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**‘The Development of the English Choral Tradition in
the USA and the Caribbean’**

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the choral tradition within the Anglican Communion, primarily in the USA and Barbados. The study was informed by a five-week Winston Churchill Fellowship which took me to America, Canada and Barbados. In these countries I was able to experience the development of the English choral tradition at first hand. Through a series of interviews and general observations I have collected the following information. I aim to present an accurate account of the current situation and to consider certain factors which may or may not contribute to this situation.

I was particularly inspired by my own experiences, first as a chorister at St Ann’s, Manchester, under Ronald Frost, then as a choral scholar at Truro Cathedral during my gap year and Newcastle Cathedral while at university. I hoped to see what parallels exist and establish how vital a role the choral tradition plays in the musical education of young people in the countries that I visited. The benefits of singing in the lives of young people are widely documented. As well as raising self esteem, singing in a choir provides the opportunity to share in an experience where the outcome far exceeds the sum of its individual members. The experience of choral singing is undoubtedly transformed when combined with music education, a liturgical framework and strong traditions. This combination is what interests me and what has flourished for centuries in the cathedrals, churches and chapels of our nation. The topic of the report seems even more relevant when we take into account that

according to the Choir Schools Association, over 1,000 boys and, since 1991, girls are being educated in nearly 50 schools to carry out their duties in places of worship.¹

Although there has been a considerable amount of scholarly attention paid to Anglican choral music in the United States, relatively little has been said about the choral tradition in the Caribbean. In this report, Barbados is used as a Caribbean case study and my intention is to shed much needed light on to a part of the Anglican choral tradition which the West has forgotten.

Barbados

Tradition, Education, & Outreach

Music is engrained within each and every West Indian. Music has historically played a vital role in the cultural life of West Indians and is a symbol of ethnic identity. Under the British colonists, slaves and indentured workers found solace in music, and from it they built moral strength, developed social networks, and gained prestige in their communities. In this way, music was not primarily a source of entertainment: it served socially and emotionally to nurture and to show one's sense of belonging.² The island of Barbados is rich in a variety of musical styles. Each year the island plays host to a spectacular five-week Crop Over Festival. Traditionally, this was a celebration to mark the end of a successful sugarcane harvest. Calypso is the biggest feature of this festival, with countless artists competing against each other. The lyrics associated with calypso tend to be reflective of the current social situation and attempt to strike a chord with the public. One of the compositions for 2005 featured the phrase 'Bajan you is African'. This may seem to reflect a desire to reconnect with African roots. However, in light of the diverse ethnic make-up of Barbados, the phrase seems to be in contention with what it means to be a Bajan in the 21st century. For many, the world of calypso and that of the Anglican choral tradition stand firmly apart. However, the Anglican choral tradition is something which is flourishing in Barbados alongside the folk idioms which are more commonly associated with the people of the Caribbean.

The people of Barbados are deeply religious and there is a strong Anglican tradition. Aside from this there are numerous denominations of Christianity represented by committed congregations whose churches dominate the landscape.

The oldest church on the island is St. James Parish Church. St James has been serving the community since 1628, and has had a choir for nearly as long. As in the UK, the music is the last thing that congregations would want to see go. Despite high church attendance, Anglican churches in Barbados struggle to recruit boy choristers. This is something which directors, singers and all those involved with church music in the UK will be able to relate to.

St. Michael's Cathedral, Barbados, once an all male foundation is now predominantly female. Choirmaster John Bryan finds it increasingly difficult to recruit boys and only enrolled two boy choristers last academic year. Bryan puts this down to a change in society and the preconception amongst boys and their piers that singing in a church choir is 'unmanly'. For some, not singing in an Anglican choir is simply down to denomination but for others it represents a trend amongst the younger generation to detach themselves from their colonial past. In spite of this, the choir stalls are full and St. Michael's is successfully enabling the choral tradition to continue and flourish. In an interview for *BBC Music Magazine*, Stephen Cleobury commented on the role of cathedral music: 'Yes, cathedral music has a role to play, provided tradition is maintained but with an admixture of new elements- new commissions, for instance.'³

The choir of St. Michael's is a successful mixed choir. It allows us to reconsider the role of the church or cathedral choir. Furthermore, it is an example of how the Anglican choral tradition can be successfully exported and adapted to become vernacular.

