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MY GOD AND KING

SAMPLE PAGES

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# MAKING A JOYFUL NOISE

THE CORONATION  
OF THE KING AND QUEEN

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MATTHIAS RANGE



Left: In an unprecedented innovation, the second Alleluia was sung by a gospel choir standing in a circle in the Westminster Abbey Coronation Theatre. PA Images / Alamy Stock Photo.

On 6 May 2023, the world witnessed the first coronation of a British monarch in almost 70 years. As Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher had pointed out on the occasion of the coronation of Elizabeth II in 1953, the coronation is one of the ‘oldest institutions’ in the ‘English church and state’, in its rudimentary form predating the Norman Conquest. The essential elements have not changed since the coronation of King Edgar at Bath Abbey in 973, the first English coronation documented in some detail: in its overall form the ceremony is a Communion service to which all the elaborate ceremonies of confirming, investing and proclaiming the new monarch – and his wife – are added at the beginning. The Reformation brought little change to this overall scheme, except that the liturgical parts from then on followed the Book of Common Prayer. British coronations have overall been quite a solid ceremony: even though the order of service is not codified anywhere, there has been comparatively slight variation since the coronation of James I and Queen Anne in 1603. Notwithstanding the re-ordering of some parts of the monarch’s investiture rites, the most momentous changes in the ceremony occurred in 1902: some longer parts were cut from the service, notably the Litany, while others were shortened, notably the Homage of the Peers. Although this was done in consideration of Edward VII’s recuperation from an appendix operation, the following coronations were based on this significantly shortened form.

The sense and idea of strong historical continuity was evoked at the May 2023 coronation of the King and Queen. However, seven decades between this and the last coronation inevitably meant that much change had occurred – especially when considering that these seven decades were in the 20th and 21st centuries, a period that has arguably seen the fastest development in human civilization and society since the discovery of fire. Accordingly, the coronation service saw (and heard) much that was different from the coronations of the previous 400 years.

#### A MUSICAL CORONATION

With a music-loving monarch such as Charles III, it is little surprise that music at the coronation was an outstanding component. In the same way as any other aspects of the ceremony, the music featured some striking innovations. The changes became instantly apparent in the practical arrangements. In centuries past, all the musicians had been placed high up in galleries around the ‘theatre’, the area under the





Above: The Welsh Kyrie, written by Paul Mealor and performed by Sir Bryn Terfel, was the first piece of coronation music to feature a solo singer in such a prominent way. Associated Press / Alamy Stock Photo.

crossing and in front of the main altar, where all the ceremonies took place. In 2023, however, the choir was in the same choir stalls that they usually occupy during regular services in Westminster Abbey, and only the orchestra was placed in the organ loft, on the quire screen. Although the number of musicians was much smaller than at the previous coronations, the new spatial arrangement meant that the singers now had a much more prominent position and visibility: music was centre stage.

There was much new music, and much traditional music, which was all well covered in the reports of the day. Not often noted by commentators, however, were the striking changes, in comparison to the 1953 coronation, and indeed earlier ones. Most notable was the departure from the order of service in the Book of Common Prayer. This matched with the practice in most Anglican parish churches up

and down the country, which usually follow the liturgy of Common Worship or some similar modern form. For a coronation, however, it was a first not to follow what is still the official liturgy of the Church of England. In practice this meant foremost the addition of the Kyrie and Agnus Dei, and the move of the Gloria from the end to the first half of the service. In addition, the sermon, which had been omitted since the shortened 1902 coronation service, was reintroduced. On the other hand, the Credo was excluded for the first time ever.

In 1953, the Credo and Sanctus of Ralph Vaughan Williams' Mass setting had been translated from the original Latin into English. Seventy years later, however, there has been much change – and the possibility of more flexibility – in the liturgy of the Church of England: Paul Mealor's setting of the Kyrie was sung in Welsh and the Gloria from William Byrd's

Mass for Four Voices in its original Latin, while Psalm 72 was sung in Greek to an Orthodox chant during the investiture rites, at the Exchange of the Swords.

Musically, the Welsh Kyrie was notable as being the first piece of coronation music featuring a solo singer in such a prominent way. Meador's setting certainly emphasized the plea for God's mercy, while Byrd's Latin Gloria added a (not necessarily recognized) ecumenical aspect. The same may be said of the Orthodox Greek chant which, it was widely pointed out, was intended as a tribute to the King's father, the late Prince Philip, who had Greek heritage. Such a pronounced reference to departed family members was also a first for the coronation music.

The Sanctus and Agnus Dei were sung in new settings by Roxanna Panufnik and Tarik O'Regan, respectively. While the former used the wording of the 1662 Prayer Book, the latter followed the words as in the 1549 version (after which the Agnus Dei had been omitted from the Prayer Book). All in all, then, the 'Mass setting' at the coronation was a rather eclectic mix of languages and musical styles, if not of theological traditions.

