

Double header for SASM choir

Sunday March 5 was a Sunday unlike any other at St Andrew and St Mark (SASM) for both the director of music and the SASM choir.

The morning All Together Eucharist at St Mark's was the first time the Children's Choir sang an entire service with the adult choir. Twelve of the choristers, ranging in age from 6 to 10 years, sung the service.

"I was awake at 3am worrying about everything that could go wrong," admitted Simon. On the day, however, the children behaved well, processing in and out of the service like professionals. While sitting in full view of the congregation for an entire service was a new experience, they all behaved well.

The children supported the adult choir with hymns, the sung Thorne service and responses throughout the service. The children's choir led the anthem, Fairest Lord Jesus, a Silesian folk song arranged by Martin How.

Adult choir members were thrilled to see the children so engaged with singing and the church service. SASM choir is looking forward to the next time they will join the Children's Choir.

"The little ones are still learning and it was only the third time they have sung in a service," said Simon. "It was a miracle they did what they did and I was really proud of them."

Special choir practices for the children were held on Fridays at St Mark's for five weeks before the service so the children could learn the anthem as well as the Thorne Kyrie, Sanctus, Benedictus and Agnus Dei.

In case the congregation wondered why singers – both children and adults – looked so happy when singing at the March 5 service, the "secret" was Simon. At crucial moments he held up a sheet with a smiley face on it to encourage the singers to smile. If you smile while singing, the sound is better as well as presenting a more engaging face for the congregation. Smiling causes cheekbones to rise. When the cheeks rise, a larger space in the mouth is created (referred to as a Duchene smile). This gives the voice a lighter tone quality and brighter timbre as well as helping project the voice and improves the pronunciation of words.

Helping Simon at the morning service on the organ was choir member and organist Tim Lavis.

Evening first

In the afternoon/early evening the adult choir had another first: choral evensong with Hollyfield school.

Led by head of music Sarah Neville, the Hollyfield Chamber Choir of 13 singers joined the SASM choir for choral evensong. The Hollyfield Chamber Choir is made up of students from year 7 (aged 11) to year 13 (aged 18). Solos were sung by a sister/brother team of Sophie (year 10) and Thomas (year 12). Both sung extremely well, as did the whole of the Chamber Choir.

The service consisted of Preces and Responses by William Smith (four part), Psalm 121 by Walford Davies (the first and third quarters of which were solos) and the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in F by George Dyson. The Magnificat began with a soprano solo and ended with the soloist leading the Gloria. The Nunc Dimittis began with a tenor solo followed by the tenor lead for the Gloria.

The anthem was "I give to you a new commandment" by Peter Nardone.

At the choral evensong the Rev'd Robert Stanier gave a brief homily tracing the origins of evensong and its words, some of which date back 1,000s of years. He said

the combination of the ancient words and expressions of faith were something special and unique to the Church of England – and something worth preserving. After the Sunday choral evensong, the choir headed to Magdalen College, Oxford, on Monday to sing evensong there with Simon Harvey accompanying the choir at and some members of the SASM congregation attending. Robert took the service at Magdalen.

“Given that most churches no longer have choirs, we are very lucky at SASM. We need to do the best we can to preserve and develop what we have at SASM,” said Simon, adding, “This is all really important work. The musical opportunities they present for us at SASM are very exciting. I hope Hollyfield will come back and sing with us again.”



The SASM Children’s Choir will next sing on Sunday June 4th. Parents interested in children joining the choir should contact Robert or Simon through the SASM website or email the church office on sasms@btinternet.com. Rehearsals are held on Fridays at St Mark’s from 4.30pm-5.30pm around five to six weeks before the choir sings.



Don’t forget the adult SASM choir will join St Matthew’s choir on Sunday, July 2, 2017 at St Andrew’s church for “dry run” of the music in preparation for singing choral evensong at Southwark Cathedral on Saturday, July 29, 2017.