

# Church Music Australia

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## **Recruitment – Asking the Questions**

Lindsay Gray, the Director of RSCM suggested at the RSCM International Festival in Brisbane earlier this year that the issue of recruitment is an important one on his agenda. Of course “recruitment” has always been an important thread in the activities of a church musician. We are always looking for new choristers for our choirs, and conductors, cantors and organists for our churches. Recruitment is also an issue for RSCM – its effectiveness is based amongst other things on its membership, and it also needs members for its various branches, committees and sub-committees. But in a much wider sense, the church has always been interested in and involved in recruiting. We call it “mission”. Lindsay alludes to recruitment in his “Notes from the Director” in the most recent issue (June 09) of Church Music Quarterly when he states the theme of the issue – Music and Mission.

In Christ’s parable of the two men who built their houses on rock and on sand respectively, it seems that the Lord is assuming that one will plan any activity before embarking on it. One part of planning can be asking questions. What questions should you ask? Here are some “how/what/when/where/why/who” questions that you might consider. To make our task more manageable and concrete, let us confine ourselves to recruiting for a choir.

- What is the nature of this choir?
- How should we recruit?
- From where should we recruit?
- How can we develop a recruitment plan?
- Who (i.e. what kind of chorister) should we recruit?
- Who should we not recruit?
- Who should do the recruiting?
- When should we be recruiting?

One could write a book expanding on the answers to these questions. Let me concentrate on just a few.

Who should we recruit to the choir? First we should ask the “what” question – what is the nature of the choir? Is the choir auditioned or not, for a certain age group only, for men and boys only, for people of a certain sight reading standard, for people of a certain choral experience, for people of a standard of vocal technique, etc. Is a certain level of commitment required and what is that? Does the choir get most of its “rewards” from its choral achievement or do the rewards also include other areas such as social activities and developing community, education activities or other types of reward?

We need to have a fairly detailed picture of our choir in order to understand what kinds of people we wish to target. When newly recruited people in a choir cause problems it is usually because the nature of the choir is not understood by the recruiter or by the person who has been recruited. There is nothing inherently wrong with recruiting choristers who are “tone deaf” (whatever that term means), who are aged and perhaps sing with an unpleasant tone, who are very young and have an attention problem, who suffer from some kind of intellectual disability, who can’t “match pitch”, who come from a different culture and language with perhaps a different understanding of certain vowel sounds etc etc. In fact (as a recent popular Australian TV program has demonstrated) choirs can include people that we would not normally think of as being choristers. And perhaps churches should deliberately decide to begin choirs that include more such “marginal” people. Should your church form a “senior citizen’s choir” from the local seniors home, or a “kindergarten choir” from the local child care centre, or a choir from the people who come to the local soup kitchen, or ...Should you seek out the people in your congregation who claim they “can’t sing” for a “school vacation choir”.

In some ways choirs are legitimately able to support the membership of a diverse range of people at least a much more diverse range than you may find in other activities. Put a bunch of men and boys in a football team and tell them to “play hard” and the men would kill the boys! But the same aged men and boys in a Cathedral Choir can work musical wonders together.

But while choirs can sometimes support a certain amount of diversity, they like most organizations “work” best when their membership consists of people of approximately the same standard, interest, commitment, ability etc. If the expectation is that the choir consists of “reading” choristers with reasonable vocal tone, a fair experience in a certain choral tradition and an excellent “ear”, then recruiting some one who is tone deaf is a problem on both sides – and neither side gains from the experience.

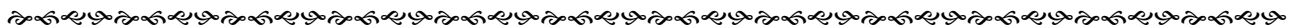
Who should recruit? There certainly needs to be an effort from your choir committee, conductor, chairperson etc. This effort may be directed to provided materials (flyers etc) and a certain structure to your recruitment efforts. But in the final analysis, most choristers don’t join choirs because they saw a flyer or an ad in a suburban newspaper. They join because some-one asked them. Your choristers are your biggest recruitment tool! You provide the motivation and guidance and structure but they do the work. However, if you expect choristers to do a good job for you, you must make sure that everyone agrees concerning the nature of the choir, otherwise you have disasters waiting to happen!

And if you work hard on recruiting, and seem unsuccessful, then maybe you need to ask some more questions:

- Why don’t people join?
- Is there something wrong with our recruitment program?
- What kinds of organizations do people join these days?
- Is there something “wrong” with or lacking in our choir given that people don’t wish to join?
- Do we need to change in some way?
- If so, how should we change ourselves so that we are an organization worth joining?

*Ralph Merton*

President RSCM Australia



## **Summer School Adelaide 2010**

Do you recall the story of the woman who covered Jesus’ feet with kisses and anointed them with costly fragrances? Variations of the story occur in all four gospels. She used her skills and resources in such a way that her life and art were transcended, it being the ethical nature of her actions that led Jesus to proclaim her forgiveness. Here is Luke’s telling of the story:

A woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that Jesus was sitting at table in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment . . .

