



CONFERENCE REVIEWS

SUNDAY, JUNE 11

EXCITED FOR THE START of my first AAM Conference, I was greeted by sunshine (and glasses-fogging humidity!) when I stepped off the airplane at Dallas Love Field airport on Sunday. Already in the lobby of our hotel, as I waited for my room to be ready, it was wonderful to greet friends and colleagues, many of whom I had not seen since before the pandemic began!

After I got settled into my room at the Warwick-Melrose, I joined the rest of the assembled attendees for our first outing: a trip to St. Mark's School of Texas for Choral Evensong



at the lovely school chapel, sung by the St. Mark's Choir of Men and Boys. Led by Director of Music and Organist Glenn Stroh at the podium and Graham Schulz, Conference co-chair, at the lovely Letourneau organ, the service was an engaging entrée into the week. The choir's sound was polished and nuanced, and Mr. Schulz's organ playing was exceptionally uplifting. As this was

my first Conference, I was truly blown away when we all started singing the first hymn together – nothing beats AAM Conference hymn-singing!

I was especially happy to hear Mr. Schulz's organ voluntaries, which included works by Elisabeth Stirling and Bruce Simonds that were brand new to me. (I'm looking forward to buying and learning both scores!) Gerald Near's Evening Canticle settings, composed for St. Mark's, were a

treat to hear; a friend told me before the service that they contained a few quotes from Herbert Howells' settings, so I enjoyed listening for those moments. The choir handled Philip Radcliffe's responses and Henry Balfour Gardiner's *Evening Hymn* with panache, and I found their psalm chanting expressive and engaging (especially with Mr. Schulz's sensitive accompaniment!)

St. Mark's School has a wonderful choral tradition that is clearly thriving under Mr. Stroh's leadership. I hope that, at future AAM Conferences, girls' choirs and mixed-gender ensembles of children and youth might be featured in a similar manner. I also would love to see more expansive programming when it comes to composers of color and women composers. (Note: We did hear several new works by women composers later in the week, but this particular service featured only one piece by a woman – Elisabeth Stirling's *Maestoso in D Minor*.) Throughout the Conference, I longed for more works by BIPOC composers.

After a lovely reception with appetizers and drinks at the impressive Great Hall at St. Mark's School, we returned to the hotel as ominous-looking storm clouds gathered overhead. I spoke with several folks whose flights were delayed or re-routed due to weather, but I'm glad everyone eventually made it safely (better late than never!).



KATHERINE BURK WEBB

Dr. Katherine Webb is Canon for Cathedral Music at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Portland, Oregon where she oversees a robust choral program and concert series. She is a graduate of Indiana University and St. Olaf College and serves on the Board of Directors for the Royal School of Church Music in America. She is also a member of the AAM Grants Committee.

CONFERENCE REVIEWS

MONDAY, JUNE 12

MONDAY MORNING BEGAN with the Opening Eucharist commemorating the Feast of Saint Barnabas at Saint Michael and All Angels Church. Expertly led by the Saint Michael Choir and brass, directed by Jonathan Ryan and assisted by organists Dr. Meg Harper and Dr. Robert August, the service began with opening voluntaries in contrasting styles, the *Finale* from Widor's *Symphony VIII* and the Brenda Portman *Elegy* (2016). In festive procession and with a full complement of acolytes, including crosses, torches, banners, flags, and even Holy Spirit banners twirling overhead, the opening hymn of the liturgy was sung in full-AAM fashion. *Lift up your heads (Truro)*



raised the roof with beloved AAM legend Sam Batt Owens' accurate description of the three-volume levels of AAM conference congregational singing: "loud, stun, or kill." The sung Eucharist was celebrated by AAM Chaplain The Rev'd Canon Victoria Sirota. Saint Michael's rector, Dr. Chris Girata, preached the sermon and welcomed the Conference. Commissioned works

were featured throughout the service, the Philip Moore *Mass for Saint Michael and All Angels* and George Baker's *Joie* (2021) as the closing voluntary, both commissioned and composed for the seventy-fifth anniversary of the parish. The opportunity to hear the complete mass (*Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, Benedictus, and Agnus Dei*) sung throughout the liturgy was a welcome treat. Baker's organ piece interestingly quoted both *America the Beautiful* and *My country, 'tis of thee* (or perhaps that was *God Save the King*). The anthem at the Offertory, *Arise, my soul, on wings enraptured* by Stephanie Martin, was commissioned by the 2023 Dallas Conference in celebration of the *Great Host of Composers* project. The choir's rendition of Sarah MacDonald's Anglican chant was masterful, and the singing of the traditional, old favorite hymns *Alla Trinitá beata* at the Sequence and *Malabar* at Communion was welcomed. The service ended with a rousing hymn, *Lord, you give the great commission* (to Abbot's *Leigh*), again resplendent with the rush of the mighty wind from the Holy Spirit banners overhead.

Following the Opening Eucharist, Episcopal priest, writer, and spiritual director, The Rev'd Barbara Cawthorne Crafton, gave the first of two keynote addresses for the week. She discussed the importance of words and how musicians and artists interact with them. Opening her discussion about the immense power of words, she quoted David Hurd by asking, "Would you sing something that you would not say?" Mother Barbara then went on with a number of touching personal stories, the last of which was about her husband's final hours and last words. Relating words and the Christian faith, she remarked on the vastness of God and the intimacy of Jesus: "God is so remote, so huge, so big that we needed the Incarnation in Jesus, who spoke in words just like us." She also reminded the group that being an artist or musician is a "minority calling" and that musicians lift and support the

liturgy. Finally, she reminded everyone of the importance of continuing to sing the words we would not say today. Her address was received by a vigorous standing ovation.

