

A Brief History of Music in the Episcopal Church

Hallelujah!

Praise God in his holy temple; *

praise him in the firmament of his power.

Praise him for his mighty acts; *

praise him for his excellent greatness.

Praise him with the blast of the ram's-horn; *

praise him with lyre and harp.

Praise him with resounding cymbals; *

praise him with loud-clanging cymbals.

Let everything that has breath *

praise the Lord.

Hallelujah!

Psalm 150 (BCP 807–808)

Music and worship have always been inextricably linked. Psalm 150, above, makes clear that active music-making has a part of worship since ancient times. The psalms themselves were hymns of praise that were intended to be sung, and the Bible contains many other references to singing as a mode of worship. For many Christians, the presence of music and the

act of singing or listening heightens worship. This chapter briefly outlines the history of music in the Episcopal Church and its “parent,” the Church of England, and discusses some of the qualities and traditions that make Episcopal church music unique.

While music is an integral part of worship in any religion or denomination, this book is primarily concerned with the music of the Episcopal Church. The Episcopal Church—a member of the worldwide Anglican Communion—has its roots in the Church of England. We start with a brief history of Episcopal church music against the backdrop of the Church of England in the sixteenth century, when it separated from the Roman Catholic Church with the Act of Supremacy in 1534, followed by the Act of Uniformity and the publication of the first English Prayer Book in 1549.

MUSIC AND THE REFORMATION (1485–1549)

The period from 1485 to 1603 was known as the Tudor period in England and Wales, signifying the rule of the Tudor dynasty. Fifteenth-century England was Catholic, and the music composed for churches primarily consisted of polyphonic settings in Latin. (Polyphony is one of three primary textures in music, meaning that music consists of more than one melodic line.) Around this same time, choir schools were established in England. These were institutions where boys received intensive musical training as singers and musicians. At a young age, they were groomed to lead worship in parishes and cathedrals. Although a distinctly Anglican form of worship had yet to emerge from the Catholic Church, the establishment of these English choir schools laid a foundation for Anglican music that would persist over the next four hundred years. Similarly, the liturgical calendar of the Catholic Church—complete with its distinct seasons and feast days—had a significant influence on the worship and music of the Church of England that emerged during the sixteenth century.

In 1534, Henry VIII broke away from the Catholic Church via the Act of Supremacy. As Henry's reasons for desiring independence from Rome had less to do with theology than with securing an heir to the throne, the liturgy of the early English Church—and its music—remained close to that of the Catholic Church during his reign. Henry did appoint Thomas Cranmer as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1533, however, and under Cranmer's supervision several important innovations were implemented, including the publication of William Tyndale and Miles Coverdale's "Great Bible" in 1539, which was ordered to be placed in all churches so that by 1543 all readings were to be delivered in English instead of Latin. Coverdale's superb translation of the Psalms is still in use in many Anglican churches today. Archbishop Cranmer was also responsible for the development of the first Book of Common Prayer, published in 1549.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ANGLICAN MUSICAL TRADITION: 1549–1644

The Act of Uniformity in 1549 imposed a uniform service book in English: The Book of Common Prayer. This establishment of an English prayer book is perhaps the most significant event in the history of Anglican church music. For the first time in England's history, a new liturgy existed that was entirely in the vernacular. The 1549 prayer book went through revisions in 1552 and 1559, each revision more radical than the next. The final revision of the Book of Common Prayer occurred in 1662, and this version remains the official Book of Common Prayer for the Church of England.

Some of the liturgical changes introduced by the Book of Common Prayer and its revisions significantly affected the music of the church. Two offices—Matins (Morning Prayer) and Evensong (Evening Prayer)—replaced the eight offices of the monastic tradition. The Book of Common Prayer also offered new translations of texts, including graduals, alleluias, tracts, sequences, antiphons, and responsories. As a result,

most of the music that had been sung in worship up until this point was rendered obsolete virtually overnight. The word “Communion” replaced “Mass,” and the *Kyrie* was replaced with a recitation of the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments) during the Eucharist.

