

## NW Europe RSCM Choral Festival – RC St.Aloysius, Utrecht Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> May 2003

It's a funny thing isn't it! I'm writing a few notes about our Choral Festival in May this year, which was held at the Roman Catholic Church of St.Aloysius in Utrecht. What's funny? Ah- yes! I wasn't there, but in the absence of any other contributions about the event I thought I'd put together a few notes based on the music [I had practised much of it before-hand with our choir in Haarlem] and some snippets provided by others, who had been there. The service, which was ably controlled and led from a musical perspective by Simon Lole [Director of Music and Master of the Choristers at Salisbury Cathedral], followed the form of a full 1662 choral evensong, with 'the family Wesley' as the main theme. The order of service was as follows:

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|-------------------|--|
| Introit:          | 'O Love Divine' - tune 'Cornwall' by SS Wesley [1810-76]; arr Anthony Caesar       |
| Versicles         | by Donald Hunt; adapted from the church music of SS Wesley                         |
| Psalm 119 vv 1-8  | chant by George C Martin   |
| Evening Canticles | SS Wesley  |
| Responses         | by Donald Hunt; adapted from the church music of SS Wesley                         |
| Anthem            | 'Ascribe unto the Lord' by SS Wesley   |
| Hymn              | 'Put thou thy trust in God' - tune 'Doncaster' by S Wesley [1766-1837]             |
| Hymn              | 'O for a heart to praise my God' - tune 'Stockton' by T.Wright [1763-1829]         |
| Final Anthem      | 'Angels' by Simon Lole [words by Keith Walker]                                     |
| Final Hymn        | 'Hail the day that sees him rise' - tune 'Llanfair' by Robert Williams of Anglesey |

The service started with a lovely arrangement of the hymn 'O love divine', and although principally a verse anthem, it is effective in providing not only the uplift and contribution to worship but also enough variation and challenges for the choristers; a little of 'Ascribe unto the Lord' also gets melded into this arrangement [nice one Anthony!]. I must admit that I was a bit disappointed with the Versicles & Responses, and although they have nicely taken elements from SS Wesley's music into each of the phrases, it seems to me a bit 'bitty' and would not be in my own Top 20 sets. Having said that, I don't know of any other 'Wesleyan' responses that could have been used; so I'll shut up on that point! [still not my favourites though!!]. Moving on then to one of my very favourite psalm chants; just so evocative and bring out the meaning of what the psalmist was trying to convey. The canticles by SS Wesley [there's a surprise], I do like but only when not rushed [as in fact indicated]. I don't know how they went on the day, but during practices we were treating them in a sort of 'plain chant' way and in a good acoustic they come across very well indeed. They are not complicated and can be in the repertoire of many choirs; but don't be fooled, they still need care to get the true meaning of the words across to the congregation, for whom [remember] they are being sung - it is a much a part of their worship as ours when we sing them! Then there is the anthem; just a short piece [not!] - 20 pages in my book. The anthem takes its words from selected verses of psalms 96 and 115, and can be sung as a shorter Anthem 'The Lord hath been mindful of us' starting some 6 pages from the end! This works well and in some respects I prefer it, to the complete anthem. Perhaps, because I wasn't there, I haven't had the feeling of singing it with a choir of some 100 singers; in which case I should not comment anymore on this point. The final Anthem was 'Angels' by Simon Lole and I like it. It's one of those that grows on you, once you grasp and master the appropriate complexity contained in your own singing part - it is sung at a reasonable but steady pace and is quite vibrant with a very effective variation in 'light and shade' [I must have heard Martin use that expression at some stage during a practice once!!]. The Anthem was written originally for the RSCM Coventry Diocesan Festival in 2001 and following our own festival this year, we have sung this on several occasions not least of all at Ripon Cathedral with ECS this year. The chosen hymns add a suitable complement to the whole act of worship and I was looking for connections between them all and with the service as whole. The first was by S.Wesley [that's fine - a clear link] then the last one has a descant by Simon Lole - so that's more than just a tenuous link - and anyway the words were written by Charles Wesley with Thomas Cotterill in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century; but what about the music of Wright? I suppose one might say that since 'Stockton' is in the North East of England as is 'Doncaster' [sort of] then that is the link I will plump for! Oh, that's ok, I've just noticed that Charles W wrote these words as well - phew.

Next year's NW Europe choral festival is to be held in Brussels [church of St Marc] on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> June 2004. The service will follow a theme [rather than a formal choral evensong - they flip flop every other year in this respect] and will be rich in many styles of music encompassing the older with the modern and covering different types of worship. I would encourage you all to get involved and be there, I really marvellous experience.

[contribution from Trevor Day]