

# Salisbury Choral Society

## NEWSLETTER

THURSDAY 28<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2021

Welcome to another edition of ramblings from the conductor!

I hope the newsletter continues to find you well.

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### Composers of the week

This week, I thought I'd write a bit about two composers for the price of one.



The English composer and organist **Samuel Wesley (1766 - 1837)** was the son of the famous hymn writer Charles Wesley and the nephew of John Wesley. As a young child, Samuel Wesley was recognised as a child prodigy by the British musical establishment. He quickly mastered the violin, harpsichord and organ and by the age of eight, he was becoming known for his composing and improvisational skills. Samuel Wesley worked as a conductor as well as a music teacher and lecturer and seems to have been one of the pioneers of the organ recitals, as prior to his time, entertainment was not considered appropriate for a church building. Samuel Wesley was known by some as "The English Mozart" and also met and played the organ to Mendelssohn.

About six months ago (yes it was that long ago), you might remember that I was sending out interview questions to fellow choral conductors for the newsletters. One of the interviewees in July was conductor and organist David Gostick, who is a very busy musician, even in lockdown!



In 2017, David conducted Portsmouth Choral Union and Southern Pro Musica orchestra for the world premiere recording of "Confitebor tibi, Domine", an extended setting of psalm 111 by Samuel Wesley. More information about the work and the CD is here: <https://pcuchoir.org/product/portsmouth-choral-union-cd-2017/> and you can listen to one of the movements on the homepage of the Portsmouth Choral Union website.



**Samuel Sebastian Wesley (1810 - 1876)** was born in London. His father was the composer Samuel Wesley. It is believed that SS Wesley was the illegitimate son of Samuel Wesley and his housekeeper Sarah Suter. His middle name was Sebastian, after the famous composer and organist Johann Sebastian Bach, whose music his father much admired. Samuel Sebastian was a boy chorister at the Chapel Royal and held many Cathedral Organist appointments during his lifetime, beginning at Hereford Cathedral in 1832. He moved to Exeter Cathedral three years later and subsequently held appointments at Leeds Parish Church (which is today known as Leeds Minster) from 1842, Winchester Cathedral from 1849 (where he was largely responsible for the Cathedral's acquisition of the organ which is

still there today) and Gloucester Cathedral from 1865. During his lifetime, he was known as one of the leading organists and choirmasters in the country. SS Wesley was buried in St. Bartholomew's Cemetery in Exeter. There are memorial tablets to him in Exeter Cathedral (see photo right) and Winchester Cathedral; and a stained glass memorial in Gloucester Cathedral.



Working in such prestigious places of worship meant that SS Wesley was often composing music for his forces. However, this wasn't without its challenges. Few cathedral chapters were willing to devote any resources to music, so SS Wesley fought tirelessly to reverse poor musical standards, often complaining of absenteeism and incompetence among the adult singers, poor organs and inadequate rehearsal time. There are many gems to enjoy and I've narrowed my recommendations down to three anthems; one long and two short.

**Ascribe unto the Lord** is from a set of twelve anthems published in 1853, while he was at Winchester. The anthem uses verses from psalms 96 and 115 and I can best describe this anthem as a 15-minute oratorio, with various choruses and solo sections. To my surprise, this anthem crops up on YouTube quite a lot, including this one from a BBC radio recording from the Southern Cathedrals Festival which took place in Winchester in 1981: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x2CVnviYYcA> (this is a very rare recording with orchestral accompaniment).

The two shorter anthems are what I would describe as miniature gems, they say exactly what they need to say in the shortest possible span (four minutes each).

**Wash me thoroughly** was probably written while SS Wesley was at Exeter (c.1840) and uses as its text a verse from Psalm 51. [Wash me thoroughly - Wesley](#)

**Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace** dates from SS Wesley's time at Winchester (c.1850). I think this anthem shows SS Wesley at his finest and would go as far as saying that *this piece is one of my top ten favourite choral works!* [Thou Wilt Keep Him in Perfect Peace - Wesley](#)

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## Next online Zoom session!

Following on from the success of the Zoom caroling session, I am very pleased to report that we are going to have another session online on **Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> February**. This zoom session is going to be along the lines of the WCMF Taster Days, where I'll be talking a bit about the chosen composer / music, then a chance to try some of them out. I feel that this format will be the most beneficial / successful as opposed to trying another rehearsal on zoom.



February's featured composer will be **Joseph Haydn (1732 - 1809)** and we will be singing the **Little Organ Mass**, alongside extracts from the **Nelson Mass** and the **Creation**. Details of how to download / obtain scores are available at the members section of the choir website, together with learning files if you would like to get some practice in before the session.

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That's all for this week folks, I hope you're still enjoying the newsletters.

Stay safe and keep singing!

*Graham*