This fascinating volume draws together contributions from a wide range of theologians and practicing musicians to consider the ways that theology and belief can interact with the practice and appreciation of music, to mutually invigorating effect. It is an impressive and exciting achievement and I am sure it will be read eagerly by all those for whom music can illuminate the sacred.

—Dr. Jeremy Thurlow, University of Cambridge

Our contemporary culture is communicating ever-increasingly through the visual, through film, and through music. This makes it ever more urgent for theologians to explore the resources of art for enriching our understanding and experience of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Annunciations: Sacred Music for the Twenty-First Century, edited by George Corbett, answers this need, evaluating the relationship between the sacred and the composition, performance, and appreciation of music.

Through the theme of ‘annunciations’, this volume interrogates how, when, why, through and to whom God communicates in the Old and New Testaments. In doing so, it tackles the intimate relationship between scriptural reflection and musical practice in the past, its present condition, and what the future might hold.

Annunciations comprises three parts. Part I sets out flexible theological and compositional frameworks for a constructive relationship between the sacred and music. Part II presents the reflections of theologians and composers involved in collaborating on new pieces of sacred choral music, alongside the six new scores and links to the recordings. Part III considers the reality of programming and performing sacred works today.

This volume provides an indispensable resource for scholars and artists working at the interface between theology and the arts, and for those involved in sacred music. However, it will also be of interest to anyone concerned with the ways in which the divine communicates through word and artistry to humanity.

As with all Open Book publications, this entire book is available to read for free on the publisher’s website. Printed and digital editions, together with supplementary digital material, can also be found at www.openbookpublishers.com.
One of the questions central to the TheoArtistry Festival was: what does the future hold for sacred music?\(^1\) Conceivably, this question would not have occurred to composers 800 hundred years ago. During the Mediaeval and Renaissance periods, the Church was the greatest supporter of the arts as well as being the main platform and disseminator for them. In music, if one thinks back to the great Renaissance composers such as William Byrd, Thomas Tallis, Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, and Tomás Luis de Victoria, all of them benefited from ecclesiastical patronage during this time. Even in the later periods of the Baroque and Classical, composers including Johann Sebastian Bach, Henry Purcell, and Joseph Haydn had significant employment from the Church as composers, though not exclusively so.

The reality today is different. However, whilst the Church may no longer be a main patron for composers, its support for church music in general is still of paramount importance. The current standards of performance in England are agreed to be at an all-time high. Martin Thomas, in *English Cathedral Music and Liturgy in the Twentieth Century*, makes an interesting comparison with the Victorian era:

Much of what is taken for granted in the musical life of the major English cathedrals in the late twentieth century was almost completely absent for most of the nineteenth century. Choirs then were ill-disciplined and musically unreliable. Lay clerks, who were paid less than domestic servants of the clergy, were often absent from weekday services and some aged and incompetent possessors of freehold. Choristers were poorly educated and surplices (if worn) were retrieved from beneath a seat or music stand. There was

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1 The TheoArtistry Festival was held in St Andrews, 4–6 March, 2018.
no procession of clergy and choir at the start of the service, music was often chosen during the service and, of necessity, not advertised by way of a music list beforehand, repertoire was limited and repetitious, and psalms were sung to unpointed psalters with haphazard results.²

The contrasts today are striking. The forty-two Anglican Cathedrals in England now provide an invaluable infrastructure for sacred and liturgical music. They have their own choirs — the majority of which are professional — and attached to many of these foundations are choir schools for the education of choristers. Bodies such as the Royal School of Church Music, the Royal College of Organists, the Incorporated Society of Musicians, and the Guild of Church Musicians provide professional guidance and training, and there is a network of charitable support through national organizations such as Friends of Cathedral Music, and trusts such as The Ouseley Trust.

None of this should be taken for granted. The Church, on the whole (and for all kinds of reasons), does not and cannot support the commissioning of the arts in the way that it used to. Because it does not have the central place in the life of our nation that it once did, funding is more difficult to find for ecclesiastical foundations, especially in an age in which key external funders, such as The Arts Council, find it increasingly difficult to meet the fiscal demands of today’s cultural organizations across the board. With this backdrop, one would perhaps be forgiven for being conservative in the commissioning of new music for our cathedral, collegiate, and church choirs. And, given that there is so much sacred/liturgical music already in existence, there might be a temptation to limit ourselves to what we know in performance; to the tried and the tested; to the familiar; to the works which we know will please congregations, choirs and clergies. Often, the promotion and performance of contemporary repertoire is met with criticism because it makes some people uncomfortable, particularly those who like what they know and know what they like.

