

EPILOGUES

1 BLESSED ASSURANCE

What? A prologue... the book... now epilogues? In the interval between delivering the lectures and revising them for publication, inevitably I have entertained further reflections. So I have set myself the final task of bringing together a few threads. What follows are my end thoughts: my summary to myself of what all this has been about.

What it was about, essentially, was reassurance. I wanted to reassure... well, just about everyone. My experience is that pessimism, anxiety, and low expectations are bad for work. People do best when they are relaxed and hopeful. Complacency and slackness do not, of course, produce good work, but the right kind of creative tension will normally exert its benign pressure most effectively when the background is optimistically supportive. The church management responsible for worship - in effect, clergy and organists - seem to be on the defensive. They have, on the face of it, some reason to be, because the proliferation of untraditional music and new forms of worship, now championed by the new Archbishop of Canterbury, is often accompanied by a barrage of criticism of traditional forms.

Organists and clergy need reassuring, therefore, that what they have devoted their lives and talents to is not to be despised, apologised for, or cravenly retreated from. But that is the least of it. More than that, they could do with being told that what they offer is inspirational, that it is needed, that it is wanted. If they know this, the upside is that they may step out of their bunker and feel in a strong enough position to be open to new ideas. For the one thing which holds out no hope in this situation is any kind of stand-off. Where rigid positions are adopted, talent is wasted, congregations and communities disrupted, and worship diminished.

Congregations also need encouragement. They need to know that singing is not an achievement orientated challenge, an outward bound obstacle course, a competition, an exam. It is for enjoyment; and they, too, need to know that they are needed. They are going to respond the more freely if they sense that experts are not meting out judgements on their 'standards' of taste or of musical accomplishment. Much of what I had to say was, in fact, about something which should be second nature to at least Reformed church people: democracy.

But there again, there is a benign side-effect. If the people in the pew feel appreciated; relished rather than tolerated, then they will be more open to the specialist roles of the leaders: organist, choir, and clergy.

The hidden, or not so hidden, agenda in all this is excellence. The pursuit of excellence is where intentions of goodwill so often founder. *Gloria in Excelsis* is not about heights of musical discrimination or technique, but neither is it about spatial geography. It is, in some sense, about getting high. In the experience of rising, or being raised above the mundane (and if music is not about that, what on earth is it about?), there has to be an exchange between freedom (democracy) and truth (excellence). In that transaction, neither should lose out entirely, though many differing shades of compromise will transpire in different local situations. To make any of this happen everyone must be prepared to take risks, massive ones if necessary, and everyone must be ready to be tolerant, massively so if necessary. The trick here is basic: it is to permit a comfortable ambiguity in the definition of values. Take excellence and truth, for example. It was in an attempt to introduce flexibility into such definitions that I sat at the piano each evening after the formal lecture and, skating lightly over matters musical and hymnological, tried to show how traditional material can be treated in a variety of ways. What follows now is a kind of graph which describes the outline, but cannot reproduce the essence, of that keyboard operation. Being a graph only, it is no way a transcript of the words used or the notes played.

I have always resisted emotional blackmail, from whatever quarter it comes. In the area of hymns (which I identified as the practical fulcrum of most church music) it works out like this: I

reject any pressure to believe that musical and verbal material between 1500 and 1900 is less relevant to present and future needs, than material from (say) 1950 to 1990. Even if the music of the last forty years was, in comparison with the music of the last four centuries, beyond peradventure brilliantly and uniquely perspicacious, I would doubt that, in relation to the vistas of the future, it should be granted a specially authorised spiritual visa. Since I am sure that the opposite is the case, then one of my objectives has to be that hungry souls and minds have access to all that these last four centuries have bequeathed us - including that century known as Victorian. Whatever you've got, whatever the material, new or old, and whatever your musical resources, accept and use it.

2 CHOOSING THE INSTRUMENT

As I sat there at the beautiful piano in the Hutcheson Hall, I was in my mind addressing a few thousand organists round Scotland. Not brilliant organists, not trained choirmasters most of them, but men and women who care.

And what I wanted to say to all of them was something like this. Alright, you may not have a fantastic instrument. You yourself may not be, technically speaking, a prodigious player. Your church is not Westminster Abbey or even St. Giles. But do not underestimate the cards you have to play. After all, you have a remarkable brute of an angel at your command. If it is an even halfway decent pipe organ, you are on Cloud Nine, or should be. Here is a transcendental vehicle for your imagination. All these pipes. This (relatively) vast acoustic chamber for them to resonate in. Plus the marvels of modern electronic gadgetry to enable them to do exactly what you want them to, exactly when.

