

*Easter's new music: "the C Major of this life."*

Did the birds sing in the Garden of the Tomb on the first Easter Day? Was the Hallelujah chorus mingled with the dawn chorus? Or was all around silent?

Literally, these are silly questions. Metaphorically less silly, for the 8<sup>th</sup> century Easter hymn by St John of Damascus suggests that earth began to sing on Easter Day:

*"The day of resurrection,  
earth tell it out abroad;...  
... now let the heavens be joyful,  
let earth her song begin,  
the round world keep high triumph,  
and all that is therein."*

The prophet Jeremiah had looked forward to a day like this. After bondage in Egypt,

after years in the wilderness,

after centuries of sporadic warfare with neighbours,

after years of exile in Babylon,

Israel would be restored, at peace and rebuilt. Writing in Jerusalem, Jeremiah looked forward to the day he would hear tambourines and see dancing in the streets as the world learnt to sing again. It would be a **new** song, of course, because, as the book of Revelation attests, you can't sing old songs in new times or old songs in new places. Remember Boney M struggling to sing the Lord's song by the rivers of Babylon; songs of rejoicing are alien when the spirit is low. Jeremiah looked forward to a day when people would hear an irresistible invitation: "Come let us go up to Zion to the Lord our God," where we will sing out God's praises.

When words fail us, many people take recourse to music. At times of deep irrepressible joy we break into song;

at times of protest, crowds unite their many voices into protest songs and vociferous chants;

and at times of deep inexpressible sadness, music howls, wails and moans in expression of where we are, how we feel, where we want to be and what we want. Music moves us to tears or puts a spring in our step.

In all the final chapters of the four New Testament gospels, words failed the writers. Because language wasn't up to the task, the four gospel writers left gaps in their telling of the

Easter story. None of the gospels narrates what happened at the resurrection. Laying Jesus hastily in a borrowed tomb one day is followed immediately with accounts of women and/or disciples discovering the tomb empty two days later and having a disappearance to deal with. About the moment of resurrection,

about the act of resurrection,

about the method of resurrection,

the Bible is silent. Words cannot express it; language fails us here, at the empty tomb.

But on each new Easter Day the Church sings new songs; throughout Lent we have avoided the word 'Alleluia' but Easter worship is full of Alleluias, for music, music as T S Eliot described it, "heard so deeply that it's not music at all," reaches higher and deeper than mere words. Music – which is only music when there is silence as well as noise – is capable of expressing the Inexpressible, explaining the Inexplicable and uttering the Ineffable. Music, about which we cannot speak without reducing it, takes the human spirit nearer to God.

Georg Joseph Vogler, also known as Abbé or Abt Vogler, was a renowned German organist who flourished at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. He also designed and built organs. I was reminded of the poem Robert Browning wrote about Vogler in 1864 when I heard Stephen playing our newly-refurbished and upgraded organ last Sunday. In the poem Browning imagines Vogler, after playing a piece of improvised music on an organ he had built, thinking about what he had just done.

The poem hints at the power of music to harmonise life's tensions and resolve its inconsistencies and, in its final twelfth stanza, the musician has reached a sense of completion and fulfilment as

... silence resumes her reign:

I will be patient and proud, and soberly acquiesce.  
Give me the keys. I feel for the common chord again,  
Sliding by semitones, till I sink to the minor, – yes,  
And I blunt it into a ninth, and I stand on alien ground,  
Surveying awhile the heights I rolled from into the deep;  
Which, hark, I have dared and done, for my resting-place is found,  
The C Major of this life....

On Easter Day we reach the C Major of affirmation and hope, the new music for the new age, new songs for the age of resurrection.

It is only partially coincidental that Easter 2014 sees the introduction of a new hymn book to Trinity. It broadens our choice. *Singing the Faith* gives us more 20<sup>th</sup> century and 21<sup>st</sup> century hymns to sing.

It gives us new songs many of them set to either traditional-style or familiar tunes we will find congenial.

It gives us songs from Taizé and Iona, such as we used to have in our supplementary book.

It gives us hymns that relate our faith to the realities and complexities of modern life.

And it gives us the old favourites and classical oldies we would never want to be without.

I want to put on public record now the church's gratitude for your generosity as a result of which the entire cost of the books has been covered (and for the anonymous donor who facilitated the organ improvements). Some of the books have been donated with a purpose: the dedications will be put in the books in the next few weeks. We will find new music to love in these books and the choir will help us, but we have not bought these books to make ourselves happy. We have them to keep our worship ever-new and ever-living and to help us draw nearer to God.

Who knows whether the birds were singing or were stunned into silence on the first Easter Day, literally or figuratively! What matters is that *we* are singing Easter's new music – the C Major of this life – to the glory of God who raised Christ Jesus and who lifts our hearts and souls both to silence and to new songs.