As a cathedral director of music for nearly twenty years, I have spent a vast proportion of my life taking part in a daily choral tradition. For me, it is clear that contemporary music must form part of our living expression of worship in the Church; indeed, I feel we have a duty to create and perform new music in addition to singing the best music from the past 800 years. It is achievable, albeit with some required determination. At Wells Cathedral, where I have been Organist and Master of the Choristers since 2005, we have sought to make contemporary music an established part of worshipping and musical life in two ways. The first is our Cathedral Commissions scheme, which was established in 2006 in order to raise funds for new works from some of today’s most exciting composers. The second is our annual festival, new music wells [sic], founded in 2008, which celebrates and raises awareness of new music through a week of services, concerts, and other events.³ Furthermore, there is another major

³ For information about new music wells, see https://www.wellscathedral.org.uk/music-the-choir/new-music-wells/
commissioning project, *The Cranmer Anthem Book*, which involves the Cathedral Choir (but not exclusively), that I will touch on briefly at the end of the chapter.

*Cathedral Commissions* aims to share the excitement and thrill of commissioning with as many people as possible. The scheme brings together a group of what James MacMillan once called ‘the midwives to new music’. The commissioners ‘club together’ to pay the commission fee for the composer. In return for their generosity, they are invited to the final rehearsal of their newly-commissioned work, to the first performance, to a special reception where they meet the composer; and they have their score signed (and the score has their name printed, with a dedication if they so choose). The commissioners are then kept informed of further performances, including broadcasts and recordings. They become involved in the ongoing life of the piece and have a feeling of ownership, which is important in engaging them with both contemporary music and sacred music.

Through this project the commissioners support living composers. They also support the continuation of the glorious ‘English Choral Tradition’ and, at Wells, they support the 1100-year-old Music Foundation. *Cathedral Commissions* is based on the model of the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group’s *Sound Investment* scheme, and follows on from a similar project that I directed at St Mary’s Episcopal Cathedral, Edinburgh, between 2001–2005, called *Capital Commissions*. With both schemes, one of the joys is the ever-growing community of committed commissioners. These commissioners have the opportunity to meet some of the great names of modern-day composition, question them about their music, and give feedback about their experience. The other beneficiaries are the cathedral choristers. For these boys and girls, aged between eight and fourteen, meeting the likes of Peter Maxwell Davies and Judith Weir is a formative experience, a memory to cherish, and perhaps a catalyst for a creative and/or spiritual spark in their young minds.

Still, it would be reasonable to ask why there is a need to commission anew for the Church when there is so much music from the past, and certainly more than one could realistically hope to perform in a lifetime. But our worshipping minds have always needed something new to challenge them, especially in the way in which we think about the texts encountered. The quest for the new was summed up perfectly by the late Maxwell Davies — the first president of *Cathedral Commissions* — who said of the scheme in Wells:

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4 Since being launched in 2006, we have commissioned twenty-one major works from the following composers: Tarki O’Regan, Richard Allain, Peter Maxwell Davies, Gabriel Jackson, James MacMillan, Judith Bingham, Howard Skempton, Jonathan Dove, John Joubert, John Tavener, Michael Berkeley, Judith Weir, Philip Moore, Thea Musgrave, Diana Burrell, and Philip Wilby. For more information about the scheme, see Wells Cathedral Music Office, *Cathedral Commissions* (Wellscathedral.org, 2018), https://www.wellscathedral.org.uk/music-the-choir/cathedral-commissions/

5 James MacMillan made this remark at the launch of *Capital Commissions* (Edinburgh).

6 The Music Foundation at Wells Cathedral dates back to the year 909, when the first cathedral was consecrated. This predates the current Gothic one, begun in c.1185. Wells Cathedral School was founded for the education of the cathedral’s choristers.

The Church must always be abreast of developments in the cultural life of the society she serves. Her spiritual involvement in all aspects of this – philosophical, scientific, and artistic – is essential to ensure that, while steadfastly maintaining the eternal values for which she stands, she renews herself at the deepest levels, to make her meaning and relevance clear to each successive generation.

A creative relationship with the musical thought of the time not only gives new and unexpected meaning to the words of religious texts, but also involves composers in a real living society – today, for obvious reasons, of supreme importance. It is for all these reasons that the Wells Cathedral initiative to commission composers is of such value.