If it is not a pipe organ, it is probably an electronic organ of some kind. That's not bad. Divine creation works through the ingenuity of human brain and hand, and these have been at work with the musical microchip. There is now a wide range of keyboards and organs which, though they cannot compete in acoustic performance with real pipes in real space, are streets

ahead of the basic electronic organ of thirty years ago, with its imitation cinema organ tone (the true cinema organ of half a century ago had genuine grandeur). Not all electronic devices give you the range of a fullblown computer organ, and not all synthesisers have laser beams *à la* Jean Michel Jarre, but even the meanest Yamaha can produce sounds which, when experimented with, can be fun, even, if imaginatively used, evocative. The key here is not to pretend they are conventional pipe organs. Don't blatter out loud organ-like sounds. Not for long, anyway.

When organs, even electronic ones, fail, or fail to materialise, you can count your lucky stars. This may be just the opportunity your colleagues in other churches, stuck with indifferent instruments, would give their eye-teeth for. Now you have a copper-bottomed excuse for experimenting, which should be seized with both hands.

First port of call will be a piano. If a grand, or baby grand is available, you're in clover. This can provide an exciting variety of mood, style, and support for much, or most, of what is needed. But first things first. Is it in tune? Not just vaguely, or almost, in tune, but really, with no sourness. Is it producing a full rounded tone, not only in the middle, but top and bottom? If not, it is worth a great deal of effort to acquire the services of a reputable tuner. Piano tuning is not the busy trade it once was. Craftsmen and women in this field are scarce. But do not, on that account, settle lazily for an amateur, or even someone like a piano teacher round the corner who sometimes tunes parlour uprights on the side. If a good piano is going to be the basis for your music then it deserves, and needs, as serious attention as a pipe organ. If you live within reach of a major city, there should be someone who, by appointment, with all expenses paid, would be willing to come. That might even apply, at longer notice, to a piano in a rural community. To get professional advice about reputable tuners, approach professional musical organisations who need reliable piano tuning for public concerts. I lay stress on this because I am sure the potential of a good piano is radically underestimated by bodies like Kirk Sessions. We're almost certainly not talking about a concert grand. A church able to afford that scale of investment would be more likely to look for a pipe organ or a classy synthesiser system. But there are various

sizes of non-uprights, down to the boudoir instrument. It's a matter of looking around and being realistic about the acoustics of the building involved. A resonant building can add a surprising roundness of tone to a modest piano - but the tone has to have some quality in the first place or what the building will magnify will be harshness, tinniness, or strings inaccurately tuned.

Having got your piano, then enjoy it. Few things are more frustrating than hearing hymns played 'correctly' on a piano; played from the page in correct chord formation, with as much tonal and rhythmic reinforcement as a scotch trifle has sherry. Traditional organists (and pianists) can perhaps learn something from the evangelical tradition, with its partly American negro roots and its Moody and Sankey colouring. But, if rhythm and blues, soul, or jazz alienate you, or leave you cold, we have our British traditions: the Salvation Army, the Baptist, Methodist, and other non-conformist influences, and the host of new styles which have sprung up in recent years. You don't have to go along with all their music or words to appreciate the freedom with which these traditions treat the keyboard. In fact, it is worth issuing a caution here: acquiring a piano is not going automatically down market. Just because it is a piano, not an organ, that lies under your hands does not mean you have to go looking mainly in 'new' music or in songs written pianistically for voice and keyboard. The full tonal range of the piano can be just as effective when deployed to turn a classic psalm or hymn into a full-bodied concerto for congregation and piano. Use all the devices a piano can offer - octaves in bass and treble, the use of organ-like *sostenuto* tone, and the rhythmic edge offered by the percussive capacity of the piano. And equally, the full range of bass and treble, when played quietly, can have a crystallinely magic effect in a resonant building.

