

ST OSWALD'S PARISH CHURCH, DURHAM

MUSICAL NOTES – MAY 2026

A brief introduction to this month; with five Sundays, including two Choral Evensongs (10th and 24th May), as well as our Ascension Day service out at Finchale Priory (14th May), there's a lot of wonderful music coming up! I also couldn't pass up the opportunity to write about one of my all-time favourites – our anthem for Evensong on the 10th, Parry's *My soul, there is a country*. A brief exposition to the *Songs of Farewell* is at the end of this leaflet (and I thoroughly recommend the 2011 Tenebrae recording, conducted by Nigel Short.)

David Harris, Director of Music

Sunday 3rd – Fifth Sunday of Easter

Parish Eucharist, 11.00am

Anthem: *O taste and see*

Music: Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872 – 1958)

Text: Psalm 34: 8

O taste and see how gracious the Lord is : blest is the man that trusteth in him.

Voluntary: *Marche de Procession (L'Organiste pratique, bk II)*, op. 41 no. 5

Alexandre Guilmant (1837 – 1911)

Evening Prayer with Hymns, 6.00pm

Voluntary: *Suite Española no. 1: Granada (Serenade)*, op. 47 no. 1

Isaac Albéniz (1860 – 1909)

Sunday 10th – Sixth Sunday of Easter

Parish Eucharist, 11.00am

Anthem: *If ye love me*

Music: Thomas Tallis (1505 – 1585)

Text: John 14: 15-17

If ye love me, keep my commandments, and I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you for ever, ev'n the spirit of truth.

Voluntary: *Chorale prelude on 'Liebster Jesu, wir sind hier'*, BWV 731

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 – 1750)

Choral Evensong, 6.00pm

Preces and Responses

Joanna Forbes L'Estrange (b. 1971)

Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in F

George Dyson (1883 – 1964)

Anthem: *My soul, there is a country (Songs of Farewell)*

Music: Hubert Parry (1848 – 1918)

Text: Henry Vaughan (1622 – 1695) – see CP #261

Voluntary: *Organ Sonata no. 3 in C minor: 2nd mvt*

Alexandre Guilmant (1837 – 1911)

Thursday 14th – Ascension Day

Deanery Eucharist, Finchale Priory, 6.30pm

Introit: *God is gone up*

Music: Arthur Hutchings (1906 – 1989)

Text: Psalms 47: 5-6, 68: 18

God is gone up with a merry noise: and the Lord with the sound of the trumpet. Thou art gone up on high, thou hast led captivity captive, and received gifts for men. O sing praises, sing praises unto our God: O sing praises, sing praises unto our King. Alleluia!

Sunday 17th – Seventh Sunday of Easter

Parish Eucharist, 11.00am

Anthem: *Above all praise (Six Motets)*, op. 79 no. 3

Music: Felix Mendelssohn (1809 – 1847)

Text: anon.

Above all praise and all majesty, Lord, Thou reingest evermore. Hallelujah!

Voluntary: *Processional*

William Mathias (1934 – 1992)

Evening Prayer with Hymns, 6.00pm

Voluntary: *To The Spring (Lyric Pieces, book III)*, op. 43 no. 6

Edvard Grieg (1843 – 1907)

Sunday 24th – Pentecost

Parish Eucharist, 11.00am

Anthem: *O Lord, give thy Holy Spirit*

Music: Thomas Tallis (1505 – 1585)

Text: from Lidley's Prayers (1566)

O Lord, give thy Holy Spirit into our hearts, and lighten our understanding, that we may dwell in the fear of thy Name, all the days of our life, that we may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.

Voluntary: *Seven Improvisations: Allegro giocoso*, op. 150 no. 7

Camille Saint-Saëns (1835 – 1921)

Choral Evensong, 6.00pm

Preces and Responses

Thomas Ebdon (1738 – 1811)

Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in B flat

Charles Villiers Stanford (1852 – 1924)

Anthem: *Come, Holy Ghost*

Music: Thomas Attwood (1765 – 1838)

Text: John Cosin (1594 – 1672), based on 'Veni, Creator Spiritus' – see CP #178

Voluntary: *Voluntary in G minor (Ten Voluntaries)*, op. 6 no. 3

John Stanley (1712 – 1786)

Sunday 31st – Trinity Sunday

Parish Eucharist, 11.00am

Anthem: *God the Holy Trinity*

Music: Joanna Forbes L'Estrange (b. 1971)

Text: Blessing for Trinity Sunday

God the Holy Trinity make you strong in faith and love, defend you on every side, and guide you in truth and peace; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father and the Son be upon you and remain with you always. Amen.

Voluntary: *Tuba Tune*, op. 15

Craig Sellar Lang (1891 – 1971)

Evening Prayer with Hymns, 6.00pm

Voluntary: *Piano Sonata no. 12 in F: 1st movt*, K. 332: I

FEATURED PIECE

My soul, there is a country (Songs of Farewell)

Music: Hubert Parry (1848 – 1918)

Text: Henry Vaughan (1622 – 1695)

The *Songs of Farewell* are a collection of six motets written, as the title would suggest, towards the end of Parry's life. The first five pieces were written and first performed in 1916, against the backdrop of some of the most fierce fighting of the First World War, in which Parry, an academic and educator as well as a prominent composer, saw many of his students injured and killed. The Royal College of Music, of which Parry was director from 1894 until his death, has a war memorial listing some 38 staff and students who died in World War I, among them the composer George Butterworth; others, such as Arthur Bliss and Ivor Gurney, were wounded. In addition, Parry was a staunch Germanophile,

admiring composers such as Mendelssohn and Bach as well as German culture in general; he had believed that Britain and Germany would never go to war with each other, and was devastated to be proven wrong.

Henry Vaughan's poem, chosen by Parry to open the *Songs of Farewell* (and found at #261 in our hymnbooks), is originally titled *Peace*. The second stanza is particularly poignant in the piece's wartime context:

*There, above noise and danger, sweet peace sits crowned with smiles,
and One, born in a manger, commands the beauteous files.*

Had Parry given up on earthly peace at this point, resigned to the ongoing horrors of war? Was the only prospect of peace to be found beyond this vale of tears? Perhaps – and if so, he could hardly be blamed. The Christmas truces of 1914 were a distant memory by this point of the war, replaced by bitterness and cynicism among the combatants – directed both at those on the opposing side and the senselessness of military command that resulted in so much death. British soldiers had begun to sing, to the tune of Auld Lang Syne, the words, “We’re here, because we’re here, because we’re here, because we’re here” – ad infinitum. This was violence entirely bereft of cause or reason.

But even through the despair, the texts Parry chose for the *Songs* are profoundly hopeful, clinging to that most radical Christian truth: that hope is always available, and always justified, even among the darkness of this world; hope in that country “far beyond the stars”. Parry surely thought of his friends and students at war, and of the war in general, in choosing the text for the fourth of the *Songs*, by John Gibson Lockhart:

*There is an old belief, that on some solemn shore,
Beyond the sphere of grief dear friends shall meet once more.*

Parry never saw the end of World War I. The final motet of the *Songs of Farewell* – *Lord, let me know my end* – was one of the last pieces he composed before he died of Spanish flu on 7th October 1918, barely a month away from the Armistice. It is the only one of the *Songs* with a Biblical text, setting verses from Psalm 39; and amid its dramatic and moving meditations on frailty and mortality, we find one brief moment of peaceful sincerity:

And now, Lord, what is my hope? Truly my hope is even in Thee.

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