The image of a person who is far from perfect and yet who claims not only the attention and forgiveness of one whom she perceives is able to transform her life, but also pours out her finest arts in love and gratitude, is something that we can all understand and accept for ourselves. In the story the woman ministers to Jesus and he unconditionally accepts her actions and proclaims the motivation that transfigured her. That profound sense of an ethical imperative, to do something for another person that is total and unconditional that leads to transfiguration, is associated with a person who gave the best gift that her art, experience and resources made possible. She is a powerful symbol of one who used her skills as an offering to the greater good, even though that person, like you and I, may not be a wholly admirable person.

This woman, who in both western and eastern traditions was sometimes identified with Mary Magdalene and Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus (an assimilation rejected by most modern scholars), is commemorated in Orthodox rites of Holy Week. Holy Wednesday Matins, traditionally sung on Holy Tuesday evening, focuses on this woman who recognised in Jesus his saving grace and compassion.

As part of the RSCM Summer School in Adelaide in January 2010, an adaptation of this service will be celebrated as a Liturgy of the Gifts, on Wednesday evening. Some of the characteristics of the original Orthodox order have been preserved: the Kyrie eleison; singing the Lord’s Prayer and an Alleluia that anticipates the Easter Alleluias (both to be sung to Russian musical settings); and a litany. In choosing the music for this celebration we decided to bring together music from many traditions, Russian Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran and Methodist. A motet by Andrea Gabrieli, based on the text from Luke quoted above and originally composed for the feast of Mary Magdalene and published in 1576, has been chosen to mark the possible 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of

Gabrieli's birth, which may have occurred around 1510. The service culminates with the singing of the Magnificat, using a setting by Johann Pachelbel.

Registration forms for the Summer School are now available on the RSCM Australia website and will be posted to all RSCM members over the next couple of months. We look forward to welcoming you all to Adelaide in January. Enquiries to [SS10@rscmaustralia.org.au](mailto:SS10@rscmaustralia.org.au); or by post to Dr Warren Bourne, Organising Chairperson, RSCM Summer School Adelaide 2010, PO Box 325, Mitcham Shopping Centre, Torrens Park, South Australia 5062.

*Dr Warren Bourne*

Organising Chairperson, RSCM Summer School Adelaide 2010



## **Haydn Anniversary**



Portrait by Thomas Hardy, 1792

On 31<sup>st</sup> May 1809 Joseph Haydn died in Vienna. This makes 2009 an ideal year to celebrate this underrated composer. Because of the anniversary, many discussions are coming forth in various journals as to why he was eclipsed by Mozart and Beethoven. One suggestion was he didn't suffer enough, didn't die young and in poverty and didn't go deaf.

For most English speaking church musicians, Haydn's best known pieces would surely be "The Heavens are Telling" from *The Creation*, perhaps some of the smaller masses like the *St Nicholas Mass* and the hymn tune *Austria*. Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* from his Ninth Symphony is a recently popular hymn tune (but usually in a very dumbed down version). Little else by Beethoven is sung in church. Mozart's *Ave Verum* would certainly compete with the popularity of the Haydn pieces and some of his shorter masses are used liturgically in Roman Catholic churches. Overwhelmingly, it is the

concert hall where large-scale masses, oratorios and other sacred pieces by these three composers are most often heard, but as Dr Neil McEwan said "It is vital that music which has been specially written for the liturgy.... must not end up being relegated to the concert hall but rather be treasured and performed in the place (for which) it was written" (talk given by Dr Neil McEwan at the NSW Branch RSCM Midwinter Dinner 2008).

In the case of the tune *Austria*, it is not so difficult to sing in church. Congregations really enjoy this uplifting tune whether sung to "Praise the Lord ye Heav'ns adore Him" or "Glorious Things of Thee are spoken" but the melody has an interesting life story which did not begin in church.

During the early 1790s while the French Revolution and its aftermath the Napoleonic Wars raged in Europe, Haydn made two trips to England. He was impressed by the effectiveness of the English National Anthem "God save the King" and "...he envied the British nation for a song through which it could, at festive occasions, show in full measure its respect, love and devotion to its ruler" (quoted by the Haydn scholar Robbins Landon, in his volume *Haydn: The Years of The Creation 1796-1800*). Haydn was also aware of the new French anthem the *Marseillaise*, composed in 1792. And so an Austrian anthem was planned.

The text by Lorenz Leopold Haschka began *Gott! Erhalte Franz den Kaiser* (God, uphold the Emperor Franz). Haydn wrote the melody and was proud of it, despite many attempts to link it to fragments of other tunes (in one hymnbook I consulted it is labelled *Slovakian folksong arr. Haydn*). Such fragments include several phrases of plainsong, phrases from Mozart, Telemann, Praetorius, Haydn himself, a Slovakian folksong and the German canon translated as "O how lovely is the evening".