Another innovation was the Gospel procession: in accordance with modern Anglican practice, the Gospel was physically carried into the congregation, in the nave of Westminster Abbey, to be read among

them; and during the two processions there and back Alleluias, together with verses 1–2 and 6–7 of Psalm 47, were sung in new settings by Debbie Wiseman. The second Alleluia especially, in the return procession, stood out since it was sung by a gospel choir standing in a circle in the theatre, joyfully swinging to the music. This unprecedented performance added yet another dimension to the eclectic choice of music at the ceremony.

Reports at the time made much of the considerable number of new pieces. Yet it is noteworthy that almost none of the larger items were new compositions. The introit was, of course, Parry's grand *I was glad*, with the Vivats adjusted to match the royal couple; and the anointing surely would not have been quite the same without Handel's *Zadok the Priest*, which now, however, was performed to cover the actual anointing so that the archbishop's important words could not be heard, as they had been in 1953.

The most memorable of the new pieces was perhaps Andrew Lloyd Webber's anthem *Make a Joyful Noise*, sung after the crowning of the Queen, while she was enthroned next to the King. With its catchy opening theme, melodious flow and the grandeur of the regal brass and percussion added to the organ and band, this anthem matched the character of this occasion, and illustrated well the text.




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**Left:** The Prince of Wales presenting composer Debbie Wiseman with an award at the Royal College of Music. Matt Durham/PA Wire / Alamy Stock Photo.

**THE KING SHALL REJOICE**  
ANTHEM FOR THE CORONATION OF GEORGE III

Edited by Maurice Bevan WILLIAM BOYCE

**Allegro**

KEYBOARD REDUCTION  
Ob. Str. Bc.

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Above: William Boyce's *The King shall rejoice* was written for the coronation of George III in 1761 and, in 2023, followed the hymns. Copyright © Cathedral Music Press, an imprint of the RSCM, 2006.

### CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

A congregational hymn was first introduced at the 1953 coronation, then accompanying the Queen's procession from her throne down to the altar to take Communion. In 2023, this was doubled, with two hymns: 'Christ is made the sure foundation' before Communion, and 'Praise, my soul, the King of heaven' afterwards. William Boyce's *The King shall rejoice*, written for the coronation of George III in 1761, followed the latter. A beautiful piece, it was delightful to hear it in the context of an actual coronation. The immediately following *Te Deum* – which has been part of all coronations since time immemorial and a majestic final piece of each coronation service since 1902 – was sung in William Walton's splendid setting from the 1953 coronation. The resulting close accumulation of massive, loud and pompous music (in the hymn, Boyce anthem and Walton *Te Deum*) certainly made one aware that the end of the ceremony was nigh, while its length enabled the Recess, the outgoing procession, to be formed.

At the very end, during the newly crowned King's leaving, the National Anthem, which had been sung in new settings at the three previous coronations at least,

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*The richly varied musical programme reflected the King's wide-ranging love of music*

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was sung in Gordon Jacob's arrangement from 1953. However, after the well-known fanfare, with its dramatic gravitas, the first verse was this time not sung a cappella; rather, both verses were accompanied by the full forces, including the ever-effective trumpet descant in the second half, thus somewhat decreasing Jacob's calculated progression. In any case, 70 years of performance at most great occasions of state had made this particular setting so linked with the words 'God save the Queen' that one may ponder on the deeper meaning of its choice.

The end of the ceremony featured a practical innovation which, however, seems to have gone widely unnoticed. While not directly linked with the music, this was very much linked with the ceremonial performance and thus with the overall impression of the whole ceremony. This innovation was a long, large ramp that ran from the entrance under the quire screen to the specially built elevated platform under the crossing. In 1953 (and at the earlier coronations), one could see the monarch, and in fact everybody else, carefully manoeuvring the steep steps leading up to this platform – which in all the long robes and finery looked somewhat precarious. In fact, in 1953, the Queen's considered climbing down these steps was further marred by the orchestra's unfortunately off-beat beginning of Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance March No. 1* (the only hitch in all the music). In May 2023, however, the ramp enabled all the processions to arrive and leave in an elegant way, smoothly and effortlessly bridging the difference in height between the elevated area and the lower floor level of the nave. The resulting imagery was matched by the elegant flow of the music, which for the King and Queen's outgoing procession led from the National Anthem directly into Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance March No. 4* with its lively, jaunty opening.

Overall, the King and Queen's coronation was clearly a 21st-century coronation. The richly varied musical programme reflected the King's wide-ranging love of music. At this joyous occasion, the music of the ceremony in its totality reflected the first line of Lloyd Webber's anthem: the performers came together in a high-calibre programme of 'joyful noise'.