Following the first plenary meeting and an afternoon reception, the conference attendees walked one block to Christ the King Catholic Church for an organ recital by Käthe Wright Kaufman. This rear-gallery instrument is a French-style Juget-Sinclair built in 2014, solidly equipped to handle repertoire from the French classic to the twentieth century and beyond. After a rousing opening with the Bach *Toccata in F*, BWV 540, Kaufman continued with two pieces by women composers, the Nadia Boulanger *Trois Pièces* (1911) in three movements, *Prelude*, *Petit Canon*, and *Improvisation*, followed by Jessica French's *Prelude on 'Jesu, dulcis memoria'* (2022). The composer was seated in the front row and received a lovely ovation, also waiving to the recitalist at the other end of the room. The program continued with Andrew Carter's *Lacrimae* (2015), dedicated to the memory of John Scott. Kaufman ended the recital with two staples of the French organ repertoire, the Jehan Alain *Le Jardin Suspendu* and the *Allegro* from Widor's *Symphony IV*. Kaufman used the resources of this grand instrument with expertise and full force. Moreover, her quiet, intimate registrations were engaging and captivating. The character of the instrument's flutes were welcomed sounds as well.

After dinner-on-your-own in the Plaza at Preston Center, just a short walk up the street, the group returned to Saint Michael and All Angels Church for Compline sung by the Saint Michael Compline Choir. This exquisite liturgy was beautifully sung by the choir, directed by Jonathan Ryan. The room was lit only by candlelight, producing a magical experience as the choir sang in the shadows. The pacing of the liturgy was peaceful, yet always clear and articulate. Hearing the choir sing the Tallis *Te lucis ante terminum* was a moving experience, having heard the Balfour Gardiner setting during Evensong at St. Mark's School of Texas the night before. The choir also sang the Tallis *In manus tuas*, which beautifully led into David Hurd's anthem, *O night that is brighter than the day*. The Palestrina *Nunc dimittis* setting and the plainsong *Salve Regina* restored the ancient ethos of the liturgy at the end, a fitting ending to the first full day of the Conference. ♦

DAVID OUZTS

David Perry Ouzts, DSM, is beginning his twenty-second year as parish musician and liturgist at Church of the Holy Communion, Memphis, Tennessee. He is a graduate of Furman University, the Yale School of Music, and the Graduate Theological Foundation. He holds diplomas in sacred music and Anglican studies from the Yale Institute of Sacred Music and the Berkeley Divinity School at Yale. Dr. Ouzts is on the Peter R. Hallock Institute board and has recently been appointed to the Chapter Leadership Specialist Support Team of the national American Guild of Organists, having served two terms as the Tennessee District Convener. He was chair of the AAM Professional Concerns and Development Committee for six years. During that time, he re-edited the PCDC's two professional handbooks, Servant Leadership for Musicians and Musicians Called to Serve.

CONFERENCE REVIEWS

TUESDAY, JUNE 13

After the Call to Order by President Sonya Subbaya Sutton and an opening prayer by Mother Vicki Sirota, the Minutes of the 2022 General Meeting were approved. Michael Smith reported on the future of RSCM America: it is in difficult times, financially speaking. Mark Lawson reported on a joint venture between ECS Publishing and AAM: a “branded” group of publications, not only choral but also organ and instrumental.

George Fergus reported on the successes of the Hancock Internship – not only does the host institution benefit from the presence of up-and-coming talent, but the experience that the organ scholar receives is invaluable. Matthew

Estes and Linda Patterson reported on the Lay Professional Advocacy Committee’s continued efforts in working for justice and equity among employees of The Episcopal Church. Mark Childers reported on AAM’s increasing representation (which includes our Executive Director, Patrick Fennig) on the Standing Commission for Liturgy and Music. Joseph Arndt reported on behalf of the Fundraising Committee – even small gifts can make a difference! Dean Billmeyer and Richard Gray presented an overview of the 2024 Conference (Minneapolis and St. John’s Abbey in Collegeville). Alan Reed gave us the election results. The proposed changes to our by-laws were approved, and the bid for the 2025 conference (Cincinnati) was accepted. Sonya thanked elected officers who will rotate off the board. Loud ovations for past, present, and future board members ensued.

Diane Meredith Belcher gave an oral presentation of her published research (see *The Journal*, May–June 2023) on the abuse of church musicians titled, *Church Wounds: Shining a Light, Lifting Our Hearts for Healing*. Although the results of her research might lead one to sadness (or even pain, if any individual experiences remain suppressed), “shining the light” on it all will surely help lead us to healthier times. We then split into groups of six or eight and were encouraged to express or recount anything related to the subject, each in our own professional situation.

We departed for Meyerson Symphony Center, where an elegant lunch was served in the lobby. The Meyerson is surely one of the most dramatic, beautiful, and successful concert halls in the U.S., perhaps even in the world. This collaboration of architect I. M. Pei and acoustical consultant Russell Johnson is stunning to both the eye and the ear. Add to that the Lay (yes, that’s “Lay” as in “Frito-Lay”) Family Concert Organ, C. B. Fisk, Opus 100 (1992), one of the most thrilling instruments of the late twentieth century. Bradley Hunter Welch gave us a “demonstration” (actually a brilliant recital) of the instrument, playing works of Dupré, Drischner, Bach, Swann, Martinson, and Saint-Saëns (the *Final* of the *Symphonie III* in a jaw-dropping transcription by Jonathan Scott). Mr. Welch is completely “at home” on this instrument as Resident



Organist and holder of the Lay Family Chair with the Dallas Symphony. His playing was stunning in every way, start to finish.

We then departed for the Episcopal School of Dallas. At 3:45 PM, began what was, for me, one of the most mesmerizing events of the entire week, a talk by The Rev’d Barbara Cawthorne Crafton. At first (as the reviewer *du jour*), I tried to take notes on her message. But after about ten minutes, I had to put down my pen and just listen, as I didn’t want to miss one single word. If you don’t know anything about her, her writings, her career, etc., look her up. There is not enough space in this review to write about her gift to us that day.