The most striking aspect of attending a choral service in Barbados is the strong resemblance to Anglican choral services in the UK. Interestingly, John Bryan said that: 'it is as if people expect to find natives beating drums and wearing grass skirts!' The liturgy, robes and choir repertoire are all evocative of the former 'mother land'. This is something which all who are involved are keen to maintain. In today's Barbados, it seems to be one of the aspects of cultural life which resonates most strongly with the 19th century writings of James Anthony Froude. In *The English in the West Indies*, Froude says: 'On no one of our foreign possessions is the print of England's foot more strongly impressed than on Barbadoes. It has been ours for two

centuries and three-quarters, and was organised from the first on English traditional lines, with its constitution, its parishes and parish churches and churchwardens...and all on the old model; which the unprogressive inhabitants have been wise enough to leave undisturbed.⁴

Only fairly recently has there been a desire to maintain the transplant whilst paying more attention to Bajan culture and Caribbean culture as a whole. St. Michael's music list includes popular choral favourites and also two settings of the Mass by John Bryan's predecessor, Dr. John Fletcher. These compositions appeal to the long standing Caribbean tradition of full congregational participation. They also include traditional melodies and rhythms which are a part of Caribbean heritage. However, pieces like this are rare and there is a demand for more high quality compositions written for Anglican choirs in the Province of the West Indies. Recognising the demand, there have been a number of workshops aimed at fostering creativity in composition and choral practice in Barbados.

St. Michael's Cathedral and other churches are attempting to establish themselves as centres of music. This is especially important as music can get overlooked in the school curriculum. At St. James Church in Holetown, Canon Winston Layne and organist Philip Forde, both recognise the importance of recruiting young people. They see it as their responsibility to actively visit schools and recruit choristers. This has been a successful but difficult task, considering that there are very few children within the catchment area of the church. The area is renowned as being 'the playground of the rich and famous'. St. James takes good advantage of its location and is able to collect a sizeable amount from generous tourists. The resources are all available, the fabric of the building is in pristine condition and this year sees vast restoration of the church's organ. This work alone is costing \$BDS 325, 000. Organist Philip Forde was born in Barbados but spent his student days in England and holds a Fellowship of the Royal College of Organists. Every attempt is being made by him to secure the future of this choir of around twenty singers. In addition to the school recruitment efforts, it is planned to eventually introduce a stipend for young choristers and maybe even a choral scholarship programme for students from the University of the West Indies.

Being the Cathedral Church, St. Michael's has a less challenging task with recruitment. Many are attracted to the grandeur of singing in a cathedral. The Cathedral's choir is made up of volunteer singers, some of whom are or have been

professional singers. What is characteristic of the choir is the desire and vision to strive towards excellence, rather than downsize everything into a melting pot of mediocrity. Unusually, less than 50% of the choir are capable of reading music. However, organist John Bryan ensures that the readers are evenly spread amongst

sections. Through dedicated weekly rehearsals the choir is able to maintain standards. There is minimal repetition in respect to repertoire and Bryan is always introducing new pieces to the choir. It is the hope that this will encourage other choirs in Barbados to do the same, some of whom rarely venture away from the choral products of Victorian and Edwardian Britain. The choir perform two concerts each year and within the past four years have recorded two CD's, with repertoire ranging from Bach to Tavener. John Bryan recognises the role of cathedral music- St Michael's are ambassadors of the Anglican choral tradition. As a centre of music for the island, St. Michael's avoids the danger of becoming an aged relic. Many of the choir receive vocal coaching and progress through the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music examinations. Each Sunday there is a recital period before Choral Evensong. This provides the opportunity for choir members and others to gain performing experience. In addition to services, concerts and recordings, St. Michael's toured Trinidad in August 2005 to further promote their work. A future goal is to take the choir to England. St. Michael's last visited England during the 1970's with a week-long residency at Westminster Abbey.