But what of the truly dire situation, where no such instrument is available? What you have is a boring old upright piano! Is this where you resign, either actually from the job of leading the music, or inwardly to weekly defeat at the hands, so to speak, of an unspeakable honky-tonk? No way. Here is your greatest opportunity. Possibly the best worship programme we transmitted on Radio Scotland in my seventeen years in the BBC, was from Priesthill Primary School in a run-down deprived housing

estate in Glasgow. It certainly was one of the programmes which had the most impact. Pat Walker, then Head of Programmes, BBC Scotland, reported that it galvanised his household, and they would have been happy to hear it all straight through again at once. The impact derived mainly from the music. Which was? A honky-tonk. Squashed into a corner of the small hall was this grotesquely ungracious apology for a piano. No, that is precisely the wrong word. The last thing, it, or anyone else, did was to apologise. Round this primitive machine was assembled as *ad hoc* a collection of scratch performers as could be imagined out of a street busker's nightmare. A drum here, a triangle there, and was there a skiffle bass, a castanet, a clarinet? To be honest, I don't remember. It didn't matter. What mattered was two things: the infection of the rhythm, and the tornado of vocal response from the school. I'm not sure if it was singing or shouting; occasionally it was almost screaming, but it was - it really was, I swear - great music-making. The genius who alchemised these unlikely resources into a paean of praise wasn't even a music teacher. Just a teacher with a gift for communication and an uninhibited reaction to an upright piano. Yes, he thumped, rather than cajoled it. But with love. And Donald Macdonald, the producer, liberated the love.

That is almost enough said, perhaps, about pianos, and about using whatever resources are locally available; but there is one more point to be made, arising out of the emotional blackmail factor I mentioned at the beginning of this section. There is no need to be caught between the devil of modernity and the deep (blue) sea of tradition. Duck out of the crossfire between those who would think a piano, even a good one, was a secular excrescence, and those who would think a piano, specially a good one, a fuddy-duddy relic of the 19th Century middle-class addiction to Chopin. Each of those notions is as silly as the other.

The piano, shorn of its parlour image, is the most versatile and classy musical instrument ever invented, and capable of an almost infinite flexibility of mood. That is why it carried the romantic tradition of Chopin and Rachmaninov into the mid-20th Century piano playing of George Shearing and Dave Brubeck. And that is why it sustained the art of song over the last couple of centuries, not only in the *lieder* tradition of Schubert,

but in the Cole Porter, Gershwin, Irving Berlin *lieder* traditions of this century. More surprising, perhaps, to those who assume that the songs of our time were trapped between loud bands and electronic back-up groups on the one hand and the strummings of guitars on the other, the piano has continued to provide the mainstay for many of the great ballads of the hit stars of the Seventies and Eighties.

I'm not suggesting that the piano is the ideal solution for most church music problems. I'm just saying its value is unnecessarily underestimated. So whose side am I on? The brilliant classical organist's or the *ad hoc* pub-pianist's? Neither, and both. I'm on everybody's side who cares and throws himself or herself off the cliff of opportunity presented by Barth's "state of affairs". As I tried to describe it in the lectures, this implies that if we accept the raw material of our actual situation, and place that truthfully in the hands of God, there is, in the dimension of Christ's redemption, scarcely any limit to the creative use to which that raw material may be put.

Anyone who has heard Donald Swann sing one of his epic serious songs to his own accompaniment will have heard the piano erupt into such multi-dimensional tones as to make an organ or orchestra sound like a fairground noise.

3 RUMMAGING AMONG THE TUNES

If free enjoyment of whatever instrument or combination of instruments is available is a *sine qua non*, hardly less so is free enjoyment of whatever material is available for singing. Material for choral or instrumental ensemble is outside the scope of these lectures. Apart from the fact that it is a specialist area, one of my main conclusions is that the key to a church music revival lies in congregational singing. Since my whole aim is to make things easy, comfortable, unintimidating and improveable without undue hassle in the here and now, my basic suggestion has to be easy: and it is. Whatever the congregation uses is fine. In the Church of Scotland, it is probably CH3, very possibly supplemented by Songs for God's People, and at Christmas time by

sheets of carols. Whether supplied only with the first, or with all three, what you have there is a treasure chest. All you have to do is fling open the lid, dig in both hands, and enjoy a good rummage. Methodists, Congregationalists (or United Reformed), Anglicans, and others, have equally good, or better books.