At 5:00 PM (still the SAME DAY), we attended Evensong offered by the St. Matthew’s Cathedral Arts Choral Artists in the ESD chapel. Damin Spritzer’s exquisite playing of the voluntaries – works of women composers, of which Damin has become a champion – began and ended the service. Eugene Lavery’s service accompaniments were nothing short of perfect. The Choir’s singing was technically flawless, carefully nuanced, and always musically sensitive to these well-known texts. *Brava!* to Monica Awbrey for her inspired and inspiring leadership of the Choir. AAM-style singing during services is not always subtle: I caught the eyes and noticed the smiles of several of the choir members during our singing of the Creed – certainly one of the most robust versions ever heard either on heaven or on earth!

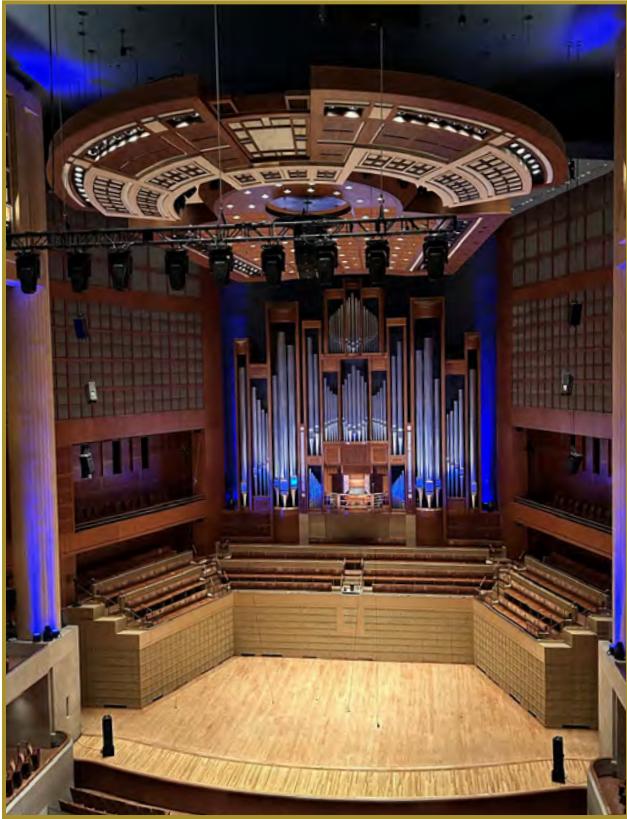
A wonderful dinner at ESD followed in the “Great Hall” (Texas style). Then we were off to St. Thomas Aquinas Roman Catholic Church for a concert by the Orpheus Chamber Singers. Only one word is necessary to describe their concert – extraordinary. Their program was wonderfully creative, mixing well-known works with lesser-known gems. Particularly notable were Howells’ *Take him, earth, for cherishing* and Willan’s *An Apostrophe to the Heavenly Hosts*. The latter, which I did not know, is Willan at his most brilliant, unfettered by the need to “sell.” This work is accessible only to the most capable of choral ensembles: the Orpheus Chamber Singers would fit at the top of that category. As I listened, I couldn’t help wishing that I could hear them sing other choral monuments – the Rachmaninov *All-night Vigil*, the massive anthems of Tallis and Mundy, or the Schoenberg *Friede auf Erden*. *Bravi!* to J. D. Burnett and the Orpheus Chambers Singers. We are grateful for the gift you gave us. I, for one, won’t soon forget the evening.

Back to the Warwick we went for another enjoyable cash bar and more family time.

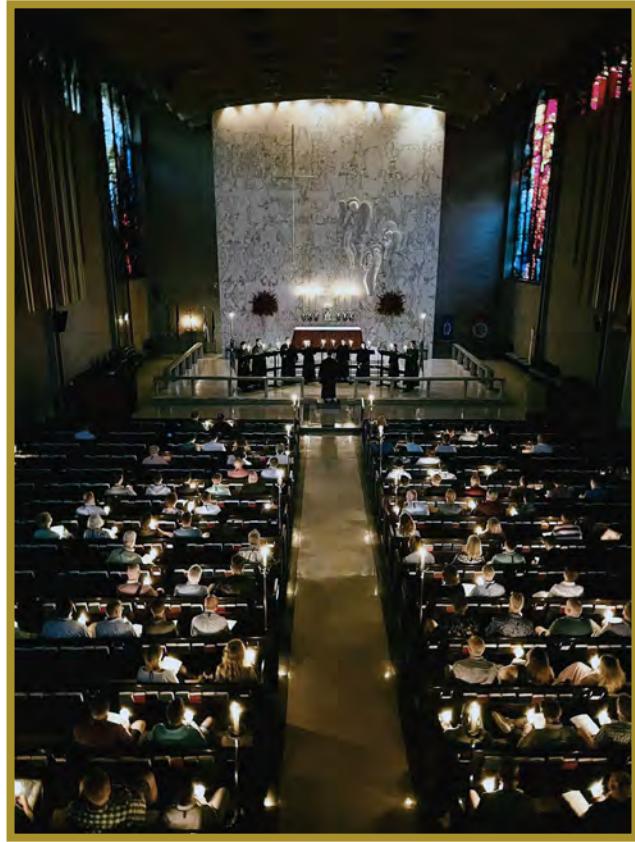
Gerre, Ray, and Jim looked down and saw all that they had made, and it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the second day. ♦♦♦

NED TIPTON

Ned Tipton is the Director of Music Ministries at St. Mark’s Episcopal Church, New Canaan, Connecticut. His previous posts include Canon for Music at St. John’s Cathedral, Los Angeles (2010–2017) and the American Cathedral in Paris (1989–2010). His organ studies were with Marilyn Keiser, Garth Peacock, and Marie-Madeleine Duruflé.



The Fisk organ in the Meyerson Symphony Center filled the room in a private “demonstration” of the organ by Bradley Welch.



Compline at the Church of Saint Michael and All Angels



Compline at the Church of Saint Michael and All Angels

CONFERENCE REVIEWS

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 14

THE CONFERENCE COMMITTEE clearly put much thought into the schedule and pacing of the whole week, and Wednesday was very intentionally a day of “heavy lifting” in terms of programming and duration, in the knowledge that Thursday would be a light and fun day at the conclusion.