The wealth of choral activity in Barbados is virtually unknown in the UK, despite the fact that it was initially a British transplant. Highlighting the work of the parish choirs and the Cathedral choir illustrates that Anglican choral music is and has become an integral part of the Barbadian cultural landscape.

The United States of America

The Church of the Heavenly Rest, Fifth Avenue, New York City

My first interview in New York City was with composer Bruce Saylor. Saylor is a lecturer in composition at Queen's University NY. He has written solo music for Jessye Norman and composed choral pieces for St Thomas Church Fifth Avenue, The American Boy Choir and Washington National Cathedral. Rather than ask specific questions, I asked him to give me a general overview of the choral tradition in the United States.

According to Bruce Saylor, composition of Anglican choral music in the United States is sparse. Saylor attributes this to the fact that America is lacking in good standard choirs whom music can be written for. It is his opinion that there is little knowledge of high standard American Anglican choral compositions in Britain. Saylor points out that the composition of choral music in England is unbroken and that there are common traits running through the ages, from Purcell through to Vaughan Williams, Stanford and Britten etc. The fact that no prominent compositional style has emerged in the United States is due to the diversity of American culture.

Interestingly, Saylor points out that unlike in British schools, it is not common for American school choirs to perform the major choral works. In an attempt to appeal to all, American schools tend to avoid the great choral works because of their religious association. This has given rise to a whole genre of choral music which is written as a replacement. The majority of this music is poorly written and it becomes a case settling for substandard choral works rather than identifying the significance of others.

In light of this, it is apparent that the Anglican choral tradition maintained in churches and cathedrals has a vital role in maintaining the performance of much of the world's greatest choral music. This is something which is exemplified by the choirs of the Church of the Heavenly Rest.

Mollie Nichols is the director of music at the Church of the Heavenly Rest, an Episcopal church in the affluent upper eastside of Manhattan. Having held the post since 1988 as a graduate of the Eastman School of Music, she was the first woman to hold such a post in a cardinal church in New York City. Not only did her arrival open up the opportunity for other women to take such posts, it also precipitated the formation of a successful all-inclusive musical programme. The previous director, Charlie Walker, had held the post for thirty-eight years. Over this period, the traditional all male choir had gradually faded out, leaving a small mixed group of adult singers.

In March of 2005 Mollie Nichols' and the thirty-five strong children's choir went on their first overseas tour to England. The choir sang services, attended services and performed concerts in Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, Worcester, Canterbury and Salisbury where they took part in a workshop with renowned choir trainer Simon Lole. Previously, the Church of the Heavenly Rest has hosted the choir of Ely Cathedral and Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford.

There is no doubt that travelling to the United Kingdom was of tremendous educational and cultural benefit for all involved. However, it is apparent that the greatest achievement of the Church of the Heavenly Rest lies in its commitment to outreach and establishing itself as a centre of music for young people in New York City. The children's choir of the Church of the Heavenly Rest began as a group of children from the Church's Sunday school who met to perform a musical. Since then, the group has grown and now provides music education for children between the ages of seven and fifteen. The educational programme is based on the Royal School of Church Music's Voice for Life scheme. This is a graded programme which allows choristers to develop a range of skills including leadership in performance, music theory and liturgical knowledge. Mollie Nichols has adapted this programme to suit the needs of her choristers. Each week the choristers receive one and a half hours of training. This is a combination of vocal and theory tuition and stems out of a belief that the foundation for choral success lies in an understanding of basic music theory.

The children's choir is not auditioned and any young person who comes to the church as a member of the congregation is able to take part. The large congregation provides a constant source for chorister recruitment. Nichols points out that although there are obvious divides in the Episcopal Church, unlike the Church of England it is not suffering from a declining congregation.

Until June 2005, the children's choir had not performed a service without the adult singers. Prior to this the weekly services had always been sung by a combination of thirty adult singers (including twelve professional singers) and twenty children. It is hoped that the children will now lead choral services at least once a month. With a relatively wide age range, the separate children's choir operates like a training choir before progression to the mixed choir. It is important for Nichols that she is able to catch identify vocal problems at an early stage.

