (1811 – 1886)

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FEATURED PIECE

Waltz in F major, 'Farewell to the Piano', Anh. 15
attr. Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827)

Although a very popular parlour piece through much of the 19th and 20th centuries, this is a piece with spurious origins. It was first published, and attributed to Beethoven, in 1838 in Berlin, and later republished by Boosey in London in the 1850s, where it was given the title *Beethoven's Adieu to the Piano, being his Last Composition*. Both attribution and title have stuck, though there is no evidence that Beethoven himself actually composed it; it appears nowhere in his sketchbooks, nor was it published during his lifetime, and the harmonic language used would tend to suggest a fresher and more contemporary approach to composition in the late 1830s than Beethoven displayed even in his later years. It was not uncommon during the 19th century for publishers, seeking to boost sales of their music, to attribute pieces to famous composers (particularly dead ones, who couldn't argue). One would hope that in the information age of having all the facts at our fingertips, such unscrupulous behaviour would no longer be possible – but then again, one would hope a lot of things.

However, the real purpose in this piece's inclusion in the evening service on the 20th July will be to say farewell to *our* piano, a Bechstein Model B grand dating from 1906. I'm not sure how long the instrument has been at St Oswald's; I have a vague memory of someone once telling me that it was initially on loan to us from the University, and they simply never asked for it back! (If anyone has any concrete information about our acquisition of the piano, I'd be very interested to hear it.) However long it's been, though, it has been through that time a big asset to the church's music-making, used for accompanying rehearsals, services, and concerts, as well as being a solo instrument in recitals and concerti – I recall a splendid performance of Beethoven's Piano Concerto no. 5, *Emperor*, immediately before the first round of COVID lockdowns came into effect.

At time of writing, the precise dates of the delivery of our new Steinway piano and the removal of the current Bechstein are yet to be determined, but the new instrument, at least, looks likely to arrive sometime during this month, and so with this piece we will say goodbye to an instrument that has served the church well over a substantial period of time, and hope it can find a new lease of life and a good home once it has received the care and attention it deserves.