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## SAMPLE PAGES

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SINGING AND  
DEMENTIA

# ‘I GET MY HUSBAND BACK’ SINGING AND DEMENTIA

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ADRIAN BAWTREE

If, after reading this, you feel I have struck a chord, I urge you to watch the short clip on the internet from the film *There is a bridge* (search YouTube for Gladys Wilson and Naomi Feil). Once watched, I hope you will better understand why I feel there is an opportunity for church musicians to help support those who are living with dementia and living in social isolation.

When we attend church, we often expect to sing. Indeed, even those who don't attend regularly expect to belt out a tune from time to time. In many churches, there are refreshments after the service, conversations, connections made and offers of pastoral support given. All of this can be replicated in a singing activity that sits comfortably, but not exclusively, outside of worship. I think of it as a 'reframing', where church musicians provide an immersive and inclusive socio-musical activity for people living with dementia along with those who have had little or no exposure to music and are therefore unaware of the benefits it has to offer.

## BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

Music making exists on many levels: from the highest planes of professional performance to the most informal. There are a great many styles; it is truly a universal language.

By bringing people together through music you offer a normalizing experience for those living with serious health conditions, and for their carers. You offer stimulation for those who don't get out much, if at all, and an opportunity for those who just like to sing.

There are challenges: the skill of running the activity with a light touch, and the limits of volunteers' time – which is why you should start with monthly sessions and develop a team. But that said, the effects are profound and you will inevitably see that at times the sessions will be anything but 'light'. The comments I have received are extraordinary, unexpected and deeply moving. Perhaps the most profound was the lady who said to me that when she and her husband sing together, 'I get my husband back.'



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Expectations around sight-reading, tuning, ensemble, diction and technique are all secondary to this modus operandi. It is an environment where people can simply sing and *be*, free of rules, just for a bit. It is more about the quality of connection. Achieving a good rapport with your group will, in time, allow things to grow and the chance to bring in a little musical challenge as appropriate will happen.

The research around group singing points to a single important fact, which is that the benefits are created by participation. Every so often you'll need to offer a gentle rebuttal to those who say, 'I'm not doing that, I can't sing.' How often have I heard that! One lady told me that during her school choir practice she was asked to mime, and then told a bit later before the performance that even her miming was too loud. Everyone can sing, but in this context it doesn't matter if you can sing well.

The sessions don't have to be long – 25 to 40 minutes will be fine. Sing hymns, folk songs, rounds, popular songs, classical favourites. Ask participants what they like to sing, take note and come back with the requests next time. Let the session take its own momentum as participants release the endorphins they need while having their minds taken away from the challenges they face. Be aware of the session's momentum to know when to inject a bit of enthusiasm or calm as necessary. Finally, recognize when each session has run its course; less is often more.

I once led a monthly singing group at an Age UK centre in Crawley. Gradually, as the participants got to know each other, they became more confident. They decided to meet fortnightly and then weekly. By this point I had moved away, but we had found a replacement, which was great because the fact that they were no longer dependent on me was a significant development (succession planning is always important). A year or two later, they invited me back to conduct a performance of Karl Jenkins's *The Armed Man*. It was a tremendous development from what started as a monthly ad hoc singing activity.

### THEIR CHURCH

Partnership working is always good, and you might consider working alongside the Anna Chaplains. When I first started at Rochester Cathedral in 2014, I met Julia Burton-Jones, the Anna Chaplaincy lead for the dioceses of Rochester and Canterbury. For those who don't know, Anna Chaplaincy is an ecumenical ministry established by the BRF Ministries, the home also of Messy Church and Parenting for Faith. Anna Chaplains and their teams (often called Anna Friends) offer community-based spiritual care to older people of strong, little or no faith, many of whom are living

with dementia. Anna Chaplains are active in care home settings, they visit older people at home, and they frequently set up groups, activities and worship services that are inclusive of people with memory problems. Rochester diocese has over 30 such groups.

A thread running through all that Anna Chaplains do is the value of music in engaging those who are living with the challenges of dementia and loneliness. Anna Chaplains speak of the remarkable awakening of people who first appear unresponsive when they hear a familiar song. As older people experience the warmth of welcome and acceptance in church through these community initiatives, Anna Chaplains find they begin to talk about the place as 'their church'.

Right now, it feels as though the arts are under siege. But with mental health also being discussed in the public arena, maybe amidst this cacophony of 'earthquake, wind and fire', our church musicians can be that 'small voice of calm' and sing a new song by embracing a different approach. By stepping outside our usual space, we create a new opportunity for church music. I remind myself of the disciples fishing, casting their nets on one side, only to be told to cast them onto the other. This particular 'other side' has nearly one million people living with dementia, and millions more living in social isolation. Just think what a flotilla of church musicians could do by casting their musical nets wider. Churches have the facilities, resources and, most importantly of all, the people and skills to make it happen; the need is great.

If you've got this far, please take one more step and watch that internet clip.



You can find out more about the Anna Chaplaincy by visiting their website [www.annachaplaincy.org.uk](http://www.annachaplaincy.org.uk)



# STANFORD'S MUSIC FOR THE SMALLER CHURCH CHOIR

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TOM COXHEAD

Stanford's contribution to Anglican church music is rightly held in high esteem. He has few challengers for repertoire that is still regularly sung in church. And his legacy as a teacher is significant: counted among his pupils were Ralph Vaughan Williams and Herbert Howells. Yet his church music is primarily conceived for use by large choral foundations with significant resources. His aim was to raise standards of the music written for the Anglican church (in which task he succeeded), rather than necessarily addressing the needs of the average choir. In any case, it seems it was never in doubt in the late 19th to mid 20th centuries that even relatively small churches could fill their choirs with men and boys for matins and evensong each Sunday.

