

March - April 2023

Newsletter no. 1064

NEWS LETTER

Heath Street Baptist Church Hampstead



Minister: Ewan King

The Friendly Beasts

Our Nativity this year was based on the wonderful carol known most commonly as 'The Friendly Beasts'. It depicts the procession of the animals to the Christ Child and originated in 12th Century France, with the current English lyrics being written by Robert Davis (1881-1950). Here in 21st century London the scene was enacted not just by regular Heath Streeters but by some professional clowns who had come to help us inhabit the beasts and convincingly prowl, shuffle, scuttle and trot our way toward the manger! I would like to thank Katie Cooper and also Sam Rayner, who joined us for the performance with great aplomb. Oh, and as a special guest star from Oldtime Nursery, we had surely the most game and chirpy baby Jesus it has ever been my pleasure to share a stage with! –Wilf Merttens

Jesus our brother, strong and good,
Was humbly born in a stable rude,
And the friendly beasts around Him stood,
Jesus our brother, strong and good.

I, said the donkey shaggy and brown,
I carried His mother up hill and down
I carried her safely to Bethlehem town;
I, said the donkey shaggy and brown.

I, said the cow all white and red,
I gave Him my manger for His bed,
I gave Him my hay to pillow His head;
I, said the cow all white and red.

I, said the sheep with curly horn,
I gave Him my wool for His blanket warm,
He wore my coat on Christmas morn;
I, said the sheep with curly horn.

I, said the dove, from the rafters high,

Cooed Him to sleep that He should not cry.
We cooed Him to sleep, my mate and I;
I, said the dove, from the rafters high.

And every beast, by some good spell,
In the stable dark was glad to tell
Of the gift he gave Immanuel;
The gift he gave Immanuel.



A Dante Pilgrimage

Around Easter time a year ago, Ewan put forward the possibility of a group to accompany him on a “pilgrimage” over two years to read the whole of Dante’s epic medieval poem, *The Divine Comedy*. The proposal was that we meet weekly on Zoom for three quarters of an hour, to read the cantos out loud one by one, with Ewan then leading the discussion, followed by reading the canto again. Since the original was in Italian, we would begin each time with Ewan reading the first lines in Italian, to capture the beauty of the poetry and the language.

It’s an interesting group that has come together; it includes those who know about Dante and his times, who speak Italian, and who add a great deal to the discussion. It also includes others who, like myself, have little prior knowledge but are curious to know more, with the thought of joining the group in its travels alongside Dante over time. It also felt like an excellent way to approach this multilayered poem, not from a purely academic point of view but as an experience together, very like a pilgrimage. There has been no homework, but reading the cantos has proved powerful and maybe served also to bring the group together.

As many will know, the journey taken by Dante and Virgil, his guide, is in three stages as conceptualised by Dante: Hell, Purgatory and lastly, Paradise. At this midway stage, we have been through Hell and are now poised to enter Purgatory. After thirty weeks meeting the sufferers in the darkness of Hell, hearing about their crimes and their sufferings, it has been with considerable relief that we have emerged into the light with more of a sense of ultimate hopefulness. It hasn’t all been grim. Dante’s poetry is superb, with every now and again the most lyrical and memorable stanzas. We are made aware of the people, the rough terrain, and the beauty of nature. The exhaustion of the journey itself has been powerfully described, alongside the fascination of the developing relationship of closeness between Dante and Virgil as they travel together.

Throughout there has been an underlying sense of Dante’s love for humanity, and with the use of allegory, the bedrock of his Christian faith shines through.

The group has felt very committed to working together, and the readings have been powerful and enjoyable. At this point we look forward to exploring Purgatory, with considerable curiosity about what trials it may bring. But there is no doubt that we are committed to the journey and deriving a great deal from it. And we are extremely fortunate to have Ewan as our leader and guide. –Gillian Miles

Being able to study the whole of the Divine Comedy is nothing less than a great privilege; week by week we are guided by Ewan, a wonderfully enthusiastic Dante scholar, through this work. It was radical, a bestseller, in 1320 and so remains, in different ways to different times, ever since.

With no knowledge of the language it is a particular pleasure for me when Ewan reads some lines in Italian and talks about the poetry. In today's world of barely comprehensible modern threats, accompanying Dante on his long journey through the horrors of Hell, the anxieties of Purgatory and the hardly imaginable delights of Paradise may seem indulgent or a poor use of time, but our reading the poem aloud each week brings the characters, with all their virtues and vices, to life over the centuries. In "Dante" the narrator, the poet has surely created a sympathetic character for readers to identify with. We see him grapple with a fantastic and at times dangerous world in an entirely human way, and we become aware of the spiritual and ethical values that are the backbone of the poem.

Reading and discussing the whole work in this group is for me, in spite of the limitations of Zoom, both helpful and an encouragement to persevere. Thank you, Ewan! –Janna

Disco Ball – Mountain Hare: Composing in the Cairngorms

In 2018/19 I took two solo camping trips in the Cairngorms and one in the Peak District to research mountain hares for a composition, supported by the Finzi Trust. The composition is called *Disco Ball – Mountain Hare*. It is for orchestra; and there is a version in progress for violin, cello, piano and clarinet. The orchestral premiere was on 22 January 2022.