My visit to the Church of the Heavenly Rest coincided with the first service lead by the children's choir. In addition to choral music by Gerald H. Knight, Marc-Antoine Charpentier and Ralph Vaughan Williams, the service opened with a cello solo played by a member of the Children's Church. In addition to fostering this level of musical involvement within the church's own community, the Heavenly Rest has an outreach programme which is able to fund joint events. Previous collaborations have been with the New Amsterdam Boys Choir of NY. This type of relationship not only allows for an exchange of musical styles, but also acts as way of breaking class and colour boundaries. Despite this, Mollie Nichols affirms that more can be done with regards to outreach. As an example within New York City, she points out Vince Williams the director of music at St. Bartholomew's Church. Under his direction, St. Bartholomew's has developed children's choir festival in New York City.

St Paul's Cathedral, Buffalo, NY

The director of St Paul's Cathedral Choir is Drew Cantrill. Cantrill is one of an increasing number of UK trained musicians who are involved in the work and ministry of the Episcopal Church of the United States of America. Since taking up the post in 2004, Cantrill has made many changes. It is his aim to make St. Paul's as British as possible. Cantrill hopes that he can implement the high standards which characterise the Anglican choral tradition in the UK.

Cantrill's aim is to provide the best possible musical education for the choristers of St. Paul's. He points out that Americans seem to think that if a child sings then that is enough. Cantrill says that there is little emphasis placed on the skills which British musicians take for granted, like sight reading. There are certain aspects which Cantrill pays particular attention to. These are pitching, intonation and aural skills. It is his opinion that these are the areas that choral singers in American churches have particular problems with. Despite this, he points out that there is much interest in vocal technique and sound vocal practice. Believing that each boy should have a solid musical background, Cantrill insists that the choristers receive music theory classes. In addition to this, there is a vocal coach for the choir. If a chorister is having vocal problems, he is withdrawn and is given individual coaching.

Buffalo's commitment to raising standards is further demonstrated in the fact that they are now in a position to turn people away. There was a time when the choir was seen as an escape route for those with difficulties, little attention was paid to whether individuals could or could not sing. Having observed a boys' rehearsal, it is clear that Cantrill's approach is successful. The average age of the choristers is ten years old. However, despite this it is obvious that each boy makes a valid contribution. Cantrill has built up a rapport with the choristers whilst maintaining discipline. Having spent a period as a professional singer, Cantrill is able to relate vocal technique in a way which is simple enough for the choristers to understand.

Prior to Cantrill arriving, the choir at Buffalo were singing a large proportion of American music. This is no longer the case and the choir now have a much broader repertoire. Currently, there is one Boys' Voices service, one Girls' Voices service, a Men's Voices service and a Eucharist service on Sunday mornings which is Men and Boys with Girls' Voices. The music list now bears a greater resemblance to that of an English cathedral choir. Cantrill points out that similar change has been seen at Washington National Cathedral since the appointment of Michael McCarthy. However, compared to a tradition English cathedral choir, there is only one service with Men and Boys' Voices at St. Paul's, Buffalo. This is something that Cantrill is planning to increase with time. Doing so will also allow for an expansion of the Choir's repertoire.

Drew Cantrill intends to remain at St. Paul's until it is recognised as being in the same league as an English cathedral choir. Cantrill believes that this is attainable with time. He points out that the music is what makes the Cathedral at Buffalo. An annual

budget of \$160,000 ensures that the Cathedral's music department has all the necessary resources. In the past year, St. Paul's has been able to organise a lavish performance of Claudio Monteverdi's *Vespers of 1610*. This involved the Choirs of St Paul's Cathedral, NYS Baroque and professional soloists. Further to this, in the summer of 2005 the male voices travelled to England and France to give concerts and sing services. In 2006 the Girls' Choir will tour during the summer. The Cathedral's *Friends of Music at St. Paul's* ensures that there is the financial security to enable such things to happen.

There is certainly a financial incentive for British musicians to move to the United States. Cantrill points out that in the US there is some ill-feeling towards British choral directors taking up American posts. It is his opinion that if the tradition needs to be turned around, then surely there is no problem with this increasing trend of transatlantic movement. However, Cantrill does express concern that it sends out a negative message to American choral directors – 'Is there little point in aiming for a top post?'