In a couple of my piano sessions at the end of the lectures, I enjoyed a few digs at CH3. Because, like Mount Everest, it is there. In particular, I confessed more than mild surprise at some of the omissions. All anthologies leave things out. What activated my critique (so to dignify a number of loosely connected examples) was the suspicion that there was in the editorial mind a conscious or unconscious disengagement from (that sounds more polite than vendetta against) Victoriana. I demonstrated at the piano, to at least my satisfaction, that the 'old' tunes for 'Fight the Good Fight', 'Lead Kindly Light', and 'Make Me a Captive, Lord', were capable of a sustained smouldering passion that 'Duke Street', 'Ich Halte Treulich Still', and 'Lux Benigna' all fine tunes, were simply not built for. 'Duke Street' and 'Ich Halte Treulich Still', in particular, are too good, in a way too vigorous. Too good, too vigorous? Surely this is nonsense. I quoted in Chapter One the Chairman of Courtaulds saying that the best is the enemy of the good. 'Duke Street' is a great tune, which leaps about athletically, swiping here, there, and everywhere, knocking out all comers and climaxing with *élan*. But I heard my one-armed organist Tom Galloway play 'Fight the Good Fight' when his remaining arm was riddled with cancer. The 'old' tune 'Pentecost' burned and crunched with a sense of profound inner struggle, not a *macho* display of prowess. In parenthesis, it is ludicrous, is it not, to call them old tunes. Medieval? 18th Century? They were written at the height of the British Empire, the time when Glasgow's industry dominated the world, and theology was explosively dominating Scotland's intellectual scene. And the 'old' hymnbook, the Revised Church Hymnary, was, after all, a 20th Century publication.

I underline this obvious point to reaffirm that value judgements based on the sliced loaf approach to history are worthless, and to encourage those who believe in 'old' tunes to feel free to reintroduce them, despite their absence from one particular slice of the loaf called CH3. The more general deduction to be made

is that the editorial decisions of one transitory hymn-book (soon, no doubt, to be superseded) do not evince the authority of even a *scintilla* of holy writ. Nevertheless, CH3 is, as I said, despite its limitations, a treasure chest, so let it be freely plundered. Let it be pragmatically plundered. Ignore its cavilling restrictions, fly lightly over its fences of editorial jurisdiction. For example, it is beyond me to understand on what theological, pastoral, historical, musicological, liturgical-historical, tragical-pastoral, or any other comical basis the editors split Advent in two: the First Coming and, half a hymnbook later, the Second Coming. Irritating though that is, one just ignores it. But when it comes to choice of tunes, ignoring is not what one should do. For example, 'Hark the Glad Sound' is set to 'Bristol'. Now 'Bristol' is a fine dignified tune, none better. It proceeds majestically across country with the measured tread of a theological earth-mover. It is not, however, designed for flying. But 'Crediton' (the 'old' tune) is designed for flying. It gets off the ground and, once off, it stays there.

Look at verse one. "Hark" is meant to alert you, like a fire alarm. The once-off dotted rhythm for verse one does just that. Never mind that half the congregation miss it. If they're that dozy, they deserve to. But it will prime their batteries.

And look at verse five. "Heaven's Arches Ring". That is where 'Crediton' gratifyingly loops the loop. Whereas, at that point, Bristol is pawing the ground and asking, "Heaven? Where's that?" It was crazy to divorce 'Crediton' from that paraphrase. Only a Hollywood New York lawyer could have so enthusiastically scissored an excellent match. Whereas, lo and behold, 'Bristol' is absolutely perfect for Hymn 162 in CH3, which was given 'Crediton'. And 'Neumark', attached by CH3 to 162, is perfect for 163, where its dignity matches John 1 hand to glove.

I'm not saying I'm right and CH3 is wrong. I'm saying, everyone is fallible. Don't be overawed by editorial decisions. Don't believe everything you read in print - even this. Make your own assessments. Then decide freely. Be your own man or woman. If you're a clergyperson, feel free to say to the musician, "Hey, what about doing this?" If you're the musician, feel absolutely free to say to the pulpitperson, "Ah, look, don't you see, this goes so much better with that?"

I'm sure all this is unnecessary. You're doing it already? Well then, I'm applauding.

4 LOUDNESS, PITCH AND SPEED

Now I come into a really dodgy area. It's dodgy because in this matter nearly everyone I'm potentially talking to will think they know more about it than me. The two subjects are speed and pitch. In cricket, these two things come together. In hymns, scarcely less so.

There is no way that in print I can portray what one could at the piano. So I am reduced (or expanded) to porridge-like pronouncements, complete with indigestible lumps.