By being actively involved in a living Church, the composers commissioned have the opportunity to surpass themselves, irrespective of their personal belief or non-belief, and to make a contribution to our musical culture with very wide reference and resonance indeed.

Maxwell Davies emphasizes the Church’s need to connect with people in an ever-changing world: believers and non-believers, and those somewhere in the middle. Music has a transcendent power to do this. John Davies, the current Dean of Wells, often talks of music as being the conduit through which we may seek to connect earth with heaven. The Church should ‘renew herself at the deepest levels’ in theology, spirituality, liturgy, art, architecture, hymnody, music, and other areas as well. Consider how fresh, daring, challenging, and wonderfully unfamiliar those (now), well-loved works of Tallis and Byrd sounded when they were first performed. These composers broke new ground; they renewed the music of their generation.

As time has elapsed, however, the ideal of presenting music afresh has become increasingly challenging not just for composers, but also for performers. The regular or daily performance of ‘Preces and Responses’, from the Book of Common Prayer, is a good example. At Wells, we sing these prayers eight times a week. One of the best-known settings is that of the twentieth-century composer, Bernard Rose (1916–1996). As the choir’s conductor, it is important for me to remember that the music is familiar to most of the singers. Indeed, some of the Vicars Choral will have sung this setting literally hundreds of times. I have to encourage them to perform it as if it were a new work and a total revelation, as it might have been when first performed in Oxford’s Magdalen College Chapel back in 1961. I also encourage them to imagine the text afresh. The familiarity of the words can make us immune to their meaning. Choirs should be praying those responses every time that they sing them, but it is easy just to sing some beautiful and comfortingly familiar music.

Hopefully, John Tavener’s ‘Preces and Responses’ — which were written for Wells Cathedral Choir shortly before his untimely death in November 2013 — and Howard

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8 Extract from Peter Maxwell Davies’s introduction to Cathedral Commissions, in a brochure published by Wells Cathedral in 2008.
9 This setting was written in 1961 for the choir of Magdalen College, Oxford, where Rose was Informator Choristarum (the chapel’s Director of Music).
10 The Vicars Choral are the professional adult members of the choir, known as Lay Clerks or Songmen in other foundations.
Skempton’s ‘Preces and Responses’, commissioned by Cathedral Commissions in 2017, help the members of the Wells congregation pray these sixteenth- and seventeenth-century prayers afresh. The contrast between the two settings could not be more marked: the Tavener setting is broad, sustained, majestic, slow in tempo; it is quite vulnerable at times and striking at others, with the use of double choir canon in some of the responses; and it possesses something of the prayerful, meditative Orthodox tradition still permeating the choral writing. Skempton’s setting, on the other hand, is in his trademark style: simple, miniaturist, delicate, and subtle (too much so for some, perhaps); it is respectful to the liturgy; and it emphasizes the music serving the text, with the result that it is prayerful in a different but highly effective way. Through being unfamiliar, both settings may help members of the congregation become involved in the texts of these prayers, rather than simply letting the music (and the texts) wash over them. Many, who have been present for services where these settings have been sung, have commented on how moving they were. An added dimension to performing these two new settings is that it is then refreshing to revisit the more familiar settings by Tudor composers such as Byrd, Thomas Morley, William Smith, and Thomas Tomkins; and later settings by Richard Ayleward (1626–1669), the aforementioned Rose, Humphrey Clucas (b. 1941), Kenneth Leighton (1929–1988), and so on. The same can be said for anthems, mass settings, and canticle settings.

Another example of a challenge through music is a setting of the Mass by Jonathan Harvey (1939–2012), a composer who pushed the boundaries of liturgical choral and organ music. In 1995, Westminster Abbey commissioned a Missa Brevis from Harvey. This was the tercentenary year of the death of the Abbey’s former Organist, Purcell (1659–1695), a revolutionary in his own day. Hearing this work for the first time, I was struck by its spiritual depth, and its ability to illuminate the familiar Latin texts of the Mass in a way that few other composers had done. It is not only the particular harmonic and melodic language of Harvey that is exhilarating and thought-provoking, but the almost visceral use of spoken word (some have written ‘shouted’\(^1\)) within the choral texture in the ‘Gloria’. At Wells, some people (in the choir and the congregation alike) still find this particular spoken use of the voice unnerving and strange in a choral and liturgical context, even though it has been performed since 2007. What is Harvey doing here? To my mind, he is expressing the earthbound nature of humanity praising God. There is something simple about speaking the text of the Mass. It has been celebrated this way for hundreds of years, yet the act of writing this into a sung setting makes some people uncomfortable. But this discomfort is surely a good thing: it is all too easy for liturgical music to be something warm, reassuring, and familiar, and — arguably — there are times when this is appropriate. Equally, a questioning, inquisitive, and alert faith — or, at least, the quest for it — needs challenge on its journey. Perhaps Harvey helps us with this challenge.