Drew Cantrill points out that the Episcopal Church wants the choral tradition to be maintained to a high standard: 'This is hard to achieve, especially when students in the US can graduate from college having never studied music history and theory. What is most important is appointing the best possible candidate to achieve a high standard of choral music. British choral directors tend to have had the exposure to the tradition from a very early age.'

Washington National Cathedral, Washington DC

Cantrill's opinion is shared by Michael McCarthy, the Director of Music at Washington's National Cathedral. McCarthy has held the post for two years. Prior to this he was the Director of Music at London's Brompton Oratory and also a professional singer. McCarthy uses the analogy of a surgeon to explain his appointment. He was appointed to turn the choir around and bring the Cathedral's music forward to a level which is appropriate for its status as the National Cathedral. Like a surgeon, he is responsible for remedying problems in the hope that the affected part will be manipulated in such a way that it is restored to its full potential. In this

way, McCarthy is building a sound foundation for the future, manipulating in such a way that ensures the choir constantly moves forwards.

McCarthy is not concerned with what people think about his appointment to an 'American post'. This is not surprising, considering that the standard of music-making has drastically improved since his arrival.

What concerns McCarthy is the fact that the choral tradition is not valued on the same scale as it is in the UK. Occasions such as the late Ronald Reagan's memorial service highlight the tradition. However, apart from this there is little recognition in a country which is dominated by sport. McCarthy points out that people in the UK take for granted what they have. There is such an intensity of choral activity within a relatively miniscule country.

One of the first things McCarthy did when he was appointed was to increase the Men's salaries and turn the group into a fully professional ensemble. There are girl and boy choristers at the Cathedral and they are educated at the National Cathedral School. They sing separately and join to form a larger treble line for major services and on recordings. McCarthy says that: 'The choristers are highly bright and their parents sophisticated. Success is very important for Americans.' The choristers take part in a variety of other activities in addition to their Cathedral duties. This can be problematic; children tend to move from one activity to another in order to construct the perfect résumé for their college application forms. Despite this, McCarthy points out that the National Cathedral's choristers do recognise the value of what they are doing. This is matched by much support from their parents.

Like the Church of the Heavenly Rest, NY, the RSCM's Voice for Life scheme is used to some extent. However, Michael McCarthy emphasises the importance of taking certain components from the scheme and tailoring it to suit specific needs. He believes that the success of the Voice for Life educational programme lies in the fact that it still works without using every component.

In 2004 McCarthy implemented a novice year for junior choristers. This year acts as training for the demands of singing six weekly services. Special attention is paid to singing at sight and music theory. Around 60% of the choristers do not play musical instruments. Ideally McCarthy would like the whole treble line to have some keyboard skills as this helps tremendously with choir. Each chorister receives vocal tuition fortnightly. He points out that this was a contributing factor to the success of the choir he conducted in the UK at the Brompton Oratory. In the singing lessons the

choristers concentrate on secular repertoire. McCarthy wants his choristers to develop as soloists, once they have honed these skills it is easy to move forward. He says that the lessons are much more beneficial when they focus on technique and secular repertoire, rather than singing through a section from a choir piece.

McCarthy would prefer it if the lessons were on a weekly basis. He realises that although though he is a singer, he can still make mistakes. Having a second singing teacher helps with this. Both the boy and girl choristers take part in vocal workshops. The workshops provide the opportunity for them to perform as soloists and receive feedback from their peers. McCarthy sees this as a tool for improving their performance skills and getting over the fear of performance.

Michael McCarthy approaches his work at the Cathedral as a performer with a wealth of experience and expertise. He is employed to train the choir and not play the organ; there are two organists who do this. This approach is not as common in the UK, where the majority of cathedral directors are first and foremost organists. It is still early days to see the full effects of McCarthy's expertise. Unlike most other things in the US, the Anglican choral tradition is not part of the 'fast food' culture. We are not likely to see the fruits of his work for many years to come.