On speeds: be your own person. THINK. I mean, think from scratch. Think, each Sunday. Assumptions I would challenge include the following:

Big congregations sing slow. Small groups sing fast.

Psalms are slow. Marching hymns are fast. Reflective hymns are slow. Hymns of positive praise are fast.

Good Friday is slow. Easter Sunday is fast.

And so on. In other words, throw the packaged stereotypes overboard.

Yes, often a psalm is best sung slow. Indeed, let me call your bluff over this assumption. Have you ever tried it really slow? I mean, really, really. I have, to the point that the congregation simply couldn't believe it, and verse one sank like the Titanic. But then, gradually, the penny dropped and the Titanic rose. By the last verse, the icebergs were scattered, and there was a momentous sound, as words sung by the Covenanters sailed to their inexorable conclusion.

But equally, you can double the speed for a lively psalm. So long as you accompany lightly, with the organ pedal working only the first beat of the bar (or, on occasion, of every second bar), there need be no sense of fuss or harassment. Even a large congregation will grasp the intention and become fleet of foot.

The same, of course, applies to hymns. On the morning that I took the psalm very slowly, I took the next item, 'Praise to the

Lord' ('Lobe den Herren') very fast. It is, after all, a waltz, and I made it a quick one. I think it worked.

This pragmatic approach works right across the board. I referred in Chapter Seven to children's hymns. It is insulting to assume that they should be always fast. Take a modern classic, which has become almost a Sunday School anthem: Sydney Carter's 'The Lord of the Dance'. I have the advantage of having heard Sydney sing this. He does so, as he sings all his songs, with a kind of rhythm which is neither fast nor slow, but always immensely poised. The source of this poise is the stringent attention he is paying to the words. The words, after all, are his. He takes them seriously. To him, they are as theological as anyone's Dogmatics. Incidentally, when did you last give these particular words a good read? I would dare you to do that and then go into church and race through the tune. The tune doesn't, in any case, invite a sprint. Listen to Aaron Copland's 'Appalachian Spring' and hear the tune given a wonderfully taut and elegant space.

In the beginning was the Word. Yes, always. I won't repeat all that I said in Chapter Seven about the possibilities latent in being very pragmatic indeed about pitch. Let me only report that at the end of that final lecture, I invited the audience to try to sing various hymns at high and low pitches, and fast and slow speeds, and asked them then to vote on the various treatments. I see no reason why this democratic procedure should not be adopted in congregational singing. That doesn't mean that any particular vote has to be conclusive. If the musician has strong views on what might work, let him or her come back again and again and experiment, demonstrate, propose.

It intrigued me, on this occasion, as I noted in the Prologue, that views on pitch appeared to split right down the middle. On one side were organists and choir members from churches where everything seemed to be hunky-dory. They were outraged at the suggestion that the pitch might be radically lowered. On the other side were people from the pews, plus one or two organists where everything was far from fine, who agreed strongly that the pitch needed to be drastically lowered to accommodate, as I had argued, the average voice, as distinct from the ideal male and female larynx.

Again, however, I am not seeking to lay down a new convention, merely to urge freedom to try out anything which might play a part in liberating the voice of the people. Take loudness, for example. It simply isn't the case that loudness is always exciting and quietness always dull. Think of the last time you attended a performance of one of the great choral classics - Messiah, Gerontius, any of the famous Requiems or Masses. Which was the most thrilling moment? Yes, it may well have been one of the towering climaxes. But think again, which was the second most thrilling moment? Was it not when the huge forces assembled there sank into a deep pianissimo that can really make the hairs on the back of the neck prickle. There is no reason why a congregation, large or small, should not sing quietly. I've heard it happen at Christmas services when a large congregation, allowed to sit for some of the carols, feels comfortable enough to sing in a relaxed way which produces a wonderfully rounded and unforced tone. In my Peterhead parish, at the Watchnight Service, I sometimes encouraged people to hum certain verses. Even without a solo voice soaring over it, that could be magical. Why should such simple devices be tried only at Christmas? It's nice to have that annual amnesty from the obligation to stand up five times in a service, square the shoulders, stick out the chest, clear the throat, and... squawk; but why not let people sit more often for a reflective or, as it used to be called, a devotional hymn or song? It is perfectly respectable. No discourtesy to the deity is implied. Free Church congregations, by no means liturgical hooligans, sit as they sing the psalms, and so do our Reformed brethren on the Continent.