The day began with a Choral Reading Session at Oak Lawn United Methodist Church across the street from our



Conference hotel. Dr. Marty Wheeler Burnett led the reading session with ease as we sang through compositions by AAM members. The bulk of the repertoire seemed deliberately aimed at the typical parish choir of moderate ability – nothing too vocally demanding and conservative in the division of voices. This Conference’s subtle but deliberate theme of increasing the representation of women composers continued in

this reading session, with notable contributions from Jessica French and Sarah MacDonald.

After a brief coffee break, the morning session resumed at Oak Lawn United Methodist with a panel discussion titled *The Elephant in the Room: A Dialogue on Things We’d Rather Not Talk About*. This session, moderated by John DeDakis, husband of AAM Member Cynthia DeDakis (see his bio in the downloadable Conference booklet), was a presentation by the Professional Concerns and Development Committee. The interlocutors of this discussion were Sonya Subbayya Sutton and The Rt. Rev’d Daniel G.P. Gutierrez (Bishop of Pennsylvania). Given the slightly uncomfortable topic (the ill-treatment of church musicians by clergy), it was helpful that the panel discussion was a gathering of friends and not adversaries. Both the moderator and the interlocutors had mutual ties and family members involved on both sides (clergy and musician), and so were able to speak a common language that always sought understanding and respect; these can be sorely lacking when these complex issues 1) reach a boiling point within parish life; or 2) are worked out over social media, with its inherent lack of nuance.

If those who came to this panel discussion with serious axes to grind hoped to leave with a sense of something “done,” they were inevitably disappointed. AAM cannot change the power structures that are inherent in the DNA of the Episcopal Church, but the recurring theme that emerged during the discussion is that leaders like Bishop Gutierrez are not just listening to, but are truly *hearing*, these stories and will take them to the levels of active leadership where real change can be achieved. That is not nothing in this church, and we will pray that the works of this ongoing discussion bear measurable fruit.

We then departed for the first of two musical sessions at Preston Hollow Presbyterian Church. After a “box lunch”

of sorts, once we arrived at Preston Hollow, we were ushered into the spacious sanctuary where the organ console had been moved front and center for the premiere of the *Dallas Hymnary*. This collection of new tunes (some posthumously submitted) featured no less than forty hymn tunes paired with new and existing texts. While discussion of such an endeavor deserves its own article or conversation, it is worth noting that congregational enthusiasm was especially palpable after singing new tunes by Jack Warren Burnam, Robert Lehman, Kenneth Miller, William Bradley Roberts, and Richard Webster. That said, the whole hymnary is full of riches worthy of being mined and used in congregational settings. This “sing-through” of the *Hymnary* was led by Joel Martinson and Graham Schultz, who took turns playing or introducing every ten hymns; some were sung through only once, and others for two or three stanzas, depending on length.

Following the premier of the *Dallas Hymnary*, members were permitted a coffee and lemonade break before a chamber music concert of considerable length. AAM’s own Dr. Jeremy Filsell was featured at the piano alongside string players performing the *Piano Quartet in A minor, Op. 21* of Herbert Howells, and the *Piano Quintet in F minor* of César Franck. Both the Howells and the Franck are lengthy, so following on the heels of the *Dallas Hymnary*, it was a bit of an undertaking with regard to stamina. But for those who might have thought the Conference left them wanting, this afternoon did not disappoint. Dr. Filsell and the string players performed with the utmost artistry, and their delight in the music was most evident.

The day most certainly went “from strength to strength,” as the quality of the musical offerings only grew and intensified as the day progressed. Judging from the Conference booklet alone, one of the week’s most anticipated events was bound to be Choral Evensong at the Church of the Incarnation and its “over the top” ending to the anthem. Robert McCormick, one of our membership’s finest service players, ably accompanied the whole liturgy from beginning to end, starting with voluntaries by Calvin Hampton and Mary Beth Bennett. The entire liturgy of Evensong was done in an atmosphere of unhurried and dignified reverence that was never once fussy – a hallmark of parishes like the Incarnation, which at once identify as High Church and yet not Anglo-Catholic (also an article for another issue).

Christopher Jacobson led the choirs in settings of the Psalms by Douglas Major and Bruce Neswick, followed by settings of the *Magnificat and Nunc Dimitis* by Richard Lloyd. Gerre Hancock’s *Preces & Responses* also lent an air of familiarity to the service. But the energy and anticipation were leading up to C. Hubert H. Parry’s monumental anthem *Hear my words, ye people*. This venerable staple of the Evensong repertoire stands on its own merits, but the specialized treatment of the closing measures to include the entire congregation left every member of AAM waiting with bated breath to enter into the final repeated strains of “Amen” alternating between choir, organ, and full choir. Though the final closing Eucharist awaited us the next day, one couldn’t help but feel that this service and that anthem represented in some way the anticipation and

CONFERENCE REVIEWS

culmination of the whole week. On a Conference day defined by “heavy lifting,” this cathedral-length choral anthem was the perfect ending and an “icon” which showed us in blazing clarity the untold depths of what our artistry seeks to perfect and understand. ♦

BENJAMIN STRALEY

The Rev'd Benjamin Straley is the Rector of S. Stephen's Church in Providence, a parish founded since its inception upon the ideals of the Oxford Movement. Prior to ordained ministry, he was the Organist and Associate Director of Music at Washington National Cathedral. While there, he was responsible for composing, arranging, and leading music for many services of national importance. Among his notable musical achievements, in 2010 he became one of the few Americans in the history of the Haarlem Organ Festival to compete in its world-renowned improvisation contest. As a musician-turned-priest, he is naturally very passionate about the role hymns and liturgy play in the worshipping life of congregations. Fr. Benjamin is a graduate of the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, the Yale School of Music, and Berkeley Divinity School at Yale. In his free time, he enjoys cooking (being a huge Ina Garten devotee), British television, improving his sailing skills, and trying to keep up with his fiercely energetic dog, Grace.

aamdallas2023.org

The AAM board will meet in October to review the Dallas Conference and would like to hear any feedback related to your experience. Please email:

office@anglicanmusicians.org

before October 1. Your thoughts and comments will be shared with both the Dallas and Minnesota Conference Committees.

aamdallas2023.org



Members of AAM whose work is represented in the *Dallas Hymnary* gather following the premiere of the *Hymnary* at Preston Hollow Presbyterian Church.