A new ordinance also required that the entire Psalter be sung at Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer over the course of each month. The psalms were organized into sixty distinct parts: thirty groupings of psalms for Morning Prayer and the other thirty for Evening Prayer. The 1979 edition of the Book of Common Prayer still reflects that organization of the Psalter. The emphasis placed on psalmody is one of the distinctive features of Anglican worship, and the singing of psalms (often to Anglican chant) remains one of the Episcopal Church’s most loved traditions.

In 1554, Queen Mary I—the only surviving child of Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon—attempted to restore Catholicism to England. Although her executions of Protestants earned her the notorious nickname “Bloody Mary,” her “restoration” was short-lived, and following her death in 1558 her younger (and Protestant) sister Elizabeth I ascended to the throne. Elizabeth cautiously returned to the reformed tradition through a series of calculated compromises that historians refer to as the Elizabethan Settlement. Over the course of her long reign, most of the country became loyal supporters of the Church of England.

Elizabeth also was the first monarch of the Reformation to weigh in on matters pertaining to music. In her Injunctions of 1559 she ordered that in worship

there be a modest distinct song, so used in all parts of the common prayers in the church, that the same may be as plainly understood, as if it were read without singing, and yet nevertheless, for the comforting of such that delight in music, it may be permitted that in the beginning, or in the end of common prayers, either at morning or evening, there

may be sung an hymn, or such like song, to the praise of Almighty God, in the best sort of melody and music that may be conveniently devised, having respect that the sentence of the hymn may be understood and perceived.

During Elizabeth's long reign she favored and encouraged complexity, elaboration, and high ceremony in church music.

Upon her death in 1603, Elizabeth was succeeded by King James I. Although James did not issue any decrees that directly influenced church music, his greatest impact on the liturgy was undoubtedly his sponsorship of a new translation of the Bible, which was published in 1611 as the Authorized Version. The King James Bible quickly established itself and remains the most ubiquitous English translation of the Bible. James also continued to support the innovations and creativity of the Elizabethan era. By the time of his death in 1625, the Church of England—and its music—was well established.

This prosperous era also saw the invention of the anthem, a choral setting in English of a biblical or religious text. This genre would inspire composers over the course of the next 450 years, leaving a rich body of distinctly Anglican choral music.

THE INTERREGNUM, RESTORATION, AND GEORGIAN ERA: 1644–1830

In 1644, two years into the English Civil War, the Long Parliament abolished the Book of Common Prayer. This led to an interim period during which a Presbyterian form of worship was espoused. Churches were ransacked, stained glass windows and organs were destroyed, and choral services ceased. Like Catholics, Anglicans became a persecuted sect worshiping in secret. King Charles I was executed in 1649, which led to a period of eleven years with no monarch. This stretch of time came to be known as the Interregnum, literally meaning “between kings,” and very few compositions survive from this bleak era, which fortunately was short lived. The Church of England with its Book of Common Prayer was re-

stored as the established church when Charles II took the throne in 1660. The 1662 Act of Uniformity introduced a final revision of the prayer book; this version is still used by the Church of England today.

The complexities of the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras gave way to a simpler style of English church music in Restoration England. Choral music was generally written in fewer parts, and the “short service” reduced the canticles for Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer to two for each service: the *Te Deum* and *Jubilate* for the former and the *Magnificat* and *Nunc dimittis* for the latter. This short service format is still in use today. The anthem continued to evolve, and instruments—a signature innovation of the baroque era—found their way into the churches, with anthems sometimes including a complement of strings or brass fanfares.

The period of English history known as the Georgian era takes its name from the successive reign of four monarchs, all of whom were named George. At the beginning of this era, George Frideric Handel was the greatest living composer in England. Handel never held a church position, focusing instead on writing Italian operas and English oratorios. Nevertheless, his style influenced the church music of the Georgian era, and choirmasters appropriated some of his oratorio excerpts for use in liturgical worship. During the second half of the century, Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart were at their creative pinnacle, and this distinctly Viennese style influenced Anglican composers as well. Perhaps the greatest contribution of the Georgian era was the establishment of Anglican chant as the primary vehicle for psalm recitation.