But, at the risk of flogging a restive if not dead horse, it must be pointed out that if it is difficult for most men and many women to sing loudly at the pitch of most hymns, it is virtually impossible for them to sing top notes quietly unless that pitch is decisively lowered.

I'm not biased against the great climactic shout. Far from it. The Priesthill primary school I quoted is a shining example to us all of what liberated psyches may accomplish. And I have pitched in, so to speak, with the best of them, as an enthusiastic member of muscularly Christian congregations singing their liberated heads off in Fettes College Chapel or St. Giles Cathedral. But

liberation is the word. I referred in Chapter Two to the common-sense doctrine of Sir Adrian Boult about an architectural perspective on climaxes - one main one, the rest scaled from that. If congregations are offered light and shade, and if every singing is not a muscular chore, then when a big climax comes they are the more likely to be willing and able to take off. Always, there has to be proportion. If the service goes in the opposite direction and droops through a succession of dull boring items, drained of energy, then the congregation's lungs and spirits will terminally droop, and the bit climax will never happen. Singing quietly is not to sing without energy. The most wearying thing of all is monotony, whether quiet or loud.

In all these matters, it is a question of balancing the detail against the whole. At the piano, I gave examples of how certain conductors and organists in Brahms, Mendelssohn, Mozart and Bach, demonstrated that the need to give space to certain details of phrasing dictated the overall speed. I then analogously played certain hymn and psalm tunes to illustrate how, if particular words and grace notes were to be allowed their verbal and musical space and not to be trivialised by rushing over them, this inevitably led to a more gracious (not slow) speed being adopted than one sometimes hears.

5 MAKING THE OLD NEW

The same general principle applies to the Christian year of worship. Every Sunday need not be, cannot be, a high feast day. This is a tricky matter, theologically, psychologically and musically. Theologically, because, in the Reformed theology of liturgy, the whole cycle of the creation and salvation story is, at least implicitly, enacted each week. Psychologically, because in pastoral terms it is dangerous to play around too much with moods. Who are you, as minister, priest, or musician, to dictate the mood of the individual worshipper? You may, for all kinds of admirable reasons, plan a service which is quiet, reflective, subdued, but someone in a pew who has spent the week sinking into an all-too-quiet labyrinth of self-doubt may need, this

Sunday morning, to be caught up in a wave of confidence as the resilient faith of those around rises in loud affirmation. Conversely, you may plan a lively exciting service, but here in a pew is a person in the toils of depression or bereavement, or just in a valued state of peace, who hoped for a space out of the world's noise and finds all this loud playing and singing jarringly bombastic. Musically, the difficulty is that if you have high days, then the low days may seem just that: low in energy, anti-climactic.

Again, it is a matter of perspective. In my opinion, never should an act of worship lack verbal or musical energy, and never should it be allowed to sag. Episodic worship withers on the vine. The creative tension must describe a span from beginning to end. This applies just as much to 'sad' occasions as cheerful ones, just as much to funerals as to weddings. It even applies to Good Friday. Who benefits from the kind of Good Friday event, especially if it extends over a three hour vigil, which, from a starting point of compulsory solemnity, unravels down descending steps of lachrymose piety into a miasma of gloom?

I'm reminded of the devastating review written by Christopher Grier in his first year as music critic of *The Scotsman*. He had been to his first Usher Hall 'St. Matthew Passion' by the Edinburgh Bach Choir and he referred disparagingly to a series of "vaguely pious sounds" floating across the hall from the platform. It was a touch cruel, but he made his point. That is a criticism nobody would have levelled at the Herrick Bunney performances of the same work, in their sense of urgency and - yes - passion. Were they any the less pious, in the true sense? Of course not. *Au contraire*.

