

MUSIC FOR THE MASSES?

"Lord forgive them for they know not what they do" was one response to the article in the last issue. Both the Archbishop of Canterbury and the BBC are included in the need for such forgiveness. However, with the very nature of worship under so much scrutiny, some change seems inevitable. The report to the Archbishop of Canterbury, 'In Tune with Heaven', is awaited with interest. Herewith two further viewpoints from within the Company:

The Rev. Prebendary Newell Wallbank
Honorary Chaplain to the Company

Personally, I think there is no necessary conflict between the great musical tradition in church services, and the development of a more popular contemporary style of music for worship; I agree with the Archbishop about that. After all, in the average parish church, the music has always tended to be "popular" music. Most of the old hymns are in fact 19th century "pop"! Inevitably for the young, new "pop" hymns etc. are wanted. Unfortunately they are often inferior to secular "pop"!

The wonderful tradition of art music written "ad maiorem gloriam Dei" has always been mainly associated with great Cathedrals, Collegiate Churches and important parish churches in the great towns and cities with a strong musical tradition. I believe (economics permitting) that this will continue to flourish. Their music must include works by contemporary and sometimes experimental composers whose works might not go down too well in average parish churches.

Artistic sophistication

Being a Christian worshipper does not at all mean artistic sophistication. The Church of St Bartholomew The Great where I had the honour of being Rector for many years, had a fine musical tradition. But I always said to my organists: "Anthems and Canticles may be as Third Programme as you like. The hymns must be Radio 1 or 2!"

Of all arts, music is the most universal and it stretches from simple folk tunes and popular melodies to Bach and Mozart, Bartok and Messiaen!

The Church at which Christopher Dearnly served in Australia, is a wonderful example of the "great tradition". This will always last, I believe. But so must all the new popular church music, which I may not like very much although many people do.

There is another point: the developed Church organ is financially beyond the resources of most average parishes. Some substitute is necessary, so why not small groups playing on their own instruments? There will be no erosion of a great musical tradition in most parish churches, because it does not exist! The music in most churches, though of course not all, is appalling; anything that would brighten it up is in my view, to be welcomed. We can hope that the tremendous experience of hearing Byrd, Palestrina, Haydn and Stravinsky in a great Cathedral will come to more and more people.

To sum up: Not "either/or" but BOTH.

The Rev. R. Neville Morton
former Precentor of Guildford Cathedral, more recently Rector of Haslemere

The arguments are not new, but the premises keeps changing!

I write as a cleric, a member of the Musicians Company, and as one, like many others, whose life has been greatly influenced by music. Both my ministry and my marriage came about through music.

The great heritage of English Church music has been maintained though the worship in the Cathedrals of the Church of England, and also in the College Chapels of Universities and Parish Churches. It is a unique heritage which has been emulated in the Anglican and Episcopal Church abroad.

Spiritual insights

Besides the many Cathedral organists of our own day, we are the inheritors of a musical repertoire par excellence. But it should be remembered that in forming a judgement, the aim of a composition should not be forgotten. It was composed to accompany Liturgy and Worship, and in no small measure reveals spiritual insights. The truth of this is reflected in the way such music communicates itself to the listener, moving both the heart and mind in a way that words often fail to do.

I married a musician, and, 'providentially' she had just obtained her FRCO and later her CHM. So I have listened to music steeped in Mystery for some of the Church's Seasons — Holy Week, for instance, with Dupre's Passion Symphony speaking more deeply than the printed text.

My wife is non-condemnatory of modern music, for much of that too is fine. But it is in the 'pop-style' that she finds it difficult to discover real worth. She believes that much of it has no real lasting musical value and is, moreover, too often linked with words that are not only repetitive, but also banal.

Much of this imported music accompanying non-liturgical worship is supported by electrical equipment. Experience has led me to believe that with the manipulation of volume, and the repeating of the choruses and 'songs', or just humming the tune with the lights dimmed, what can only be described as a semi-hypnotic state is induced. Hence the growing concern at the way traditional services of the Church of England are being jettisoned for this alternative.

Dignity missing

So, to return to Modern versus Traditional. The distinction between the two does lie in the music, but more fundamental is the concept of that worship. In many churches today the interior of a glorious medieval building has been changed — pews gone, close carpeting, easy chairs and a service which belongs to neither the Book of Common Prayer nor the ASB. 'Unstructured' is the word. Clerical attire is abandoned. In all this, dignity, reverence, and a sense of awe are missing. The feelings of the participant are all important. The over-familiar has replaced both Transcendence and Mystery which has been an inherent part not only of Christian worship, but of other religions also.

It is my belief that the great musical tradition of the Church of England will not only survive, but will also be instrumental in preserving from dissipation the beauty of its worship.

Liveryman Harry Bramm, Director of the Royal School of Church Music has agreed to contribute to our next edition.

It has not escaped the Editors' notice that the Rev. Neville Morton lists his address as Rock House!