

Director of music report 2025-2026

Regular Sunday services

The norm for musical accompaniment for the 10.30 Sunday morning Eucharist is robed choir and organ, and we continue to provide an anthem each week. Choir numbers remain stable and indeed have increased a little this year. I am extremely grateful for the loyalty and expertise of my singers! We are fortunate still to have David Boarder, Richard Prince and, occasionally, Mark Buck to play the organ for us. We have however also sought to utilise the new sound system increasingly for accompaniment, benefitting from the vision and talents of Sam Chaplin. For the past few months, we have been trying a new format whereby we have one or two worship songs at Communion, usually accompanied by Sam on the electric piano, with one or two singers using microphones. We feel this has allowed the congregation to engage more with the Communion hymn(s) and has provided a few moments of perhaps more open-hearted musical expression; the change of style has been a little hard to get used to for some, and we are still in the process of finding the very best way to present this part of the service, but overall we have had good and constructive feedback and are keen to continue with the experiment.

For all-age services, we also use the electric piano and we have felt the benefit of the new sound system greatly. I am most grateful to the expert musicians who play and sing for the instrumental group which accompanies the services. This usually includes young people, and I am very keen that this should continue.

The hard-working electric piano is generally used for the monthly Soul Sunday services as well, and again I am grateful to Sam Chaplin who so often provides the accompaniment.

Special services and other events involving church musicians

Since last Easter the choir has led the Ascension Day Taizé Eucharist, a choral evensong in October, the Advent Sunday candlelit service, the candlelit Lessons and Carols service, Ash Wednesday evening service and in Holy Week the Taizé, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday services.

A large group of choir adult members went to Rochester Cathedral in January to participate in a choral evensong there - a trip much enjoyed by all. A smaller group (two of us!) took part in a post-Christmas Evensong in St Albans Cathedral organised by East Herts Church Choirs Association, to which we are affiliated. At St Mary's Hertingfordbury, Keith Neat has occasionally organised a sung evensong and involved members of our choir to help with the singing there.

This year, the UK Government and UNSECO are asking for submissions of types of cultural activities which may be listed for protection and support under a "Living Heritage" category. The Cathedral Music Trust are nominating "English Sacred Choral Music" for inclusion in this

listing. The Church of England's Choral Evensong is a core part of the tradition. I wish to make Choral Evensongs a more regular part of our worship at St Andrew's, and am aiming to provide one service per term going forward. The first of these will be on May 17th.

Following the sad loss of Chris Seward last year, it was felt best not to proceed with HarvestFest in October. In December, however, a very successful Beer and Carols event went ahead, the music for which was led by our church band, Flare.

The Hertford Children's Choir

Last year's DoM report detailed the setting-up of the HCC by Rachel and Sam Chaplin, and this choir has now been running for about 15 months. It has made a very successful start and links with the church are strong. The choir has sung at several All-age services and collaborated with the church choir at two of these, highly successfully. Many members of their families have attended these services. They have also performed at other venues in the town, and, in St Andrew's, with the WGC Male Voice Choir. Last summer they received an invitation to sing at the lunchtime Eucharist in St Paul's Cathedral. This involved running a summer camp beforehand to rehearse, leading to a very successful and inspiring trip on the day at which the choir sang outstandingly, so much so that they have been invited back this summer. Although volunteers from the church support them as helpers during these activities, the success of the choir is due to the very hard work and expertise of Sam and Rachel (who also write songs for the choir). We will continue to give them every support we can. We are still giving thought as to how to attract some of HCC's singers to join St Andrew's choir – a grant application for a scheme we had devised was not successful last summer, and we are currently rethinking our plans.

The church building as a music venue

The church regularly hosts concerts of music of varying genres e.g. classical and community choirs, folk, chamber music and solo recitals. No doubt more details about these will be found in the Events Committee's report.

Jane Eldred