Just as hymns in general may benefit from a fresh review of their speed, in particular some 'sad' hymns can be rescued from the doldrums by a radical reconsideration of the speed and rhythm. This is especially true of what we know as the German Reformation Chorales. Some of them are arrangements by Bach, adapted by Mendelssohn, but that doesn't make them any more suitable for our congregational use. It is quite impossible for a normal congregation to sustain, let alone impart energy to, hymns like 'Wake, Awake' and 'A Safe Stronghold' at the speed and pitch, and with the harmonic stolidity incorporated in the Revised Church Hymnary and in CH3. This is especially galling

when it is known that in their original form, these tunes, and others like them, were energetic, lithe, rhythmic, and fun to sing. It is true that continental congregations still sometimes sing such chorales in the heavy manner, but many others, with astringent new song books, sing the more rhythmic original versions, and in unison. If the truth be known, many of our metrical psalm tunes were similarly metamorphosed. Originally, they were lively enough for an English bishop to refer to them as "these Geneva jigs". But it was Luther who asked why the devil should have the best tunes and it was he, an enthusiastic lute and flute player and composer, who adapted, among other material, contemporary folk songs. Was 'O Sacred Head' not originally a secular love song, with a lilting pulse? Is there any reason why it should not lilt today, even on Good Friday? Or why with different words, it should not throb with urgency?

I have some reason to be happy with the Passion Chorale's attachment to the Chesterton hymn 'O God of Earth and Altar', as I was, I believe, the person who joined them together. Just another instance of a one-off risk becoming institutionalised! History need not dictate to us, one way or another, in those questions of style. But we need to know that we are free to knock the stuffing out of unhelpful traditions and let tunes be re-animated, so that dynamic thoughts can breathe again freely.

So how should we deal with the great German classics? The answer is, in essence, simple. Sing them in unison, with rhythm, sometimes faster, and often lower. If it can be taken, then, that there is no spiritual or musical justification for dullness, greyness, blandness, or somnolence in any kind of service, the way is open, without anxiety, to vary the diet throughout the year, with relative high and low points, relative light and shade, relatively vivid colour contrasting with more subtle toning. And as I said in Chapter Seven, there is no need for every service to have five items of congregational praise. Equally, there is no reason why a whole service should not be geared round community singing (presumably thematically linked) or round a sequence of high quality performances by choir and/or instrumentalists, for sitting and listening is just as much worship as standing and singing, as Anglican cathedral worship recognises in deeply spiritual services such as Choral Evensong.

All the above comments have been directed at having a fresh look at traditional material. What about new material? To go into detail about the increasing amount of recent and contemporary publishing in this field would have required a separate exercise. My main aim has been to reassure people that we can kickstart quite a sufficient musical reformation right now where we are, with the material that is at hand, so that nobody can plead the *alibi* of not knowing this or that technique, or not having this or that resource, or not knowing this or that kind of old or new music. Any minister or musician worth his or her salt is sooner or later going to do research into other sources both old and new, but in the meantime we can begin the new revolution with the old tools, and we can begin next Sunday.

A prominent theme in these reflections has been the supposed tension between old and new. Those who are concerned for the new will think I have been over-concerned for the old. I hope that is not so. My concern has been to preserve the living soil of our ordinary worship, for that is the seed-bed of tomorrow's flowering; and so I would like to renew confidence in everything that has nourished that soil and can continue for the foreseeable future. I have questioned the concept of old and new in the context of music. Beauty and truth, I sentimentally believe, are for ever. But 'ever' is not a long straight line, it is a loop through the human and divine spirit. Musical and spiritual freedom involves the privilege of being alive at any time and in any place and to have access to the experiences of others which have been enshrined in any time and place in artifacts, because they still provide the most widespread access in most of our church communities. They are channels which lead to open seas where many a spiritual adventure may still be launched.

I referred in Chapter Two to arriving back from Prague, and finding that Leonard Bernstein had died. A couple of weeks after the last of these lectures, BBC TV broadcast a special edition of 'Omnibus' which paid tribute to Bernstein. Michael Tilson Thomas, one of the finest of the new generation of American conductors, now principal conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra, described the impact of 'Lenny' on himself and other young musicians at Tanglewood, the summer home of the Boston Symphony. He said that before Bernstein arrived, the

idea, under composers like Aaron Copland, was to search out new paths. There was the classical path here and the new music path there. Lenny made it “one whole wide path, stretching 360° in possibility, the idea of music as a universal expression of mankind; and the purpose of a life was to explore all of the music, and for one to enrich the other.”

That rings true of the composer of ‘West Side Story’ and the Chichester Psalms. There’s a very simple point here. Our sense of historical perspective is not wide enough to separate dross from gold. One Vienna critic said Schubert couldn’t write tunes. TUNES? In a different field, planners in the ’60s wanted to demolish Gilbert Scott’s St. Pancras station in London, as a Victorian monstrosity, a blot on the brave new world of tinted glass rectangles. Now, a mere thirty years later, the race is on to restore it to its former glory. Where yesterday’s *kitsch* is today’s cult, what will be tomorrow’s trend? Better to remain unsnared in these smart debates, and trust your own emotional response.