After first performing Harvey’s Missa Brevis, a member of the congregation said that she did not care for the piece at all, and that the Sanctus had made her ‘feel physically sick’. I was delighted to hear this — not because this elderly lady had ‘felt sick’ — but because the music and the performance of it elicited a strong reaction. She had engaged with it, and it had made her think; she had listened and had become involved. What could have engendered this reaction? The Sanctus starts in a mysterious way, especially in the context of following the Gloria, with a quiet and low-pitched chord of A-major in six parts. The stillness of the opening of the Sanctus is not dissimilar to some early Tudor masses: the Missa Euge bone of Christopher Tye (c. 1505–1573) springs to mind. These chords develop to encompass all twelve tones of the chromatic scale, perhaps — as Andrew Nethsingha suggests — representing all of God’s creation.\textsuperscript{12} The ‘Pleni sunt caeli’ section (‘Heaven and Earth are of full of Thy Glory’), again, represents God’s creation through the quiet, microcosmic busyness of the texture, which is fascinating to see on the page of the score, as well as to hear performed. A spacious declamation of the ‘Hosanna’ follows, which, through the bold use of silence, has something of the cosmic God about it. For some, the impact of this enforced stillness can be uncomfortable, even in a reverberant acoustic. Of his experience of silence whilst being a chorister at St Michael’s College, Tenbury, Harvey wrote: ‘The silence of the building was haunting... Music came out of it, dissolved back into it.’\textsuperscript{13} Arguably, the effect of these ‘composed silences’ makes it one of the most thought-provoking settings that has ever been written. And this is what Maxwell Davies alluded to when he said ‘a creative relationship with the musical thought of the time […] gives new and unexpected meaning to the words of religious texts’.\textsuperscript{14} Harvey does make us think afresh about the God of the ever-expanding universe. The music is slightly incomprehensible; this strikes at the heart of our faith and worship: that which we call God, is — in so many ways — unfathomable.

On a Wells Cathedral Services and Music List, therefore, one will find plenty that is familiar, or — at least — plenty of composers who will be familiar. But one will also find commissioned works which are there to refresh the liturgy and the choir’s role within the worshipping heart of the cathedral. In addition to the twenty-one works which Wells Cathedral Choir and I have premiered thanks to Cathedral Commissions, we have also given many first performances of works commissioned by other means (over 120, from January 2005 until July 2018): everything from works by student composers at Wells Cathedral School right through to a major new setting of the St John Passion by Bob Chilcott. Many of these new pieces have been broadcast and/or recorded, which is important in raising them to the attention of liturgical and concert choirs throughout the world. The most successful is probably Arvo Pärt’s ‘Nunc

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\textsuperscript{13} Quoted in Nethsingha, ‘Personal Reflections’, para. 1.
\textsuperscript{14} Maxwell Davies’s introduction to Cathedral Commissions.
...dimittis’, which the Choir of St Mary’s Episcopal Cathedral and I premiered in 2001. Taken up by choirs all over the world, it has been recorded over ten times, sung at the BBC Proms three times, and broadcast widely. This example, and many others, confirm the view of Skempton, that composing liturgical music — especially settings of the evening canticles, masses, and responses, but also anthems which are assigned to a particular feast day or season of the church’s calendar — is rewarding because it will be performed so often.\textsuperscript{15} Moreover, much of what has been written for Wells and the Anglican tradition would fit within the worship of other denominations.

The process of commissioning new works is always fascinating and stimulating. Three major works commissioned between 2012 and 2017 are examples of the different approaches to a similar project by three British composers: Chilcott’s \textit{St John Passion} (2013), John Joubert’s \textit{St Mark Passion} (2017), and Philip Moore’s \textit{St Luke Passion} (2018).\textsuperscript{16} In his moving seventy-minute setting of the \textit{St John Passion}, Chilcott provides specific instrumental colours for the three main roles: viola and cello for the Evangelist; two trumpets for Pilate; and horn, trombone, tuba and organ for Jesus. The organ and brass combine with timpani to accompany the choir in the crowd scenes and the hymns. The hymns punctuate the Gospel narrative, enabling the congregation to be involved in the same way as they would have been in a Bach Passion or in John Stainer’s \textit{Crucifixion}. Chilcott writes instantly memorable, original hymn tunes for well-known Passiontide hymn texts. He also intersperses several ‘choral meditations’ throughout the work. Chilcott commented:

The larger role that the choir has to play is the singing of four meditations that punctuate various points of the drama. I have tried in these meditations to emulate the style of a strophic carol in the mould of a writer such as Thomas Ravenscroft, cast in a simple, melodic way. The texts they sing are English poems from the 13th to the early 17th centuries that express deeply human responses to death, to life and to man’s relationship with the world and with God. Two of these meditations are sung by the choir with Soprano Solo, the last of which expresses most poignantly the human response to seeing Christ crucified on the Cross.\textsuperscript{17}

The \textit{St John Passion} is a stunning work, with rich yet economical orchestration, and well-written solo and choral parts.

Equally compelling, yet different, is Joubert’s fifty-minute setting of the \textit{St Mark Passion}. Joubert originally desired a large ensemble; however, in early discussions it was agreed that, for practical purposes — not least the financial considerations in engaging professional instrumentalists — the work would be more moderately

\begin{itemize}
\item An opinion expressed during ‘Composer Conversations with Michael Berkeley’ (18 October 2017), new music wells 77-17, and on other occasions in personal communication with the author.
\item Quoted from the composer’s introduction in the ‘Order of Service’, Wells Cathedral, from Palm Sunday, 2013 (24 March 2013).
\end{itemize}
scaled than Chilcott’s *St John*. Thus, the cello accompanies the evangelist; the organ accompanies Christ and, of course, the chorus parts. Joubert chose to include hymns from *The English Hymnal*, sometimes keeping the original harmonies and adding his own compositional ‘stamp’. It is an interesting selection: the plainsong version (‘Vexilla Regis’) of ‘The royal banners forward go’ (with Joubert’s own harmonization); ‘Let all mortal flesh keep silence’, with a re-harmonization of the French carol that traditionally accompanies these words, and what one might call ‘vocal commentaries’ from soprano and tenor soloists; ‘Drop, drop, slow tears’, using the beautifully plaintive ‘Song 46’ by Orlando Gibbons, with organ links between the verses in Joubert’s complementary hand; the great Passiontide hymn, ‘O sacred head, sore wounded’, using well-known Bach harmonization of Hans Leo Hassler’s melody (which, interestingly, Joubert does not touch); and — finally — ‘When I survey the wondrous cross’ to the glorious tune, ‘Rockingham’, once again with organ links provided by Joubert. Like Chilcott’s *St John*, the soloist and choir parts are full of drama, with the parts of the Evangelist (marked ‘Narrator’ in the score) and Jesus being particularly demanding.

Moore’s contribution to the (eventual) set of four gospel Passions is the longest of the settings, lasting approximately one hour and forty minutes. It is scored for soloists, choir, and organ. Originally, Moore had proposed using saxophone in the work (an idea later dropped) and had also considered having Christ as a countertenor. This idea of varying the portayers of the narrative from what might be called ‘the traditional set-up’, has found favour with, among others, MacMillan who, in his setting of the *St John Passion* (2007), gave the role of the Evangelist to a ‘narrator chorus’, which the composer suggests should be sung by ‘8-24 singers of a professional standard’. And, in MacMillan’s *St Luke Passion* (2014), he assigns everything to the main chorus (i.e. there are no soloists), and a children’s choir portrays Christ. He explains his reasoning for the latter:

Any Passion that casts Christ as a soloist immediately makes him take human form as an adult male, whereas I wanted to examine his otherness, sanctity and mystery. Employing a children’s choir grants a measure of innocence to Christ as the sacrificial lamb, while the vocal line is either in unison or in three parts reflecting the oneness or Trinitarian implications of God.