CATHEDRAL VERSUS PAROCHIAL TRADITIONS

Although cathedrals were the epicenter of the evolution of Anglican church music, smaller parishes located in rural areas of England were developing their own independent traditions. These two distinct traditions were maintained until the nineteenth century, when a more unified style emerged. Before

proceeding into a discussion of this “golden era” of the mid-nineteenth century, it is worth taking a moment to explore the differences between cathedral and parochial traditions.

Cathedrals

Cathedrals, with their elaborate architecture, magnificent organs, and large choral forces, were the venues that boasted perhaps the greatest productivity and innovations in Anglican church music. The word “cathedral”—from the Latin *cathedra* or “seat”—simply refers to a church where the bishop is seated, and therefore the principal house of worship within a designated region (called a diocese). It does not necessarily imply a large church or music program, but more often than not, cathedrals are considerably larger in scope and scale than most parishes.

In large cathedrals, the choirs were well-trained and could easily execute difficult pieces of choral music. Composers took advantage of the split chancel area to write many pieces for double choir as well. The abilities of these choirs established that very little congregational singing took place; the choir and organist did most of the music-making. It was the smaller parishes without the advantage of choirs and organs that established a congregational singing tradition in the Anglican Church.

Parishes

While many Episcopalians feel strongly that their congregations should have opportunities to participate in music-making, the tradition of congregational singing was actually born out of necessity—the lack of trained choirs, quality organs, and organists—more than any theological perspective. Congregational singing in the Anglican Church was borrowed from the Lutherans and Calvinists, who engaged in congregational hymn-singing from their inception. Metrical psalms sung by the congregation began to be preferred to Anglican chant formulas. Over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth cen-

turies, a musical culture emerged in smaller parishes starkly different from what was taking place in the cathedrals.

In the early nineteenth century, the Oxford Movement brought some of the cathedral traditions into the smaller parishes, including accessible anthems and psalmody. The men and boys in the choir began to wear surplices, as they would in cathedrals or colleges. Cathedrals absorbed some of the parochial traditions as well, especially the use of congregational hymns. Thus the boundary between these two began to blur, and over the course of the nineteenth century a more unified tradition was established.

A UNIFIED TRADITION AND A GOLDEN ERA: 1830–1922

The end of the Georgian era coincided with the Oxford Movement, during which high church Anglicans who desired a reinstatement of lost ancient Christian traditions sought to return to worship traditions from the early and medieval church that were in some ways more “Catholic.” It also began an era when large cathedrals and small parishes began to adopt each other’s traditions. More elaborate liturgical traditions found their way into small parishes, and congregational hymns began to be introduced in cathedrals. Interestingly, while a unified tradition emerged, the style of English church music itself continued to move forward, almost completely unaffected by the Oxford Movement. Over the next forty years, English church music flourished as it never had before in its history. In 1872, John Stainer was appointed as organist at St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, and his program set a new standard for excellence.

During this era, the first colleges devoted to training church musicians were also established. Frederick Ouseley founded St. Michael’s in Tenbury in 1856, and Trinity College in London was founded in 1872 for the purpose of training church musicians. The publishing industry also began to produce a large body of sacred music. Most of their collections consisted

of accessible anthems that could be performed with success at small parishes. Although most choirs still performed in churches with a divided chancel, compositions that required antiphonal singing in anthems became less common. Solos were shorter and more accessible to amateur singers, and extremes of vocal range were avoided. The merging of cathedral and parish traditions was also a catalyst for a flourishing of pedagogical writings, usually published with the intention of educating choirmasters and singers in smaller parishes. Anglican chant continued to be performed in both large cathedrals and small parishes. Samuel Sebastian Wesley emerged as the greatest Anglican composer of the mid-nineteenth century.

