

Musical Notes for Sunday 29 August 2021 – by Mark Dawes

The readings for today's service are based around a wedding theme, so much of the music chosen for the service is similarly wedding-related.

The choral quartet will sing Edward Bairstow's (1874 - 1946) setting of words from Song of Solomon chapter 2, verses 3 and 4. While this morning's reading begins a few verses later, verses 3 and 4 are clearly appropriate for a wedding, and do not appear elsewhere in the lectionary so there is no other opportunity to hear them.

I remember being told, when learning Mendelssohn's (1809 - 1847) third organ sonata, that the opening fanfare had been intended to be a wedding march for the marriage service of Mendelssohn's sister, Fanny. I haven't been able to verify this because, clearly, an internet search for "Wedding March" alongside Mendelssohn's name, produces over a million links to the famous incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I suspect this story is likely to be just that, but this small excerpt of the start of the sonata fits very well as the first prelude for today.

Johann Pachelbel's (1653 - 1706) most famous work, his *Canon in D*, is interesting for a number of reasons. First, the canon in the title does not necessarily come across clearly in performances on the organ. A canon repeats what is essentially the same music but at a distance of (in this case) several bars. It is much easier for this to be audible when different instruments are deployed, because it makes each individual line much clearer. For this reason, it is useful that this morning we will have Pippa playing the melody on her cello. Secondly, it is an 'accompanied canon', in that there are other parts, most notably the ostinato part, sometimes referred to as a 'ground bass'. The ground bass repeats throughout the piece and is an additional melody in its own right. The bass and the chord-changes that accompany it are so strong that they have been used as the basis of pop songs from the 1960s onwards. (We will stick to Pachelbel this morning!) Finally, the music was not an instant 'hit'. It was composed in the late 17th century, but was published for the first time in 1919 and only became popular in the 1970s.

There is a popular genre of modern classical music that consists of lots of repetition of broken chords, with fairly sparse instrumentation (piano or piano and strings). It is tonal and very easy to listen to and could have been written at any time over the past several hundred years. Two prime exponents of this genre are Alberto Giurlioli and Ludovico Einaudi, who regularly feature on Classic FM 'Hall of Fame' lists. The focus in some of this music is on the harmony and the repetition; there is sometimes no obvious melody at all. It is good fun to listen to Einaudi's music and to improvise around it to add a melody.

There are parallels with the way Charles Gounod (1818-1893) treated Bach's C major Prelude number 1 from the *Well-tempered Clavier*. We heard this several months ago, at the start of Ian's *grand projet* to perform all of the 48 Preludes and Fugues. Gounod improvised over the top of Bach's prelude and his composition teacher transcribed it. It was originally published in a version for violin or for cello. Words were added later, with the French 'La livre de la vie' appearing several years before it was finally paired with the words of the *Ave Maria*. This means that today, in playing it in a version for cello and piano, we are merely reverting to an earlier version.

It is unclear how much involvement Gounod had in deciding to publish what is possibly his best-known work. I can't decide whether it's an act of genius or of hubris to treat a well-known work by Bach as being 'unfinished'! Something that organists regularly do is to shorten pieces to ensure they fit the needs of the service. I have taken the additional liberty of doing that here.