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18 It should be noted that Chilcott also provided a version of the *St John Passion* with only two instruments: the organ and cello.
19 The final instalment of the Passion settings is by Philip Wilby (b. 1949), who is composing a *St Matthew Passion* for Palm Sunday 2019.
20 First performed in the Barbican Hall, London, by Christopher Maltman (baritone), the London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, conducted by Colin Davies.
22 First performed on 15 March, 2014, in the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, by Netherlands Radio Philharmonic and Choir, Vocaal Talent Nederland, National Jeugdkoor, conducted by Markus Stenz.
In the end, Moore settled for the traditional tenor for the Evangelist and bass-baritone for Christ. His approach to the hymnody is different again from Chilcott and Joubert. In recent years, Moore has spent a good deal of time in the United States and has become familiar with various American hymnbooks. This has led to an interesting selection of hymns for the choir and congregation to sing throughout this St Luke. For example, ‘Of the glorious body telling’ (normally sung to the plainsong ‘Pange lingua’) is set to ‘Grafton’ (a French ‘Tantum ergo’ in Chants Ordinaires de l’Office Divin, Paris 1881); and there is an American folk hymn, ‘What wondrous love is this’, to the tune ‘Wondrous Love’ from the hymn book, American Southern Harmony, 1835. Perhaps most powerfully, there is a translation, by Francis Tucker, of the ‘Solus ad victimam’ by the Mediaeval French theologian, Peter Abelard (1079–1142). The words are set to Tallis’s haunting ‘Third Mode Melody’ — familiar to most, perhaps, as the main theme from Vaughan Williams’s Fantasia on a theme by Thomas Tallis, which Vaughan Williams included in his 1906 edition of the English Hymnal. Moore sets ‘Solus ad victimam’ as a piece for choir, and then — helpfully for the congregation — he subsequently uses the ‘Third Mode Melody’ in a hymn, with words by the great Methodist hymnodist, Fred Pratt Green (1903–2000). As well as the choral portrayal of the crowd scenes, there are some additional effective choral reflections which intersperse the gospel narrative: ‘Meditation on “Wondrous Love”’; a setting of the Gradual for Maundy Thursday, ‘Christus factus est’; and ‘A Litany’, with words by Phineas Fletcher (1582–1650).

Another interesting comparison is between two settings of the ‘Jubilate Deo’ (Psalm 100), which we commissioned for the 1100th anniversary of the Cathedral Choir. We chose two renowned composers — MacMillan and John Rutter — from different ends of the compositional spectrum, who we also knew would write engagingly for voices, organ, and instruments. The MacMillan setting has a difficult virtuoso organ part, opening with constantly moving semi-quavers darting between the pedal and the manuals in a menacing way. The choir writing — marked ‘strepitoso’ [noisily] — is boisterous and rhythmically punchy, at times in an almost jazzy way. It is an impressive, exciting, and challenging setting of these familiar words. Rutter’s setting is a wonderful contrast. The commission came about through a request for a companion ‘Jubilate Deo’ for the ‘Winchester Te Deum’, which was written in 2006. The result is the ‘Wells Jubilate’, for brass quintet, percussion, timpani, organ, and

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26 The ‘Te Deum’ and ‘Jubilate Deo’ are the canticles which are often paired together in the Anglican service of Matins (the other canticles are the ‘Benedicite Omnia opera’ and the ‘Benedictus’).
choir — the same scoring as the ‘Winchester Te Deum’. It bears all the hallmarks of Rutter: eminently singable and pleasing vocal lines, tonal, appropriately festive for the text, and fittingly joyful. Both settings of the ‘Jubilate Deo’ are strong, original, and excellent additions to the canon already available to choirs and conductors, although the Rutter is more likely to be taken up widely owing to the fact that the MacMillan organ part is fearsomely difficult, and the choir parts are quite challenging.

Two other particularly challenging works that have been written for Wells Cathedral Choir are masses by Tavener and Joubert, both entitled Missa Wellensis. They push the singers to the limits, especially vocally, but also musically. Both pieces are nevertheless rewarding to perform and fine additions to the repertoire. The Tavener setting has a lot of divisi in the vocal parts (the setting is for double choir and he splits all the parts within both choirs, giving SSAATTBB & SSAATTBB) meaning that one needs at least four singers per voice part, which a number of cathedrals in the UK and elsewhere do not have.

This question of the practicability of performance is, naturally, an important one. Whilst one should not be overly prescriptive in a commissioning brief, it is little use having an unperformable piece. From this point of view, I was especially pleased with Jonathan Dove’s Missa Brevis, which we premiered in 2009. It was commissioned by the Cathedral Organists’ Association (COA) and performed during its spring conference, held at Wells. I was tasked by the COA to shape a brief for the commissioned setting, and to ‘negotiate it’ with Dove. I proposed the following:

- A Latin Missa Brevis (‘Brevis’ in the sense that there was to be no Creed).
- Accessible for the performers and congregations alike, but also stimulating and refreshing.
- No divisi in the choir parts.
- An organ part which should not be too difficult.
- Appropriate for the liturgy (i.e. which is not too long).