CONFERENCE REVIEWS

THURSDAY, JUNE 15

THE LAST DAY OF THE AAM CONFERENCE dawned hot and foggy but quickly cleared. The swimming pool was warm and welcoming when it opened at 7:00 a.m. Indeed, the entire hotel was warm and welcoming with only a few snafus. My room was spacious and well appointed. It appeared that each room had a different layout but with the same excellent amenities.

Because there was time at breakfast, I approached conference attendees about their experiences during the week. Comments such as “fabulous organ recitals,” “amazing choral

groups,” “great food,” “conference beautifully organized,” “incredible weather,” and “exceptional programming” were offered by almost every table. Indeed, the weather had been extremely cooperative, the choral groups presented programs of the highest quality, the organists had shown such musicality and beauty, and the congregational singing – what can one say about 250 Anglican musicians singing hymns together?



There were some suggestions of additions to the excellent sessions; a 12-step program and a yoga offering could be considered for the next conference.

One table of “seasoned” musicians told me how much they had enjoyed the downtime given as an opportunity to reacquaint with old friends and meet new ones. The next table of “newbies,” young and talented musicians, asked for a fuller schedule so they could learn as much as possible in this short time. Isn’t the cycle of life wonderful?

Almost without exception every table commented on how valuable the session entitled “The Elephant in the Room” had been to them and that the handling of these difficult topics had been very well accomplished.

Thus, up to Thursday morning the conference had been pretty much a rousing success. Was it to continue?

The morning was filled with workshops, five of them. They included *A Great Host of Composers* presented by Susan Jane Matthews; *Data-driven Chorister Recruitment* presented by Ruth Cobb and Margaret White; *Vocal Methods for Choirs* presented by Connor Lidell; *Sabbaticals – Practical Information for Requestion, Planning, and Sharing* hosted by Joel Martinson and presented by Jason Abel, Bruce Barber, and Sonya Subbayya Sutton; and *Planning for Retirement* hosted by Alex Benestelli and presented by Larry Dresner, Richard Webster, and Bart Dahlstrom.

Because there were two time slots allotted to these workshops, all of which were offered in both time slots, conference attendees were able to attend two of them. I asked Charlie Rigsby and Jessica Nelson to help me with this review so a little could be said about all of them. Unfortunately, I misinformed them about which workshop to attend and they both went to the retirement workshop, leaving the sabbatical

workshop unreviewed. So sorry.

From *Vocal Methods for Choirs*: I must say that I’m prejudiced about this subject and approached the workshop with great trepidation. It was fabulous. This young presenter, Connor Lidell, reinforced every prejudice I have (don’t we just love that!). I learned a great deal about working on blend, balance, timbre, and color matching during the first 10 minutes of a rehearsal in place of arpeggios, scales, and other frequently used individual vocal techniques. He discussed challenges with the aging voice and offered suggestions for extended good vocal health as tissues change. In the short time allotted, Mr. Lidell was able to cover other topics such as blending using an ideal vowel, placement of the tongue in singing, using the space in the back of the mouth, breathing concepts that no longer focus strictly on the diaphragm, using full vocal tones even when singing softly, straight tone verses use of vibrato, and other important vocal concepts.

The next session I attended was *A Great Host of Composers*. The team of musicians who have curated a detailed database of sacred choral music by women composers for the three year Revised Common Lectionary includes Susan Jane Matthews (founder and presenter), Marissa Hall, Lyn Loewi, Sarah MacDonald (composer of the closing Eucharist’s communion motet), Louise Stewart, Brian Woods-Lustig, and Janet Yieh. This comprehensive database can be used by all but might be particularly helpful to a small parish seeking to introduce women composers (see www.greathostcomposers.org).

From Charlie Rigsby: *Data-driven Chorister Recruitment*, led by Ruth Cobb and Margaret White, was an excellent presentation concerning chorister recruitment, data collection, and advertisement. Though their program is for St. Thomas Choir School choristers, many ideas could be used for parish choirs. Peachjar.com was mentioned as an excellent way to contact choristers and send information about your choral programs. Reaching out to local groups, such as Boy and Girl Scout Troops and Gifted and Talented Programs, could reach new singers. Continuous contact and follow up helps keep choristers and parents involved.

Planning for Retirement was led by Alex Benestelli, Larry Dresner, Richard Webster, and Bart Dahlstrom. Presentation included descriptions of many types of savings and retirement programs, Traditional IRA, Roth IRA, 401K, Rollover IRA, Fidelity Account, etc. The bottom line was that a financial advisor would be the best place to start, at any age, and to see what the best plan would be for you. Larry Dresner was open to being contacted by AAM Members.

Jessica Nelson also attended *Planning for Retirement*. She adds the following: “We did ask questions about the relationship between Church Publishing Group and the church and why there isn’t just one pension fund for both clergy and lay persons. Larry indicated he would send these questions up the chain at CPG, that these were out of his area.”

Note from Victoria: It was mentioned to me that a possible outcome from this session might be “large scale activity” (whatever that means) from lay employees at General Convention concerning pension parity. I hope so.

CONFERENCE REVIEWS

Following the workshops, a ‘lunch on your own’ was scheduled. There were many luncheon choices within easy walking distance from the hotel. We then had time to dress for the evening and were bussed to the closing Eucharist at the Church of the Transfiguration.

I won’t use the space here to tell you specifics about this service, but it was wonderful; the volunteers; the setting of the mass (I really loved that Spanish, English, and Latin were included) by Joel Martinson; the hymns, the anthems, and yes, even the sermon. The choir, the brass, the superior organ playing, and the congregational singing (“loud, stun, and kill” volume levels) were normal AAM quality which is the highest you can find anywhere.

