

Grace Notes *Friday, April 16, 2021* ¹



Dear friends:

Thanks to my friend and colleague, Dr Murray Watson, who is my counterpart at the Simcoe-Muskoka Catholic District School Board, I discovered an Easter hymn I hadn't sung before and liked it enough to want to share it. <https://www.facebook.com/cpcsouthpas/videos/688077678606783/> I've added the words at the end of today's missive in case you want to sing along. It can be sung to the beautiful Welsh lullaby, *Suo Gan*, known to many people from the movie, "Empire of the Sun" or to one of the more commonly heard tunes with an 8787 metre like that to which we sing "Alleluia, Sing to Jesus", a tune known to organists and choristers as 'Hyfrydol'. This last can also be used to sing, Come, thou long expected Jesus because of the metre. The numbers refer to the number of syllables in the line and, in many hymnals you will find an index of the metres so that the director of music can exchange a tune for one better known by the congregation. Hyfrydol was written in the early 19th century by Rowland H. Prichard, also Welsh, who apparently lived up to the stereotype of having an excellent singing voice. He was a precentor, the leader of song in his (probably Methodist or Chapel) congregation and thus would have applied his music-writing talents to creating pieces which could be easily sung and followed. Churches in these traditions did not have organs and singing was a capella, led by a precentor in a technique known as lining: the precentor sang a line which was then echoed back by the people.



Known also to the Scottish Hebrides and to the Appalachian regions of the United States, this type of hymnody has only survived in a very few areas. Hear an example in this article, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/aug/27/vertical-connection-to-god-the-euphoria-of-gaelic-psalm-singing>, recorded at a church in Lewis/Harris in the Scottish Outer Hebrides.

Many of the early Protestant traditions allowed only the unaccompanied singing of scripture-based hymns, thus had a strong dependency on the Psalms. As a child, I learned "Psalms and Paraphrases" from a book of that name as I accompanied my Church of Scotland grandmother to services; by that time her town parish had relaxed enough to allow an organ; however, her grandfather had been a precentor in one of the fishing

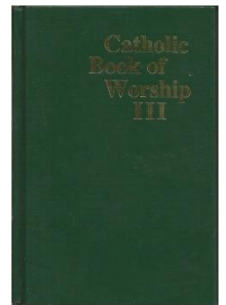


¹ Sculpture - Triumph by Timothy P. Schmalz



villages; his only musical instrument was a tuning fork, rapped smartly on the pew and used to set the pitch. This recording from Regular Baptist congregation in Kentucky in 1993 demonstrates a similar style. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQmfHLpCQcU> Although some musical instruments, such as the harp, lyre and flute, seem to have been used in pre-Christian Jewish tradition, the Church frowned on the use of them for about the first millennium. Even St Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century condemned instruments: “For musical instruments usually move the soul more to pleasure than create a good internal disposition”² Instrumental music started to become more common in the Western Church in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; however, most of the traditions of the Reformation – such as the Calvinists mentioned above – considered it “grave abuse”. To this day, most Oriental Orthodox Churches and some Eastern Rite Catholics consider a capella music to be the only acceptable form. I found the music at my son’s wedding in a Serbian Orthodox church to be quite transcendent, offering a worship experience very different from the Folk Mass to which many Roman Catholics are accustomed.

Considering the scope of contemporary Catholic church music, many brides-to-be are quite shocked to be told that they may not have Mendelssohn’s Wedding March or Wagner’s ‘Bridal Chorus’ from Lohengrin, played at their ceremony because of their dark origins; likewise, Schubert’s Ave Maria, one of the songs written for Sir Walter Scott’s ‘Lady of the Lake’, is often considered inappropriate as it was originally the desperate cry of a bride in exile. The divide between what constitutes hymnody and what is a worship song not suited for liturgy can often seem very subjective; however, it is based on certain standards of content, rhythm and metre. It also can vary quite significantly from one jurisdiction to another, and from one Christian denomination to another. When choosing music for liturgy, especially for Mass, we are always safest to use selections from a locally recommended hymnal. Note that music composed for religious education programs is very suitable for use in classroom celebrations but may not be as welcome in the church. But, nothing prevents us from enjoying contemporary inspirational music and it is uplifting to the soul: “Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth, How can I keep from singing?” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Li2hddmy63U>



I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have being.³

With every blessing,
Gillian

² <https://www.christianstudylibrary.org/article/musical-instruments-worship>

³ Psalm 104:33

Christ has risen while earth slumbers

1. Christ has risen while earth slumbers, Christ has risen where hope died,
As he said and as he promised, as we doubted and denied.

Let the moon embrace the blessing; let the sun sustain the cheer;
Let the world confirm the rumour: Christ is risen, God is here!

2. Christ has risen for the people whom he died to love and save;
Christ has risen for the women bringing flowers to grace his grave
Christ has risen for disciples huddled in an upstairs room.
He whose word inspired creation can't be silenced by the tomb.

3. Christ has risen to companion former friends who fear the night,
Sensing loss and limitation where their faith had once burned bright.
They bemoan what is no longer, they expect no hopeful sign
Till Christ ends their conversation, breaking bread and sharing wine.

4. Christ has risen and forever lives to challenge and to change
All whose lives are messed or mangled, all who find religion strange.
Christ is risen. Christ is present, making us what he has been –
Evidence of transformation in which God is known and seen.

Words by John L. Bell & Graham Maule © 1988 WGRG, c/o Iona Community, Glasgow, Scotland. www.wildgoose.scot.

The Iona Community (<https://iona.org.uk/>) describes itself as "a dispersed Christian ecumenical community working for peace and social justice, rebuilding of community and the renewal of worship." Iona is "a tiny and beautiful Hebridean island off the west coast of Scotland, cradle of Christianity in Scotland, where in 563AD the Irish monk Columba (Columkille) established a monastic settlement that evangelised large parts of Scotland and the north of England and became an important centre of European Christianity". In 1938, the Reverend George McLeod took craftsmen, unemployed as a result of the Depression, and clergy in training to the island to rebuild the physical structure and the community. It continues to be a place of pilgrimage for many but also a popular tourist attraction for visitors to the west of Scotland.

You may recognise John Bell as the lyricist of "The Summons" (Will you come and follow me if I but call your name) and a number of other pieces often set to familiar Scottish folk tunes.