Dove fulfilled the commissioning brief so successfully that, immediately after the service in which it was premiered, around twenty-five cathedral directors of music said that they would add the work to their repertoire. Subsequently, it has been recorded at least twice for CD, broadcast on television, webcast, and taken up by choirs all over

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27 Rutter later published a version for organ only.
30 The only CD currently available of the Missa Brevis is the first recording by Wells Cathedral Choir. Jonathan Dove, Choral Music by Jonathan Dove, Wells Cathedral Choir, cond. by Matthew Owens (Hyperion Records, CDA67768, 2010).
the world, including many of the cathedral and collegiate choirs in the UK. Dove’s Missa Brevis, then, is a veritable lesson in itself for all composers and commissioners.

At Wells, Dove’s Missa Brevis led to two further commissions: ‘The Wells Service’ (‘Magnificat’ and ‘Nunc dimittis’) in 2012, and ‘Te lucis ante terminum’ in 2014. For choirs, organists, and conductors, it is good to build relationships with composers, which in turn — and crucially — helps a congregation to build a relationship with the composers. We have worked extensively over the years with many composers, immersing ourselves in their music and subsequently making single-composer discs of a number of composers, including David Bednall, Judith Bingham, Geoffrey Burgon, Chilcott, Gary Davison, Dove, MacMillan, and Joubert. In addition, the choir has recorded single-composer discs by Leighton, William Mathias, and Tavener, once again becoming enriched by the individual language of these recent composers.

In working with composers, it is always illuminating to know what has or has not influenced them. Chilcott talked of early musical influences:

I was fortunate as a singer to sing the evangelist role in both the great Passions of Bach a number of times. I also remember as a boy chorister in King’s College, Cambridge singing the simpler renaissance versions of the Passion chanted by the dean and chaplain of the chapel in holy week. It is the austerity, the agony and ultimately the grace of this story that has inspired me to write this piece, to be performed for the first time in a magnificent building where this same story has been commemorated for almost a thousand years.

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31 The Missa Brevis was broadcast live on Christmas Day 2009 from Chester Cathedral. Among other examples, the Choir of St John’s College, Cambridge webcast the work in 2010. The Choir of St John’s College, Cambridge, Dove J – Missa Brevis (Sjcchoir.co.uk, 2018), http://www.sjcchoir.co.uk/listen/sjc-live/dove-j-missa-brevis.

32 Sister foundations in which cultivating such relationships has worked well include Truro Cathedral where the choir (dir. by Christopher Gray) has worked extensively with Gabriel Jackson, Philip Stopford, and Dobrinka Tabakova, among others.


35 Bob Chilcott, Requiem & Other Choral Works, Wells Cathedral Choir, cond. by Matthew Owens (Hyperion Records, CDA67650, 2012); Bob Chilcott, St John Passion, Wells Cathedral Choir, cond. by Matthew Owens (Signum Classics, SIGCD412, 2015).


39 John Joubert, St Mark Passion, 2013.


42 John Tavener, Missa Wellensis & Other Sacred Music, Wells Cathedral, cond. by Matthew Owens (Signum Classics, SIGCD442, 2016).

In relation to the *St John Passion*, Chilcott also recalls ‘approaching the commission with a mixture of excitement and apprehension, daunted by the towering presence of Bach’s *St John Passion* and mindful of more recent works by Arvo Pärt and James MacMillan’:

I had a similar feeling when I was asked to write a Requiem […] There are such incredible models to look up to, which of course made me nervous. With the *St John Passion*, you’re taking on something deeply rooted in western music and also deeply rooted in Christian theology.

Similarly, Joubert was initially reluctant to write a setting of ‘*Locus iste*’ because of the ‘shadow of Bruckner’s setting’. Thankfully, Joubert changed his mind and wrote a piece of almost symphonic proportions in the scale and demands of its choral writing. In contrast, having commissioned Skempton to write a setting of ‘*Beati quorum via*’ and given the first performance of it, I discovered that he had never heard Stanford’s well-known setting.