St Paul's Church K Street, Washington DC

Like the National Cathedral, St. Paul's Church has a successful educational programme for choristers. Mark Dwyer has been the Director of Music at St. Paul's Church since 2004. There are three choirs: The Parish Choir, the Girls Choir and the Men and Boys. The girl and boy choristers receive tuition in music theory and vocal technique. In addition to the RSCM Voice for Life scheme, Dwyer uses the Kodaly technique. He believes that through the Kodaly technique, the younger choristers especially are presented with a graspable approach to learning the language of music through methods such as *solfa* and movement.

One of the most interesting aspects of St. Paul's Church is the willingness to try new approaches to choral training. There is also the view that a choristership should not be seen as something which isolated from a child's other interests or activities. Prior to being appointed to his current post, Dwyer was the Director of Music at the Albany Cathedral. Whilst at Albany, Dwyer realised the strong parallels that exist between singing and sport. Both activities improve morale and the physical benefits

of sport help to improve the stamina of the choristers. Mark Dwyer points out that children who are physically fit, are often better vocally. Further to this, sport helps to support the strong tradition of chorister mentoring system.

Dwyer points out that a large proportion of the chorister parents are musical. It is his opinion that this provides additional support for the children involved. However, St. Paul's still suffers from the issue of convincing parents to fit the choir commitments into an already hectic schedule. This is not usually the case in less affluent areas where a cathedral choir can present a 'package', providing a main focus for children and can even inform a career choice. This is certainly the case in areas such as Buffalo, NY and Albany, NY.

Distinctive to St. Paul's is the strong sense of community. Dwyer points out that the key to success is the support the choral foundation receives from the clergy and the congregation. Like Buffalo Cathedral, the music is an essential feature. The appeal of St. Paul's Church K Street is demonstrated by the fact that its choir stalls are full, there is a thriving congregation and they even attract Lay-Clerks from the National Cathedral who often augment the choir after singing their own evensong.

Reflection

In the US there is definitely a strong commitment to music education and the benefits of the Anglican choral tradition are obviously recognised by those involved. The children involved are being exposed to something which is not being provided in the nation's schools. This presents the problem of the Anglican tradition becoming exclusive.

A way of avoiding this is to take on the title of 'Centre for Music'. This is being implemented by the Director of Music at St. James Cathedral in Toronto, Canada. Michael Bloss' aim is for St. James Cathedral to be open to the community. He points out that because music making has decreased in schools, he sees the Cathedral as taking on a new role. However, the biggest problem he faces is bridging the gap between the sacred and secular. He points out that it is very hard to present a cathedral choir as something which is inclusive. Despite its unavoidable religious affiliation, he says that it is still possible to appreciate the Anglican choral tradition as an art form.

The Anglican choral tradition continues to be a living reality in both Barbados and in the US. The willingness to embrace new ideas and approaches contributes to the success of the tradition. Musicians in these countries are not concerned with producing a replica of the English model. More importantly, they are recognising the need to move towards the vernacular. This is especially the case in Barbados, where the Anglican choral tradition exists amidst much discussion of ethnic and cultural identity.

The Fellowship has enabled me to realise that the Anglican choral tradition has exported well. Furthermore, I am now even more convinced about the educational

benefits of the tradition. What worries me is that outside of each cathedral or parish choir community, there is relatively little national recognition. This is the case in both the United States and Barbados. These establishments should be considered as national treasures. They are seats of learning. Admittedly, some provide a better education than others. However, this report has illustrated that it is impossible to dispute the essential role that Anglican choral tradition plays within the current landscape of music education. The sustainability of this English transplant abroad relies on maintaining tradition creatively, improving skills-based training, accessibility and excellence. ▫

¹Holloway, Amanda, 'Not Just for Christmas', *BBC Music Magazine*, Vol. 13, No.4, (2004), p25.

²See Guilbault, Jocelyne, 'Racial Projects and Musical Discourses in Trinidad, West Indies', *Music and the Racial Imagination*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p.435

³Holloway, Amanda, 'Not Just for Christmas', *BBC Music Magazine*, Vol. 13, No.4, (2004), pp.25-27.

⁴Froude, James Anthony, *The English in the West Indies*, (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1888), p.33