The new anthem was circulated to all theatres to be played simultaneously on the Emperor's birthday 12<sup>th</sup> February 1797 – a hymn that was '...the greatest piece of propaganda ever devised to hold together a people made nervous and uncertain by the French Revolution and the ideas it had generated, and the bad progress of the war.....' Haydn was less interested in the politics, wanting to compose a hymn-like national anthem of great beauty, simplicity and dignity; in that, he succeeded even beyond his own expectations (Robbins Landon *ibid.*)

Haydn's pride in this anthem remained undimmed. During 1796-7 he composed a set of 6 String Quartets Opus 76 and in the slow movement of No.3 he uses this as a theme for a set of variations. Not surprisingly it is called The 'Emperor' Quartet. In old age, enfeebled and frail, it was the last piece he played when led to the keyboard. His friend and admirer Dr Charles Burney translated the original text into English calling it "The Emperor's Hymn" but some changes had to be made to

accommodate the words. No doubt Burney's efforts led to the melody being used as a hymn tune in England in 1805 while Haydn was still alive. It first appeared in a volume of psalms and hymns of Isaac Watts in 1805, and was sung to "Praise the Lord ye heav'ns adore Him" in the 1809 edition of the *Foundling Collection*, the hymn book of the London Foundling Hospital which Haydn had in fact visited in 1792. Haydn, who was childless loved children and wrote after the visit "I was more touched by their innocent and reverent music than by anything I had ever heard" (from The Penguin Book of Hymns ed. Ian Bradley)

The hymn "Glorious Things of Thee are spoken" with words by John Newton from Isaiah 33:20 and Psalm 87:3 was produced in 1779 and only later became attached to Haydn's melody.

After the death of both Haydn and the Emperor Franz, many wordsmiths tried to write new words to the grand melody and none succeeded until 1841 when a German poet Hoffmann von Fallersleben, famous for writing childrens' songs, wrote *Deutschland*

*Deutschland über alles* and it served as a national anthem for both Austria and Germany from then on. The German Emperor Kaiser Wilhelm II is said to have been startled when visiting his godmother Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle and found himself singing Newton's hymn to his country's national anthem.

In 1945 the Allied Commission for Austria refused to allow it to be the national anthem for Austria and Haydn's music is now the German national anthem and Austria found another.

Today, if you visit Haydn's tomb in the small town of Eisenstadt south of Vienna, you will see his white marble coffin near the entrance of the church on the hill, where so much of his church music was first heard. A cherub holding a manuscript sits on each of the four corners, of the coffin and each one carries a phrase from that memorable melody. And today, perhaps while thanking God for Haydn and the glories of his music, we too can raise our voices and sing "Solid joys and lasting treasures, none but Zion's children know."

*Meg Matthews*



### **Psalm 76 – a psalm of Asaph**

In Judah God is known;  
his name is great in Israel.  
His tent is in Salem,  
his dwelling place in Zion.  
There he broke the flashing arrows,  
the shields and the swords, the weapons of war.

*Selah*

**Selah** – A Hebrew term of uncertain meaning which occurs three times in the Book of Habakkuk (3:3, 9, 13) and 71 times in the Book of Psalms. It is almost invariably placed at the end of a verse. Both the meaning and the purpose of *Selah* remain obscure, although it is generally regarded as some form of liturgical or musical direction to the Levite choir and orchestra in the temple. Various suggestions have therefore been made – that it indicated a dramatic pause or change of tempo in the levitical recitation of psalms, when the choristers' voices were raised or lowered, a new melody was introduced, or the instrumentalists accompanying them brought the tune to a crescendo or allowed it to fade in a diminuendo. According to the Talmud (*Er.* 54a), *Selah* may be translated as a synonym of "for evermore," while rabbinic exegesis holds it to be a confirmation of the preceding phrase or sentence. It is in this sense that the term was accepted in the Jewish prayer book. (*Encyclopedia of Judaism*)

This is the fullest exposition on *Selah* that I have been able to find. There is no case for actually saying the word when you come across it, either in private or public reading of the Psalms. If the Talmud suggestion is accepted, then there may be a case for the congregation saying the word, as they would say "Amen" at the end of a prayer.

But nowhere have I seen the suggestion that appeals to me the most – that *Selah* is an onomatopoeic word indicating the clash of a cymbal. Try it; it works. And wouldn't that liven up the congregation!



Church Music Australia is published three times each year by the National Council of RSCM Australia. Contributions are welcomed. Please contact the Editor through the National President: [president@rscmaustralia.org.au](mailto:president@rscmaustralia.org.au). The next issue will be published on the RSCM Australia website in November 2009.