The York Decision of 1820 (which will be discussed in chapter 5) established the legality of hymns in worship—a significant event in the history of Anglican church music. From this point forward, music-making would tend to be more congregational in nature, as the modern Anglican worship style began to take shape. In 1861, *Hymns Ancient and Modern* was published, and the practice of writing and singing treble descants for hymns grew. Organists began improvising in services as well. Several of the greatest English composers of the era devoted their energies to hymn writing, including Ralph Vaughan Williams, who is represented by more hymn tunes and arrangements in *The Hymnal 1982* than any other composer. Two other significant hymn collections soon followed: *The Yattendon Hymnal* of 1899 and *The English Hymnal* in 1906. In addition to Wesley, Stainer, Ouseley, and Vaughan Williams, many of the greatest masters of Anglican Church flourished or began their careers during the golden era from 1830 to 1922, including Edward Elgar, Herbert Howells, and Gerald Finzi. Although styles change and new music continues to be written, a glance through the index of *The Hymnal 1982* and standard anthem anthologies suggests the importance of this era to Episcopal church music.

MODERN ENGLISH CHURCH MUSIC: 1922–PRESENT

The aftermath of World War I saw the rise of a more cynical and church-weary England, with church attendance shrinking rapidly. In 1922, a commission on church music published a report entitled *Music in Worship*, which stated that “the ideal in all parish churches is congregational singing.” Hymn festivals began to flourish, and efforts were made to make liturgical “style” more family-friendly.

As the twentieth century progressed, some English composers began to experiment with musical styles as well. One landmark experiment was the “Twentieth Century Folk Mass” by Geoffrey Beaumont, which was premiered in 1956. In general, smaller parishes in England are less bound to tradition and more likely to experiment with alternate liturgies and absorb ecumenical styles that fall outside the Anglican tradition. The unified golden era has perhaps once again given way to the two distinct traditions of the cathedral and small parish.

EPISCOPAL (AMERICAN) MUSICAL TRADITIONS

The Episcopal Church in North America can trace its roots to 1607 with the founding of the Jamestown colony in Virginia. Robert Hunt celebrated the first known Eucharist in the New World. In 1624, Virginia became a royal colony and was required to conform to the Church of England, including weekly prayers for the King. In 1701, Thomas Bray founded the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Maryland, sparking the growth and spread of the Church of England throughout the colonies. Following the Declaration of Independence in 1776, many Anglican priests fled to England or Canada. The Revolutionary War officially ended in 1783 with the signing of the Treaty of Paris, and Samuel Seabury was consecrated by bishops of the Scottish Episcopal Church as the first American bishop in 1784. The Protestant Episcopal Church was founded in 1789, and the first American Book

of Common Prayer (a revision of the 1662 prayer book) was published in the same year.

Throughout most of its history, the music of the Episcopal Church has been remarkably similar to the music of the Church of England. American choirmasters and organists largely performed the same repertoire by the same composers. However, from the Episcopal Church's earliest days, hymnody was emphasized to a greater extent, due to an American prioritization of congregational singing. The English collection *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, first published in 1861, had considerable influence on the music of the Episcopal Church, as did two other British publications: *The Yattendon Hymnal* (1899) and *The English Hymnal* (1906).

The first four Episcopal hymnals in the United States—authorized in 1789, 1826, 1871, and 1892, respectively—consisted only of authorized words. In 1913, the Joint Commission on the Revision of the Hymnal produced the first Episcopal hymnal consisting of both words and music. Simply entitled *The Hymnal*, this work is now retroactively known as *The Hymnal 1916*. In 1919, the Joint Commission on Church Music was formed, the deliberations of which resulted in the eventual publication of *The Hymnal 1940*. This hymnal was conceived to be used in tandem with the 1928 revision of the Book of Common Prayer. After the publication of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, the hymnal was revised once again, resulting in the publication of *The Hymnal 1982*. This hymnal, perhaps more than any of its predecessors, emphasizes the importance of congregational singing.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Episcopal church music is historically indebted to the Church of England. Does the parish you attend draw from that Anglican tradition? Which period(s) in particular? Are there any non-Anglican traditions your church explores?

2. Contemporary Episcopal liturgy usually includes both choral offerings and congregational singing. What kind of “balance” do you think should exist within a single service? Are you the type of person who prefers to participate actively as a singer, or do you enjoy listening to the choir sing an anthem or psalm setting? (Or both?)