I wrote an extended travel essay called *Disco Ball – Mountain Hare: composing in the Cairngorms* about the process of camping and composing in the largest subarctic landscape in the UK. You can read extracts from this below. The disco ball metaphor was suggested by Anna Fleming (*Time on Rock*, Canongate 2022). Our conversation in the Cairngorms features in her essay, *Dances with Hares*, in the anthology, *Women on Nature*, edited by Katharine Norbury.

As we sup tea in the cold wind, Bill asks, "How would you represent a mountain hare on the stage?" I pause, turning the unusual question over like a pebble in my mind and a surprising metaphor leaps out. A disco ball. Hares catch the eye in a dazzle of (almost ridiculous) movement. The hare's myriad nature – running, hiding, watching, relaxing, frisking, quaking, yawning, bathing – are flashes of a thousand glittering faces. And beneath this reflective exterior, something is hidden. There is always an aspect of the hare that remains unseen, unknown. They are creatures of the mountain.

(Extract, Anna Fleming, *Dances with Hares*, from *Women on Nature*, edited by Katharine Norbury, Unbound 2021)

In a 13th century poem about hares, translated in the 20th century by Seamus Heaney as *The Names of the Hare*, seventy-seven names are given for the brown hare, *Lepus europaeus*. Whether it is in awe or jest is unclear, but it gives an idea of the hare's status in western folklore. Amazingly the heart weight in relation to body weight in both brown and mountain hares is bigger than in most animals, including humans, dogs, cheetahs, lions and whales. This large heart allows them to start fast and stay fast for a long time. At 40 miles per hour their front legs don't even touch the ground! This heart could also be the source of their fabled intelligence and wisdom. In the beautiful Buddhist tale of the [Selfless Hare](#) the Bodhisattva is reborn as a hare. The hare takes a leap of faith into a fire to offer his body as food to Sakra, Lord of the Devas. The astonished Sakra puts the fire out and rewards the hare by painting it on the moon, so that its bravery shines everywhere.

1) When it stops, it is your nonchalant drummer beating with its paws on the ground – we still don't fully understand why. Feel and hear the footpad tap on a slightly caking peat surface... Now imagine having the hearing of those great, swivelling ears. Consider that the hill is endless drums. Peat skin taut above sloshy, resonant mass; or thin peat clinging to echoing rock. How deep does the mountain hare hear and tell? Take the dome of St Paul's. Upend it, submerge it, and whisper in the gallery with your feet. Now smell in colour, and see in detail a mountain and heather-filled orb of a couple of kilometres. With your big amber eyes on your elegant head you can almost see the full round. What a session!

2) In winter the plateau can be one of the most exposed and seething skins in the mountain body of the UK. You walk, but the wind will throw you to the ground. Sometimes you will crawl. Imagine for a moment that you are sitting with a mountain hare on the aperture edge of a Bunsen burner on maximum power. In your terror, as you try to maintain your hold, you can feel the assault on your always-open ears. Your nose's inability to close doesn't help. In winds as powerful and constant as this it is a wonder that the mountain hare sits calmly beside you, flattening into the iron. In its 'form' on the Cairngorm plateau – by the subtlest body alignment – it experiences such quietness that it becomes the eye of the storm. Some years ago, in a strong wind on a mountain in Glen Cannich I laid my head in a hare form and was astonished to find pin-drop silence.

3) For a virtuoso of concealment like the hare, the open 'tundra' landscape of the plateau is home and hiding. I could see plenty of pellets. Away from the tourist trail and untrampled by humans, these remote tops provide less food, but for the variety of vegetation they are hard to match. There are miniature willow and birch trees which, at a height of one inch, hold out tiny red and gold autumn leaves to catch the light and breeze. Yellow grasses whistle above squat banks of red sorghum moss that glows like coral. Scattered rocks sport bleached lichen and glint with embedded flecks of quartz. It's a bedazzling beauty when the sun's at play. A heavenly field. What a place for a first sight! But after walking two miles further eastwards I was still – to my eyes at least – alone on the hill.

4) [*Referencing the memorial service in Notre Dame after the Paris bombings.*] Paris was numb. Gradually [the organist] Latry released low, husky, indeterminate waves into the quiet. He graded these until recognisable pitch and volume held us. Now music and urgency increased, and over 6,000 people within Notre Dame felt into it. The playing grew in speed and richness until the sound had a dangerous edge. The colours darkened, the volume increased, and it became the angriest, most violent music I have ever heard. I felt furious in it, and knew I wasn't alone. Just when you were wishing the anger and pain would end, imperceptibly the sounds softened, curved and became solemn and warm. A beautiful melody emerged from the texture, becoming less clothed, less weighed-down and simpler as it soared. Now it was song-like and, after a brief, missed heartbeat, it was joined by the choir who, we realised, were processing down the side aisle. Thousands of us had been guided and allowed to grieve.

*Yes, I know, God's silence never breaks, but is that really a problem?
There are thousands of voices, after all.*

(Mary Oliver, *Whistling Swans*, extract.)

