

♪ West Gallery Church Music ♪

2. Arranging a West Gallery

Event by Francis Roads

What is the choice?

The three most popular types of event are services, workshops and concerts. Workshops may lead to a later service or concert, or may stand alone.

What sort of music is there?

The greatest part of the repertoire consists of metrical psalm settings; there are also hymns, anthems, canticle settings and Christmas carols.

The metrical psalms and hymns are strophic; i.e. the text is in verse, with several verses. Some are as simple as modern hymn tunes; indeed, there are probably some in your regular hymn book. Others are longer, and more florid and complex, and these may be less suitable for congregational participation. The anthems and canticles are usually settings of scriptural texts, and fairly short and straightforward in style. Christmas carols are where the repertoire is especially strong, with some lively settings.

Services

If you would like a service in your church with West Gallery (WG) music, first decide how far you want to go in recreating the atmosphere of an 18th or 19th Century service. This could range from simply including a few WG items in your usual worship to a complete recreation; though most churches will want to stop short at the hour- long sermons which used to be the norm. In the WG period almost all services in the established church were Matins or Evensong. This is something to take into account, although WG music can be adapted to any modern service. There are anthems and psalms suitable for most of the major church festivals throughout the year.

Secondly, decide whether you want to invite an existing WG quire to sing at your church, or to use either your regular choir, or a group specially recruited for the occasion. It is also possible to hold a joint event, with members of a WG quire singing alongside singers who are not yet used to WG music. The spelling "quire" is used to denote a body of both singers and instrumentalists; instrumental accompaniment is traditional, though it is possible to use an organ or other keyboard instrument. If using local singers, you may want to invite an experienced WG leader to a prior rehearsal or workshop.

Much WG music is suitable for congregations, and it is easy to achieve a balance between congregational and quire items.

Workshops

Any group of amateur singers and instrumentalists can meet to enjoy a WG workshop. It can last for any length of time from a couple of hours to a whole weekend. WG workshops are often held as part of a larger event. A mixed group of singers, with ideally a few instrumentalists as well, is needed. There is plenty of three-part WG music for occasions when there may be a shortage of male singers. The practice of doubling the vocal parts with instruments makes it easy for less confident singers, or those who cannot read music, to learn and hold their parts. Young musicians can play a useful part in such events, both as singers and instrumentalists. Workshops work best if the leader is an experienced WG musician, but anybody can get hold of some WG music and have a try.

Concerts

Established WG quires are usually keen for opportunities to give concerts. These may take the form of lecture-recitals, with information about WG music and suitable readings. There can usually be opportunities for audience participation. Or a concert may follow a workshop. Mainstream choirs may wish to include WG items in a regular concert, perhaps along with other music.

How much will it all cost?

In some cases leaders and quires will require a fee, but many will work on a voluntary, or expenses-only basis for churches, charities, or comparable non-profit organisations. Much suitable music is available in the form of cheap photocopyable master sheets. Workshop leaders will usually provide music suitable for the occasion. So it needn't be an expensive occasion.

Where do we go for more information?

Advice on how to contact suitable leaders and quires, and to obtain suitable music for occasions described above is available through Roding Music and the West Gallery Music Association (WGMA), which may be contacted via <www.wgma.org.uk>. *Roding Music* welcomes enquiries by email or post. There are three other leaflets in this series: 1. *West Gallery Church Music: an Introduction*, 3. *Preparing your West Gallery Event*, and 4. *Interpreting West Gallery Church Music* all available free of charge from the address below for an SAE.



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Email: francis.roads@gmail.com