As a young man, Bernstein became famous overnight when he had to conduct the New York Philharmonic at no notice at all because Bruno Walter had flu. Bruno Walter is one conductor I haven’t reminisced about in these pages, but I referred to him in one of the piano sessions. I played ‘The Blue Danube’ waltz and asked: is this new or old? For a world that is gone or for our world? In answering my question, I recollected the *matinée* concert in the Usher Hall on the last day of the first Edinburgh Festival in 1947. What had made the Festival lift off, by encouraging great artists to participate, was Bruno Walter’s agreement to reunite with the Vienna Philharmonic at Edinburgh. Hitler, the Holocaust, the War, had separated them. It was a Viennese concert, and as the marches and polkas crackled and the waltzes glided, I saw from the organ loft the tears in the orchestra and on the face of Lotte Walter, and the conflict between light and shade on Walter’s face.

They were in mourning for a world that had passed away. But the bitter-sweetness in the music was integral to it, and so was the emotional aspiration which is at the heart of every age. So, although it was a glorious surprise when in the Stanley Kubrick film ‘2001’ the soundtrack for the first sequence in space was ‘The Blue Danube’, it did not jar. Music from a past world had

leapfrogged over the present and was illuminating future worlds. If a late 20th Century epic of the cinema dealing with 21st Century matters is not too proud to use 19th Century music - music, moreover, for a *passé* social mode - then it is difficult to see why Christian musicians and clergy, following a cult based on events of two to three thousand years ago, should be so fastidious about Victorian hymnody.

Because, unlike the Blue Danube, so many 19th Century hymns are doleful dirges?

On the 4th April 1993, virtually at the time of going to press, the South Bank Show showed a film. If a film can be, this was a dirge. It was slower than any hymn. And sadder. And very much longer than an hour. It consisted of the Polish composer Henryk Gorecki's 3rd Symphony, entitled 'Symphony of Sorrowful Songs'. Tony Palmer's film overlaid on a complete performance of this most uniformly sombre of all 20th Century laments, images of the horrors of our time: Auschwitz, Somalia, Iraq, Sarajevo. Inexorably pressed home by the unrelenting orchestral throb and the soprano's cry of mother for child, child for mother, and all for God, it was all but unbearable. The Samuel Barberesque harmonies were such as would fit any popular hymn. Who could want such stuff? An unprecedented number of people. This symphony has sold more recordings than any classical work written this century, reached number six in the pop chart album last January, and sold over 300,000 compact discs world-wide. Why? It is about death. It confronts death. Everything is stripped from the human heart. Why do we expect the music of our cross-centred faith to do less?

Yes, our faith goes beyond death, and our music has to outrun the dark places of the heart, but if we try to bypass either we bypass the mass of people that music exists to serve.

6 AND LASTLY...

The river of life flows on. Chapter Five opened with my recollection of the 1938 showing of the film 'Sixty Glorious Years', starring Anna Neagle in a pre-war world which bears no

relation to ours. A month after delivering that lecture I was transfixed to see on my television set a clip from that ancient film, my first sighting of it for 52 years. What unfixed me, brought me to my feet indeed, was the lively conversation that followed. The presenter was chatting to an attractive dynamic lady whom I had carelessly assumed to have gone long since to wherever stars go when they die. This was Anna Neagle, and she was still performing in front of my eyes. She described how she never thought she would get anywhere because she was always so 'tongue-tied and stupid' (encouragement to all 'ordinary' musicians and ministers) but was brought on by Jack Buchanan, the Scottish singer, local boy from Helensburgh, where I live and this book was written. Her great successes included 'Goodnight Vienna' (1932), and 'Bittersweet' (1933) - that dated old world again! Yet one of her finest roles was her least glamorous, that of 'Odette' (1950), set in the black realism of disfigured modernity.

But here is a final serendipity. She was not, after all, speaking 'live' to me. The programme was recorded. Now biologically dead, she, like Lenny Bernstein, lives in the alchemy of tape and film. And her autobiography is entitled 'There's Always Tomorrow'.

Indeed there is. Equally, there's always yesterday. They meet today. Which is our golden opportunity!