One thing to be remembered about the closing Eucharist was that the sound system went awry immediately before the service and the whole thing was done without microphones. All participants stepped up to the challenge and the hundreds in attendance could hear and understand the proceedings. Was it like Pentecost where the spirit caused all tongues to be understood, or just energetic, purposeful projection?

I was so moved by the brass and organ performance of Craig Phillips’ joyful closing voluntary that I realized that I was jumping around, moving to the music. It was then pointed out that the composer was right behind me. Oops.

We moved on to Union Station for the farewell banquet. The high point of this event might have been the opportunity to visit with conference attendees, many of whom sported unusual and beautiful attire. The conference organizers thanked all who helped them produce the conference. If Graham Schultz decides to add another profession to his successes as an organist-choirmaster and conference organizer, he could consider being a stand-up comic as he exhibited great talent that night. Graham and his co-chair Meg Harper were excellent hosts and conference directors. Many thanks go to them and all their committees for the hard work, time, and skill they exhibited throughout the week. ♦♦♦

VICTORIA MATHIS HARDEN

Victoria Mathis Harden has served Episcopal and Presbyterian Churches since she was fourteen years old, retiring in 2021 as Organist-Choirmaster from Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Little Rock, Arkansas. At present, she serves as interim Organist-Choirmaster at St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, North Little Rock. She served for ten years at St. Bartholomew’s, New York City, as part of the all-professional choir, served as assistant Organist-Choirmaster at Saint Michael and All Angels, Dallas, Texas, and taught for fifteen years at South Arkansas Community College in Eldorado, Arkansas.



Margaret White and Ruth Cobb,
from St. Thomas Church, New York City,
presented a workshop on chorister recruitment.



Past-President Marilyn Keiser pauses with newly-installed President Kyle Ritter at the closing banquet.

CONFERENCE SERMONS



The Rev'd Canon Victoria R. Sirota, D.M.A.
AAM Chaplain

CHORAL EVENSONG SUNDAY, JUNE 11

The Commemoration of John and Charles Wesley

“Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven to earth come down.”
— Charles Wesley (1707-1788)¹

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

THANK YOU, DALLAS! You have gathered us together for worship, concerts, workshops, and fellowship. You have called us to come “with high and holy hymning” and have reminded us even before we got here of the importance of our sacred songs: how they are the vocabulary and the bedrock of our belief, how they accompany us throughout the year, give voice to our joy and to our sorrow, and remind us of what is important.

And thank you, Saint Mark’s School of Texas, for your wonderful choir and for this beautiful Evensong commemorating John and Charles Wesley. We are blessed to be here.

In eighteenth-century England, these two brothers from a family of nineteen felt a call that sent them from England to America. While crossing the Atlantic Ocean, there was a terrifying storm. While others cowered, they noticed that the Moravians stayed calm and sang hymns. Charles’s and John’s eyes, ears, and hearts were opened. They had set out thinking that they were going to convert people in the New World but began to realize that this journey was really about their own conversion. Upon returning to England, John’s renewed inspiration resulted in passionate sermons and translations of powerful German hymns into English. And Charles Wesley wrote thousands of hymns, one more profound and beautiful than the next.²

Oh yes, and they founded the Methodist movement.

How many people still sing these eighteenth-century hymns? *The United Methodist Hymnal* (1989), of course, uses over fifty hymns and poems by Charles Wesley.³ But also in the Episcopal *Hymnal 1982* we have nineteen hymn texts by

Charles Wesley, including *Hark! the herald angels sing* (#87), *O for a thousand tongues* (#493), and *Jesus, Lover of my soul* (#699).⁴ *The Baptist Hymnal* (1991) has fifteen hymns by Charles Wesley;⁵ *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (2006) uses ten;⁶ *Lift up your hearts*, from the Christian Reformed Church and Reformed Church in America, 2013 uses fourteen;⁷ and even the Roman Catholic *Worship Fourth Edition* (2011) uses seven hymns by Charles Wesley.⁸

And all of these hymnals include the text of our final hymn, *Love divine, all loves excelling*.⁹

When your heart, mind, and soul are all connected, God can use you: beyond your sphere of friends, beyond your limited worldview, and beyond what you can imagine.

At the Professional Concerns and Development Committee’s tea a couple of weeks ago, we were blessed with honest conversations from two worship teams, both with a priest and a musician who work well together and support each other in their ministries.¹⁰ I found myself a bit surprised and intrigued when our outgoing President of AAM, Sonya Sutton, pointed out that worship does not actually need music in order to be worship. She said that this is what fills her with a sense of humility.

Yes, of course. We can attend an early service with a priest and no musician and be moved by the quiet of partaking of holy communion, of the Holy Mysteries in silence. Yes, of course.

But what is the gift that music adds? And why is it important to approach it with a sense of humility?

Paul Simon, who is now 81 years old and has written, among other songs, *The Sound of Silence* (1964), *Homeward Bound* (1966), *Bridge Over Troubled Water* (1969), and *Graceland* (1986), has just released an album entitled *Seven Psalms*.¹¹ I have known about this new composition for a while because my husband Bob was privileged to work with Paul Simon on a string and wind arrangement for the middle movement, entitled *Your Forgiveness*.

In the tradition of the psalmist King David, Simon’s *Seven Psalms* struggle with profound issues of doubt, joy, remorse, fear, and compassion. I find his bold and courageous honesty in both the words and the music breathtaking. He sings,

The sacred harp
That David played to make his songs of praise
We long to hear those strings
That set his heart ablaze.”

He goes on:

The ringing strings,
The thought that God turns music
into bliss. . .¹²

We know intuitively when that happens. But we do not always know how it happens. How does God turn music into bliss?

The central movement of Paul Simon’s *Seven Psalms* is *Your Forgiveness*. As he contemplates profound issues, he finds that, like the Psalmist, he needs to request forgiveness. And he translates the desire for absolution from past sins into modern thought. He sings:

CONFERENCE SERMONS

Inside the digital mind
A homeless soul ponders the code
Of forgiveness.¹³

What is that code? How do we ask for and receive
forgiveness?

