

## REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF MUSIC – 2020

For the first time in the recent history of St George's, the pattern of musical worship established particularly since the arrival of the new Rieger organ in 2012, was disrupted by the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic.

After a very successful year for music at the church in 2019 – which saw wonderful performances of new works and many special events sung by both choirs – it seemed that 2020 would be yet another wonderful year and see a further development in our well-known music tradition.

There is no doubt that this past year has been difficult in many ways. However, it started very positively with a few remarkable musical events. Our first Evensong recital in February was marked by a performance of Bach's Cantata *Ich habe genug*, with a small orchestra from Pretoria. February also saw the launch of the first ever **Johannesburg English Music Festival**, which was centred on St George's and included many memorable performances of world-class music making. Particular highlights were the 'Come and Sing' event, which saw the church almost filled to capacity with people coming to sing hymns of praise, and also the Sunday services which featured superb singing by the **Chamber Choir of St George's** and the **Choir of St George's**.

Just over a month later we were plunged into a nationwide lockdown, which saw the cessation of all in-person services, including monthly Evensong and our ever popular Evensong recitals.

During the months that followed, we were able for the most part to only include organ music for our new online services, with occasional choral music sung "virtually" by members of the choir – each having recorded their part separately at home, and then having it all together in a studio. It was a brave new world, but we were up to the challenge. By far the biggest effect of the pandemic has been the loss of community for us as a choir – something we tremendously look forward to return to.

Shortly after October, we were able to resume in-person services. The choir for Sunday mornings was reduced to a quartet of singers, in order to minimise risk and to enforce social distancing. This proved very effective and allowed us to have sung liturgy as normal. With the Chamber Choir, we were able to have Choral Evensong in October, albeit without a recital beforehand. It was with great sadness shortly after that we learned of the passing of a former choir stalwart, **Patrick O'Neill**. A few members of the choir came to sing at his memorial service, and we could present the music that he had requested.

Amidst all the regulations – singing being a primary target – the rest of the year was proving more positive. In November we presented a full **Requiem Mass for All souls** with truly spectacular singing by the Chamber Choir. There was also a very popular outdoor concert held with four of South Africa's leading opera singers.

In December we had our annual **Advent Carols** and **Nine Lessons and Carols** services, which were well attended given the restriction on numbers. Having not been able to celebrate Easter properly, we were at least able to end the year on a high note for the celebration of Christmas.

In 2020 we welcomed a few new members to the choir, and said farewell to a couple of our longstanding members. We also greeted with eagerness the installation of a new state of the art sound system, which will enable us to record the music being made in our Parish. The year was challenging, but the choir members of St George's met it with enthusiasm to ensure that our respected music tradition continued. We look forward to another different year, and believe that we will be able to present services and a high standard of music that has become synonymous with St George's. We thank our choirs for their patience during these difficult times and for their continuing contribution to our worship. St George's firmly remains a cultural centre for music in Johannesburg – both sacred and secular.

**Marnus Greyling**

*Director of Music and Organist*