Many church choirs today are not so blessed, following the changes in fortunes of choral music in our parishes over the last hundred years. Smaller choirs may find that the rather high tessitura of the soprano and tenor parts, and the fact that most of the anthems are substantial pieces of often more than 120 bars, significant challenges.

As director of music for a small church in south-west London, these are the difficulties that I have faced when looking at Stanford's music. Nonetheless, while rebuilding our choir and repertoire, it was

rather surprising to discover that we had not learnt any Stanford before his centenary year.

I know that many directors of music may find themselves in a comparable situation: they have a choir that can vary from 8 to over 20 singers, often without a tenor section. Although we sing a choral evensong each month, the choir mainly provides music for Sunday morning Eucharist and the repertoire needs to reflect its use at the distribution of Holy Communion (or occasionally at the offertory), but with a certain amount of flexibility depending on the number of voices available. For many choirs, the *divisi* in some pieces, such as the much-loved 'Three Latin Motets', may be problematic. However, the good news on this front is that Stanford wrote most of his choral works for four voices. The following suggestions are pieces that may prove practical for a range of choirs with a variety of resources at their disposal.

## ANTHEMS AND SETTINGS

Anthems of a more manageable length include lesser-known pieces such as *If thou shalt confess* (1885), an earlier work that takes its text from the Epistle for St Andrew's Day, but which is suitable for other saints' days, or general use. *When God of old* (for Whitsuntide) is a concise, largely homophonic setting



Above: It seems it was never in doubt in the late 19th century that even relatively small churches could fill their choir with men and boys. From *The Illustrated London News*, 1888.

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*There are plenty of musical choices when it comes to Stanford's service settings*

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of words by John Keble that is not lacking in drama, but which doesn't make major technical demands of the singers. Similarly, *Lighten our darkness* (a setting of the third collect for evensong) offers a high emotional return for relatively simple music. *How beauteous are their feet* and *The Lord is my shepherd* are more familiar Stanford haunts. And for choirs that are comfortable singing without accompaniment, the part-song *When Mary thro' the garden went* shows another facet of Stanford's compositional expression.

There are plenty of musical choices when it comes to Stanford's service settings, and while these are

likely to be part of the staple repertoire for choirs who regularly sing matins and evensong, they can also prove useful for Sunday Eucharists. Even for churches that use congregational settings of the ordinary, the Agnus Dei from the Benedictus and Agnus Dei in F (published with the Communion Service in C) would make a satisfying and appropriate communion anthem. Equally, the Jubilate, being a setting of Psalm 100, can often be used at the offertory in place of (or in addition to) a hymn. The morning services in A and G are worth considering as well as the more-familiar settings in B flat and C; there are occasional soprano



*divisi*, but they are usually covered by the organ accompaniment. Stanford's unison service in D major may also provide smaller choirs with an alternative. Other canticles, such as the Benedictus or Nunc Dimittis, are appropriate at certain points of the church year, too.

*Stanford's settings in 'Varied Harmonies for Organ' provide a great deal of flexibility for smaller choirs*

### SOME MUSICAL OPTIONS

*Six Hymns* (from Opus 113)

1. *Let us, with a gladsome mind*
2. *Purest and highest*
3. *In Thee is gladness*
4. *Pray that Jerusalem may have peace*
5. *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty*
6. *Oh! for a closer walk with God*

The final of these short hymn-based anthems, *Oh! for a closer walk*, is well known, but its five sister anthems are often overlooked. *Let us, with a gladsome mind*, *In Thee is gladness* and *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty* are particularly accessible. With completely homophonic texture and organ accompaniment, they could be useful anthems for choirs that are short of lower voices. Similarly, *Pray that Jerusalem may have peace* can be sung unaccompanied, or can work with some organ support (with a judicious use of registrations to give an antiphonal effect). *Purest and highest* is of a similar stature to *Oh! for a closer walk with God*, both being more substantial within this set of miniatures.

### *Varied Harmonies for Organ*

1. 'As now the sun's declining rays' (to *St Columba*)
2. 'O sons and daughters, let us sing' (to *O filii et filiae*)
3. 'O God, our help in ages past' (to *St Anne*)
4. 'All people that on earth do dwell' (to *Old Hundredth*)
5. 'O worship the King' (to *Old 104th*)
6. 'Thou art the Way; by Thee alone' (to *St James*)

In 1912 Stanford contributed half a dozen hymn arrangements to the breathlessly titled collection *Varied Harmonies for Organ (and Voice ad libitum) of Certain Tunes in Hymns Ancient and Modern*. Now out of print, these hymn arrangements are due to be republished by the RSCM. While it might not seem prepossessing material from which to extract pieces

Above: *In Thee is gladness* is accessible to many choirs.  
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for use as anthems, Stanford's settings are more substantial than mere reharmonizations. Musically they are of merit and provide a great deal of flexibility for smaller choirs because they can be sung entirely in unison, or with optional, simple SATB harmonies, and there are suggestions for antiphony between higher and lower voices. Not surprisingly, much of the interest is driven from the organ accompaniment, which has various interludes and codas that are probably too complex to use for congregational accompaniment today. They may also be useful to choirs with no such constraints, but for whom certain hymns are unlikely to be taken up by the congregation – *O filii et filiae*, for example. They will undoubtedly become a useful choral resource.

Stanford's *Six Hymns* (from Opus 113) are available to buy as individual hymn-anthems through Cathedral Music Press, an RSCM imprint, at [www.rscmshop.com](http://www.rscmshop.com): In *Let us, with a gladsome mind*; *Purest and highest*; *Pray that Jerusalem may have peace*; *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty* and *Oh! for a closer walk with God*. Stanford's *Varied Harmonies for Organ* is forthcoming.