In our first reading, it is only after Isaiah blurts out, “Woe is me,” and an angel touches his lips with a coal, that Isaiah has the courage to say, “Send me!”¹⁴ Confession and absolution are at the core of our worship – every time. Standing before our God, we remember that we are not God. We can’t even fake it. We yearn for forgiveness, but we struggle with forgiving others.

Thomas Merton writes in *Life and Holiness*, “To ‘be perfect’ then is not so much a matter of seeking God with ardor and generosity, as of being found, loved, and possessed by God, in such a way that his action in us makes us completely generous and helps us to transcend our limitations and react against our own weakness. We become saints not by violently overcoming our own weakness, but by letting the Lord give us the strength and purity of his Spirit in exchange for our weakness and misery.” Merton continues, “Let us not then complicate our lives and frustrate ourselves by fixing too much attention on ourselves, thereby forgetting the power of God and grieving the Holy Ghost.”¹⁵

Dear Members of the Association of Anglican Musicians – whether you have been a member for decades or have just joined: I am in awe of you, of your gifts and talents in speech, in composition, in improvisation, in conducting, in singing, in playing the organ, the piano, the harp, the guitar. If music sets your soul ablaze, then your vocation is to share it, share the deepest part of who you are with the deepest part of all who are listening.

Yes, this takes profound humility – because you are allowing the Divine to speak through you. You are answering a call. You are allowing Christ, as he did in the Upper Room with his disciples, to breathe on you. And, as it says in our Gospel today, you are being sent out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal, through your words, through your music, through your compassion, through your presence.

God cannot use us if we are too full of ourselves. Our blaring egos – both when we are too impressed with ourselves and when we are not at all impressed with ourselves – our blaring egos get in the way of that fragrant, delicate, holy mist of the Spirit – that can also be a powerful wind.

It is not about trying harder. It is more like falling back into the arms of a loving God.

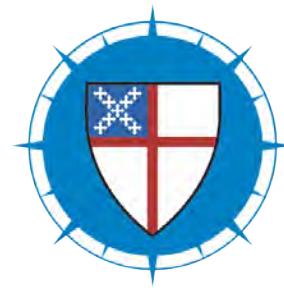
As Charles Wesley put it,

Finish then thy new creation;
pure and spotless, let us be;
let us see thy great salvation
perfectly restored in thee:
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise.¹⁶

Amen.

NOTES

- 1 Charles Wesley, *The Hymnal 1982 according to the use of the Episcopal Church* (New York, The Church Hymnal Corporation, 1985), 657, “Love divine, all loves excelling.”
- 2 Ernest Edwin Ryden, *The Story of Christian Hymnody* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1959), 281-282.
- 3 *The United Methodist Hymnal: Book of United Methodist Worship* (Nashville, The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), “Wesley, Charles (1707-1788),” 922.
- 4 *The Hymnal 1982*, “Wesley, Charles (1707-1788),” 941.
- 5 *The Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville, Convention Press, 1991), “Wesley, Charles (1707-1788),” 744.
- 6 *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress, 2006), “Wesley, Charles,” 1194.
- 7 *Lift Up Your Hearts: Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs* (Grand Rapids, Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013), “Wesley, Charles,” 1050.
- 8 *Worship Fourth Edition* (Chicago, GIA Publications, Inc., 2011), “Wesley, Charles,” 1236.
- 9 The six hymnals use two different tunes for “Love Divine”: *Hyfrydol* (Rowland Hugh Prichard 1811-1887) (*Hymnal 1982*, 657; *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, 631; *Worship*, 642; *Lift Up Your Hearts*, 351), and *Beecher* (John Zundel 1815-1882) (*The United Methodist Hymnal*, 384; *The Baptist Hymnal*, 208). The tune *Blaenwern* (William P. Rowlands 1860-1937) used in this Evensong Service is not paired with this text in any of the six hymnals mentioned. The tune, however, is used in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, 647 and *Lift Up Your Hearts*, 519.
- 10 The Professional Concerns and Development Committee, Association of Anglican Musicians, Zoom Education Workshop, *Best Practices in Working Relationships*, Tuesday, 23 May 2023, 4–5 PM EST.
- 11 List of Paul Simon songs (paulsimon.com/songs); Paul Simon’s *Seven Psalms* (sevenpsalms.paulsimon.com).
- 12 Paul Simon, *Seven Psalms*, #6 *The Sacred Harp* (Owl Records, 2023).
- 13 Paul Simon, *Seven Psalms*, #4 *Your Forgiveness* (Owl Records, 2023).
- 14 Isaiah 6:5-8 (NRSV).
- 15 Thomas Merton, *Life and Holiness* (New York, Doubleday, 1963), 31.
- 16 Charles Wesley, *The Hymnal 1982*, 657, verse 3.



CONFERENCE SERMONS



The Rev'd R. Casey Shobe, D. Min.
Rector, Episcopal Church of the Transfiguration
Dallas, Texas

CLOSING EUCHARIST THURSDAY, JUNE 15

The Commemoration of Evelyn Underhill

WE COULD HARDLY HAVE CHOSEN a more fitting saint to commemorate in this service than Evelyn Underhill, though I would venture to guess that she is new to more than a few of you. So if you will indulge me, I will share a bit about her life, trusting that her saintly witness can shine light on all of us and the work we do for the Lord.

Evelyn Underhill was born into a comfortable middle-class London family in 1875. Her parents were members of the Church of England, but only superficially so. She grew up in a mostly secular home in the rapidly modernizing world of the late 1800s and received only a scant one year of higher education, none of it theological or religious. Little surprise, then, that as a young adult, she described herself as an atheist.