--Bill Carlslake

Heath Street Choir

Following the success of the July 2022 performance of Mozart's *Vesperae Solennes de Confessore*, Heath Street Choir attracted the attention of an anonymous sponsor. This promoted the director, Emily Gray, to apply for charity status for the choir. This process is ongoing. It is hoped that a little funding will attract more funding, and Emily can - with the help of a board of trustees - continue to provide a low-cost/free introduction to classical singing and choral music to those not otherwise able to afford it.

The choir also hopes to attract new members with a come-and-sing event on 15th July 2023 of Coleridge-Taylor's *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast*, the first of a three-part choral cantata that was widely performed at the turn of the nineteenth century that has since fallen out of the standard choral repertoire. Please do feel free to attend, either as a singer or audience member. And, when the choir's charitable status is confirmed, do lend a tenor.

www.heathstreetchoir.co.uk



the **HAMPSTEAD**

ceilidh

Gaelic dancing & live music · food & bar

6.15 P.M.

MONDAY **10** APRIL 2023

HEATH ST BAPTIST CHURCH

84 HEATH STREET, NW3 1DN

WWW.HEATHSTREET.ORG

TICKETS ON THE DOOR
ADULTS £10
CONCESSIONS £6
CHILDREN £4

HEATH STREET CHOIR PRESENTS
SAMUEL COLERIDGE TAYLOR'S



HAWAITHA'S
WEDDING
FEAST

DATE: 15TH JULY 2023
6:30PM FOR 1HR APPROX
£15 ENTRY (£5 CONC.)



CONDUCTOR: EMILY GRAY
TENOR SOLOIST: WILLS MORGAN
PIANIST: TIMOTHY SALTER

HEATH STREET BAPTIST CHURCH, 84 HEATH STREET, NW3 1DN

heathstreet.org heathstreetchoir.co.uk

Readings and Prayers

March 5-11

Genesis 12.1-4a

5th Annie Fang

6th Frida King

7th Elya Ghasempour

8th Babak Agin

9th Theresa Thom

10th Thaddeus King

11th Genna Naccache

March 12-18

Exodus 17.1-7

12th Birgit Leuppert

13th Fiona Ranford

14th Josh Somers

15th Nathalia Bell

16th Sarah Harper

17th Esme Baker

18th Mysie Johnson

March 19-25

I Samuel 16.1-13

19th Nesa Thorne

20th Rhona MacEachen

21st Tom Somers

22nd Otilie Johnson

23rd Nomsa Ndebele

24th Edward Humphreys

25th Lydia Baker

March 26-April 1

Ezekiel 37.1-14

26th Thomas Roy

27th Emad Eisapour

28th Hildegard Williams

29th Zahra Safaryazdi

30th Laura Somers

31st Joachim King

1st April Gabrielle Falardeau

April 2-8

Matthew 21.1-11

2nd John-Henry Baker

3rd HK
4th Maral Agin
5th Rebecca McLeod
6th Wilf Merttens
7th Juno Lee
8th Isabel Somers

April 9-15 Acts 10.34-43

9th Ali Ghasempour
10th Hyun Ju Lee
11th Beauty Kunene
12th Beryl Dowsett
13th for Kasai Province, DRC
14th Ewan King
15th Andrea MacEachen

April 16-22 Acts 2.14a, 22-32

16th Anselm King
17th Leo Patterson
18th Grace Jiang
19th Susan Brandt
20th for the life and ministry of St. Mary's Hampstead
21st Cole Ellenbogen
22nd John Walsh

April 23-29 Acts 2.14a, 36-41

23rd Dusol Lee
24th Paul Conrad
25th Susan Le Quesne
26th Phoebe Jiang
27th Kylo Layton
28th for Ukraine
29th Gaynor Humphreys

April 30-May 6 Acts 2.42-47

30th Coco Ellenbogen
1st May Jen Finamore
2nd Leila Ranjbar
3rd Evelyn Baker
4th Robin Thorne

5th Selena Barrera

6th Julie Benoit

Weekly Activities

Sundays	11 am	Divine Worship Including our Children's Sunday Club – stories, crafts, drama and play for all ages. Live stream also available on request by emailing johnhenry@heathstreet.org at least 24 hours in advance.
	6:00 pm	Sunday Sundown concert series
	7:00 pm	Contact Club
Mondays	5:00 pm	Storymakers Club An after-school club aimed at children between the ages of 7 and 13.
Tuesdays	10 am	Oldtime Nursery Introducing old melodies and traditional stories to a new generation of children
Wednesdays	5:30 pm	Storymakers Club
Thursdays	10:30 am	Oldtime Nursery
Fridays	8:00 pm (online)	Dante Pilgrimage A Zoom reading of the whole of Dante's Comedy, to take place weekly until 2024. https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87179878823
Daily during Lent		A Zoom reading of Mark's gospel, in eighty parts, each morning and evening at 8 am and 8 pm. https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87179878823

For requests regarding church membership, Baptism or opportunities for Christian ministry in the church, please contact the minister.