Another way in which we seek, at Wells Cathedral, to bring new material to the liturgical and musical table, is through our festival, *new music wells* [sic], which started in 2008. The inspiration for the festival came from Norwich Cathedral, which, in conjunction with the University of East Anglia, used to host a Festival of Contemporary Church Music every two to three years between 1981 and 1997. Further inspiration for *new music wells* was the London Festival of Contemporary Church Music, founded in 2002. Based at St Pancras Parish Church, London, and founded by Christopher Batchelor, it is an important festival for new choral and organ music, even if it stretches ‘contemporary’ to include composers from the twentieth century, such as Herbert Howells, William Walton, Olivier Messiaen, and Mathias, within its programme. It was, however, this element of not restricting our festival at Wells to living composers that helped the formation of a particular feature of the festival in Wells. Each year, *new music wells* is a retrospective of the previous forty years of music. Thus, when it…

45 Ibid.
47 Skempton wrote his setting of ‘*Beati quorum via*’ for The Exon Singers for their 2008 Festival. The first performance was given during a BBC Radio 3 broadcast of Choral Evening from Buckfast Abbey. For the scores, see Howard Skempton, *Three Motets, New Horizons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
48 The festival took place in 1981, 1983, 1986, 1989, 1992, and 1997 and was the brainchild of Michael Nicholas (Norwich Cathedral, Organist and Master of the Choristers, 1971–1994) and Peter Aston (University of East Anglia, Professor of Music). They commissioned and programmed much adventurous repertoire. Sadly, the Norwich festival ceased, partly through lack of support by the authorities at the cathedral as Martin Thomas explains in Thomas, *English Cathedral Music*, p. 213.
49 For more information about the London Festival of Contemporary Church Music, see: The London Festival of Contemporary Music, About the Festival (LFCCM.com), http://www.lfccm.com.
started, the music performed during new music wells 68-08 dated back to 1968. Ten years later, the earliest work in our festival was from 1978. This annual change creates an interesting shifting focus and a constant programming challenge. Much of the music featured within the festival falls within the regular cathedral services of Evensong, Eucharist, and Matins. Consequently, all the canticles, anthems, responses, masses, and organ voluntaries must fall within the forty-year time span.\footnote{Currently, the only exceptions to the ‘40 year rule’ are the hymn tunes and psalm chants.} This constantly shifting time-frame is what makes new music wells unique: it is not a contemporary music festival (as that, arguably, should only include living composers), but a celebration of music from the last forty years.

In 2017, new music wells 77-17 was the platform for the launch of The Cranmer Anthem Book. It is a major undertaking — over a period of ten to fifteen years — that will see all ninety-two Collects of the Book of Common Prayer, by Thomas Cranmer, set to music by some of the world’s finest composers. The inspiration for this project is the well-known setting of ‘Almighty and everlasting God’ (the Collect for the Third Sunday after Epiphany) by the English composer, Orlando Gibbons (1583–1625). In my view, it is a most useful and versatile work for the following reasons:

- It is relatively straightforward, making it an ideal choice for choirs of all abilities.
- It is useful either as an introit or as an anthem because of its length (just under three minutes).
- It may be accompanied by the organ, or sung without accompaniment.
- It is simply scored for a four-part SATB choir, with no dividing parts.

Using this Gibbons anthem as a model, I am curating a collection of pieces entitled The Cranmer Anthem Book, commissioning composers to set these beautiful texts in order to provide attractive and useful works for choirs around the world from today’s finest composers.

The first collect, the ‘Collect for Saint Luke’, was set by Francis Jackson, and premiered on the Eve of St Luke (17 October), just a couple of weeks after the composer’s 100th birthday. Two days later, Skempton’s ‘Collect for the 18th Sunday after Trinity’ was premiered. Other composers who have been commissioned for the project thus far are Richard Allain, Bingham, Diana Burrell, Davison, Joubert, Paul Mealor, Thea Musgrave, and Tarik O’Regan. I hope that The Cranmer Anthem Book will be a useful and inspirational resource for singers, choirs, and musicians in the church and the concert hall for centuries to come, in the same way that the Eton Choir Book has been since 1505.

The Eton Choir Book pushed the boundaries, and it is important that we all continue to do the same today: to deepen — through the transcendent power of music old and new — our understanding of what it is that we call ‘God’. I am very optimistic...
about the place and future of sacred music in liturgical and concert settings. Part of this optimism is borne from witnessing how people react to both established and new repertoire. With regard to the latter, nothing that we have done at Wells Cathedral is revolutionary, but I have been blessed with a committed Cathedral Chapter throughout my time, as well as with the supporters (i.e. commissioners, congregants, and concert attendees) of Cathedral Commissions and new music wells who have embraced what we are doing and who have been great evangelists for the cause. All that is needed is a ‘grain of mustard seed’ in order to continue to connect the church with the ‘musical thought of our time’.

52 For a detailed discussion, see Jonathan Arnold, Sacred Music in Secular Society (London: Ashgate, 2014).