However, by her mid-20s, she experienced something like a spiritual awakening. She expressed growing curiosity about the deeper mysteries of the world, which led her to experiment with religion. She went on some retreats, and she began to pray. Slowly, God went from a distant and uninteresting idea to a real and living presence. She began to read the great spiritual classics of the late medieval church, especially the mystics such as Julian of Norwich, John of the Cross, and Teresa of Avila. Over time, the spiritual life – life in and with God – became her primary focus and passion. She published a book titled *Mysticism*, which became an instant classic and propelled her to a kind of Anglican fame. She was known as “the spiritual director of her generation” and was highly sought after for spiritual direction and retreat-leading in Britain in the 1920s and 30s.

The focus of her teaching and writing was on the simultaneous imminence and transcendence of God. God is as near to us as our next breath, and we each desperately need to take into ourselves deep draughts of the Spirit all the time. And yet God is also far above and beyond all things, so profound and mysterious as to defy our understanding. Underhill loved to reflect on this great paradox of the Christian faith – that we follow a transcendent God, who is also within us.

Here is why she is so relevant to us, a room full of church musicians and ministers: for Underhill recognized that the place where those seeming paradoxical natures of God – God’s nearness and God’s incomprehensibility – meet is in *worship*. Worship is when we praise the God who is infinite, who dwells in light inaccessible, yet who is known in the breaking of the bread.

“Worship is the response of the creature to the eternal,” she writes, and “the whole life of the universe, seen and unseen, conscious and unconscious, [is] an act of worship, glorifying its Origin, Sustainer, and End.”¹ And that need by all creatures to respond to the eternal is written into every human soul. We all have something within us that desires to respond to the divine presence we perceive, consciously and unconsciously, around us. Worship emanates from that place of mystical comprehension of God, and when we offer the worship that our souls so deeply desire, the very God we seek to adore comes that much closer to us.

What we are about, then, as ministers of the church – musicians and priests – is assisting people in fulfilling one of the deepest yearnings of the human soul: connection with God through worship. We have the privilege and responsibility of creating experiences in which people can adore and praise, and drink from the Source of all life.

The challenge, of course, is how to hold onto the enormity of it all. We don’t always “feel” the transcendent power of our work. We may play instruments that are not grand, or lead choirs that do not always sound angelic, or be squeezed by financial and practical limitations. Not to mention that the people in the pews are often self-conscious, cynical, and grumpy, which can make it hard to create the sort of soul-elevating, holy worship that Underhill describes as being essential for deep, joyful living.

And yet, hold onto it we must. For the people are desperately hungry for God, and they come to us hoping we can give them something to eat. They come parched in their souls, and they enter our churches hoping we can offer them refreshment. They come from all their various situations, somehow having admitted their yearning to connect with God, and they enter our churches hoping we can lead them to a holy encounter.

She may have been a mystic, but Evelyn Underhill was also a realist and truth-teller. The Church, she sadly lamented, too often fails to satisfy the spiritual hunger of the people because its ministers have forgotten that *God is the point*. In advance of the Lambeth Conference in 1930, that once-a-decade gathering of all the bishops in the Anglican Communion, Underhill wrote a letter to Archbishop of Canterbury Cosmo Lang. It is truly extraordinary in its honesty and wisdom, and audacity. I wish I could read you the whole thing, but I’m aware that no one comes to AAM for the preacher, so I’ll just share a few highlights:

“May it please your grace,” she begins.

I desire very humbly to suggest with bishops assembled at Lambeth that the greatest and most necessary work they could do at the present time for the spiritual renewal of the Anglican Church would be to call the clergy (*and whenever you hear*

the word clergy, replace it with ministers, for I think we are all implicated) as a whole, solemnly and insistently, to a greater interiority and cultivation of the personal life of prayer. The Church wants not more consecrated philanthropists, but a disciplined priesthood of theocentric souls who shall be tools and channels of the Spirit of God.

We look to the Church to give us an experience of God, mystery, holiness, and prayer which ... shall lift us to contact with the supernatural world and minister eternal life. We look to the clergy to help and direct our spiritual growth. We are seldom satisfied because with a few noble exceptions they are so lacking in spiritual realism, so ignorant of the laws and experiences of the life of prayer. Their Christianity as a whole is humanitarian rather than theocentric. So their dealings with souls are often vague and amateurish. In public worship they often fail to evoke the spirit of adoration because they do not possess it themselves. Hence the dreary character of many church services and the result in the increasing alienation of the laity from institutional forms.

God is the interesting thing about religion, and people are hungry for God. But only a [minister] whose life is soaked in prayer, sacrifice, and love can, by his own spirit of adoring worship, help us to apprehend Him.²

Ninety years later, and it's like she is speaking directly to us. I pray that we may each hear and heed the wisdom of this great spiritual director. Let us all center our lives in the loving presence of God so that our ministry can convey the One we regularly encounter, and the people we serve can meet and know that same loving presence, too. For they are hungry for God. And if we are rooted and grounded in the Spirit of God, then in the music we create, in the prayers we offer, in the sermons we preach, in the worship we celebrate ... we can give them something to eat. ♦

The Rev'd R. Casey Shobe is the Rector of Episcopal Church of the Transfiguration in Dallas, Texas. He holds a Doctor of Ministry degree from the School of Theology at the University of the South, and a Master of Divinity degree from the Virginia Theological Seminary. He is married to fellow priest and author The Rev. Melody Wilson Shobe, and they have two daughters. He is a member of the Fellowship of St. John and the Order of St. John.

NOTES

- 1 Evelyn Underhill, "The Nature of Worship." Essay. In *Worship*, p. 3-5. London: Collins, 1936.
- 2 Underhill, *Underhill Letter to Archbishop Lang of Canterbury - Anglican Library*. Accessed June 15, 2023. <http://www.anglicanlibrary.org/underhill/UnderhillLettertoArchbishopLangofCanterbury.pdf>.

AAM MINNESOTA
JUNE 9-14, 2024



Walking with Saint Benedict



ASSOCIATION OF
ANGLICAN MUSICIANS

P.O. Box 1012, Norwalk, CT 06856
(203) 807-5208 • office@anglicanmusicians.org