

Music Survey Report | February 2015

Towards the end of 2014, we conducted a survey among the people who come regularly to St James's Church for the 11am Eucharist to gain their views on the music we use during the service. 26 were filled in.

What words would you use to describe music at St James's?

High standard	Accessible x4
Uplifting	generally upbeat x2
Comforting	Eclectic
Devotional	Under rehearsed (lay singers), variable
Inspirational x 2	standard (lay singers)
Meditative	Interesting
Loud	Better to do it this way than a choir at the
Community	front III
Participative x4	Safe
Traditional x2	Old fashioned x2
Encompassing	Boring
Sometimes restricting	Unadventurous x2
Professional	Cautious a bit tired, mono cultural
Controlled	Really limited variety x3
Beautiful x2	"right on" (mostly)
Uniquely St James	Usually dull
Not samey – enough "spice" varied, fairly	Skilled organist
varied	Lil has a beautiful voice
Not too much drumming	Good drumming
Diverse	Remarkably dated music – very little
Inclusive x2	contemporary of any genre in the morning
Poetic and thoughtful x3	service
Mixture of old and new	Stylistically conservative
Rhythmical	Formal
"love the chants leading into communion"	Too much of it – more silence please
Not always fitting in written quality and	
content	

What are we not doing?

- Graham Kendrick, more emotional music eg choruses, gospel music

- “we seem to have an aversion to anything out of the more evangelical wing of the church” – there are some very good things we could sing
- Modern joyful singing sung with joy and passion
- Maddy Prior and The Carnival Band: roughish, fun, vitality
- There’s interesting contemporary stuff out there – gospel, praise, folksy, swing
- Church Hymnary 4 is a good hymn book with modern hymns
- We pay “lip service” to world church music and Iona music shouldn’t be accompanied on the organ - more variety of accompaniment
- Use the piano more
- Music that touches the heart more and appeals less to the head
- Instrumental music/solos (everything is vocal)
- Worship songs – can be adapted and made inclusive
- Some plainchant settings of the Eucharist can work well – Missa De Angelis
- Middle eastern music and Jewish music
- More anthems from the great classical repertoire and more meditative music
- Psalm translations are not good; they are “robbed of their poetry, intensity and power”
- Some of the modern hymn words are dire and some of the modern syncopated tunes are awful
- I like sacred, fairly anonymous music
- Worship starts in the heart – more freeing music, less structure,
- No music after Communion
- I don’t want to sing after Communion – listening to something is “bliss”
- All sounds the same when played on the organ
- More contemporary music with guitar, piano

Inclusive language

- Leave George Herbert alone
- Inclusive language is good – but some of the changes trivialise eg “sing and laugh and play” in For all the Saints. Takes away the visionary meaning of this hymn
- Fine as long as kept in balance
- I am not too hung up about historic hymns as I can sing whatever pronouns I like
- Generally inclusive language good
- Keep the variety of he/she interchangeable – we all sing what we like
- Leave George Herbert as he is
- “humankind is a mouthful” – man can be replaced with we or us

- Inclusive ethos of St James is important. Gender free language is important
- Change of words in familiar hymns is good – makes me think
- Inclusive language very good but please keep the man – too much feminine side goes awry in my view
- I like the non-sexist language but it's ok not to have it all the time. Some modern hymns work, others sound contrived.
- The traditional gender words in their idiom, should live alongside the the modern in theirs. Both contain overmuch anthropomorphising of the nature of God. Concern about gender representation here seems to me to further emphasise this and is therefore unhelpful and inappropriate.
- It's a mistake to mess with historic language and iconography, particularly when it is by great poets/ masters.
- In terms of gender equality, I tend to think in terms of complementarity and completeness rather than equivalence or interchangeability.
- Mankind is a generic word, not a masculine one.
- Modern texts can and should reflect current theology – but it must be good theology not just playing with words.
- As a feminist, I like all the words to be gender inclusive eg Creator
- I would prefer that we sang historic hymns as written. We need to be more imaginative than just changing existing hymns
- Inclusive language is something I hold dear. If change to inclusive language is possible within the structure of a text, I would like to see it happen regardless of the age of the text.
- If I know it or its secure in the tradition to be sung with a specific gender pronoun or reference, I say keep it. but I don't really care one way or the other.
- I would prefer on the whole that we did not change the text of well known traditional texts
- I am happy with inclusive language and prefer it to be used where possible but there is a difference between historic texts and modern ones. Poetic texts shouldn't be tampered with (I make a distinction between historic and poetic texts)
- I would like hymns to be gender inclusive if it fits. I prefer more modern hymns anyway
- It really doesn't bother me a bit. I think inclusive language can feel a bit contrived. God is beyond language and gender so it seems slightly immaterial whether we pray to God as male or female.
- Gender inclusive language is more important in traditional hymns, to bring them into the present. I like other names for God – Maker, Artist, listener etc
- Modern texts definitely inclusive
- Yes to gentle alteration of historical ones

- As at present – when the piece permits it without becoming clumsy
- I would prefer to stick to the original language that was used. I realise that will be unpopular but that’s my opinion. This is most important with poetic and historic texts. I believe it is wrong to change the language.
- On the whole I prefer inclusive language. Perhaps there are times when one has to leave well alone.
- Gender inclusiveness is fine and usually easily done. Some of the attempts to avoid “He” for God are very clunky
- If historic texts are too gendered, maybe they shouldn’t be used at all
- I deeply value inclusive language and appreciate the amendments even if sometimes they are a bit clunky. I suggest only one exception in every service – too many “Fathers” jars.
- I welcome the use of inclusive language – occasionally this jars with the original and some of the poetry is lost.

Lay Singers

- Great appreciation of the Lay Singers, and their dispersal within the congregation and of the organisation it takes to make it what it is – with often a “plan B” needed. Lil is very tolerant and encouraging, makes an impressive, often beautiful contribution to worship
- “I would join if the music was more adventurous, exciting ”
- “ the repertoire of very old, classical music means that membership becomes exclusive, as most people don’t feel up to going anywhere near it”
- I have often thought of joining but am too nervous to volunteer. Also I am no good before 10am
- We need a separate group who “make a joyful noise” – existing to teach new songs in a more informal less structured way – worship songs.
- It should be made more widely known that all are welcome
- Thin on the ground, so can sound small/thin but would like broader musical palette - get some pros in – once a month? SATB
- They can sound very unprepared but the harmonies in the liturgical music enhance the service
- Get other music/singing groups going

Music Practice

- It is helpful x6

- It is helpful but we should have more sustained music over a season not changing every week as I find the practices a bit tedious
- I am frequently bemused by what does not get practised – it would be very helpful to have a practise of unusual hymn tunes
- It helps us be inclusive
- It is helpful but it should be earlier so we really can have some quiet before the service
- Mostly useful – can use it for run through of unfamiliar hymns or point out particular things eg the Tallis we sang on 23rd November has a long note at the beginning of each line
- Unusual hymn tunes should be included
- I would prefer not to have a music practice but quiet before the service IIII
- It's fine x4
- I would love to see some teaching of harmonies as appropriate
- Is this the bit that Lil does before the service? I don't mind it but am not sure it's particularly helpful

Other comments

- Hats off to Malcolm and Lil
- Just big thanks to all who contribute to the music
- We are extraordinarily fortunate to have Malcolm and Lil.
- Thank you for asking.
- Lil as cantor and soloist and Malcolm are great.
- Malcolm is an excellent organist and gives us a good variety of music and sounds. One little thing I would like is more triumphal improvisation after the gospel occasionally – it's good to have reflective music but occasionally I would like it to be stirring
- Lil has a beautiful voice and is a blessing to this church
- I would want to encourage St James's to have the confidence to integrate a much more varied wealth of music and to ensure that the melodies and words compass a range of religious experience not just a choice of "very old" or "very intellectual"
- My main comment is I would like us to sing more modern upbeat hymns/songs of praise – sing joyfully and with passion
- The music reflects our own uncertain corporate identity and plays safe. Who are we? How do we see ourselves? Do we really cope with "otherness"? Be bold and adventurous.
- Risk annoying people in a different way
- Different instruments, broader range of music accompanied by other instruments

- I really understand that a lot of hard work goes into the music here and I'm sorry I have been so critical. However, I came across a service sheet from 2002 and the music was exactly the same as I see every single week. Please, please start to include a wider range.
- I wish more people would come forward and join the Lay Singers. A commitment to turning up at practices and skilled guidance from Lil means that those with no experience can learn quickly
- Please avoid "happy clappy" praise choruses, Graham Kendrick style songs and worship service as X Factor performance style music. I even dread "Lord of the Dance" type singing when we have it, but I can take the occasional lapse.
- The balance between talking and music is better than it used to be. I used to feel overburdened by words half way through the service but this doesn't happen now. I am keen to encounter more worship music that I like.
- I like the use of introits at the start of services
- It is a central part of the Sunday gathering for me and I'd prefer keeping things as neutral and traditional as possible.
- Occasional musical gatherings when St James's people could bring an instrument and play together one Sunday afternoon rather than doing too much change to services which could divide unnecessarily if it turned into worship songs/too much world music
- I just like the variety!
- My preference is not music (to join in with) after the Eucharist – it is disruptive. A solo etc is lovely (x3)
- It has a simple touch combined with the touch of the professional: a finely tuned balance

St James's Piccadilly
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April 2015