

## Music Reflection for June

### “Flaming June”

I have to confess to being somewhat surprised to find that we are here in June already and cannot help but wonder what on earth I have been doing during the first half of the year. June is a busy month in any year with much taking place before the summer holidays start in earnest but, this year it is doubly so given the events to mark the Platinum Jubilee of our amazing and much-loved Queen.

In the life of the Church, June sees both the Feast of Pentecost on the 5<sup>th</sup> when we celebrate the Holy Spirit coming down with tongues of fire to the disciples followed by Trinity Sunday when we mark the constant presence of God with us in the form of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In our everyday lives June sees the longest hours of daylight in the year and finds young people looking toward the completion of GCSE's and other examinations at the end of the month; Racing aficionados look forward to the Oaks, the Epsom Derby and Royal Ascot during June, tennis fans have their sights set on the start of Wimbledon as the month ends and everyone starts to hope for some summer weather.

I would like to offer you a selection of music here which I hope reflects at least some of the aspects of June or as it is sometimes styled “Flaming June” but I wonder, is that is a description of the weather we can expect or is there another and completely different reference here?

*To read the full reflection please click on the image below*

It is in fact a common misconception that “Flaming June” is some sort of indication of the characteristic weather for the month when in fact meteorological data shows that in Britain, this month is often unsettled as a series of fronts roll in from the Atlantic, sometimes called the European Monsoon. June is generally cooler and wetter than July and August. Instead “Flaming June” is the title of a painting by the Victorian artist Sir Frederick Leighton depicting a woman dressed in bright orange who appears to be sleeping on a balcony during a hot summer day. If you would like to see the picture and find out more about “Flaming June” please follow the link below

<https://www.dailyartmagazine.com/painting-of-the-week-flaming-june-by-sir-frederic-leighton/>

Despite what I have said above, June is still a month associated with fire and light both in the religious context with fire at Pentecost and in the secular world in terms of the light enjoyed during its long days. Johan Julius Christian Sibelius (1865 – 1957) was born in Finland, which at that time was a Grand Duchy in the Russian Empire. Sibelius had ambitions to become a professional violinist and as well as studies in Helsinki he went on to study in Berlin and Vienna. To his disappointment it gradually became apparent to the young Jean as he became known, that his future lay in composition rather than performance and thus began the composing career of the man who is recognised as the greatest Finnish composer yet. Not only was the work of Sibelius recognised for its musical qualities but also as a symbol of the struggle for Finnish independence from Russian rule. **“The Origin of Fire”** is a cantata first performed at the opening of the National Helsinki Theatre in 1902. The work is based on the mythological Finnish national epic, the Kalevala, which describes the theft of the Sun and Moon and subsequent events to restore light to the earth. The work is performed here by Tommi Hakala, baritone soloist, the Ylioppilaskunnan Laulajat Male Voice Choir and Lahti Symphony Orchestra conducted by Osmo Vänskä.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2X9iYr\\_ubFQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2X9iYr_ubFQ)

On a somewhat lighter note, I would like to turn now to the work of the celebrated partnership of Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein and in particular their second joint work *Carousel* (1945) which was adapted from Ferenc Molnár's 1909 play *Liliom*, transplanting its Budapest setting to the Maine coastline. The story revolves around carousel barker Billy Bigelow, whose romance with millworker Julie Jordan certainly has its ups and downs although, unlike the play, the musical has a happy ending. The musical opened on Broadway on April 19, 1945 where it was an immediate hit with both critics and audiences. *Carousel* initially ran for 890 performances and duplicated its success in the West End in 1950. The show has many memorable songs which are still well-known today including "You'll Never Walk Alone" (much beloved of Liverpool Football Club fans) and "***June is bustin out all over***" which signals the preparations in the story for the summer clambake. The song is sung here by the cast of the original film version of the show made in 1956.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=khL3AVmPj24>

Make Music Day or World Music Day is an annual celebration observed on 21 June around the world; It is a day to encourage young and amateur musicians to perform. On this day, anyone can play their favourite instruments for enjoyment as part of a celebration that now spans 120 countries where people organise free public concerts in parks, stadia, and public places, mostly for music lovers and learners. The first World Music Day was celebrated on the Summer Solstice in France in 1982 when the former French minister of art and culture, Jack Lange, along with Maurice Fleuret started the *Fête de la Musique* in Paris. In our country the event is promoted and supported by Make Music Day UK and there have been some wonderful contributions made over the past two years despite the constraints imposed by the Covid pandemic. An excellent example of what I describe is the 2020 contribution to Make Music Day by the ***Kinnaris Quintet***, a Scottish group formed in 2017 by a group of friends in Glasgow which comprises one mandolin, one guitar and three fiddles. The music was recorded in their individual homes and edited together; I hope you like it.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRvXT9\\_CU84](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRvXT9_CU84)

As I mentioned in my introduction, June this year sees the celebration by the Church of the Feast of Pentecost which occurs 50 days after Easter Day. Jesus reassured his disciples that, after he had returned to his Father, they would not be left alone but rather that the Holy Spirit, the "Comforter" would come to them and give them the strength and support needed to carry out their mission. We are taught that the Holy Ghost did indeed come to the disciples on the day of Pentecost while they were all together and came with the sound of the wind and with flames of fire which rested on their heads. We are also told that after this the disciples were also able to speak in such a manner as to be understood by all the people of the various races who were present – indicating that the message of salvation was for all people throughout the known world rather than just the Jews in Jerusalem. We too can take comfort that, if we are prepared to admit it, the Holy Spirit will live in our hearts giving us the constant presence of God with us.

*Veni Creator Spiritus* (Come Holy Ghost) is a hymn to the Holy Spirit thought to originate in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The hymn first appeared in English as the only metrical hymn in Thomas Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer* of 1549. The hymn has been used at all coronations since 1625 in the translation of Bishop John Cosin set to an arrangement of the original Gregorian chant.

Jonathan Dean Harvey (1939 – 2012) was born in Sutton Coldfield and studied at St. John's College following which in 1969 he took up a Harkness Fellowship at Princeton University.

In the 1980s, Harvey produced music at IRCAM French institute dedicated to the research of music and sound, especially in the fields of *avant garde* and electro-acoustical art music after receiving an invitation from Pierre Boulez to work there. Harvey composed a setting of "**Come Holy Ghost**" which is sung here by the Choir of St John's under the direction of Andrew Nethsingha the Director of Music.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ueq-Ju5dMls&t=0s>

Pentecost is one of the twelve "Great Feasts" of the Eastern Orthodox Church and is celebrated 50 days after Orthodox Easter. The celebration of the feast, as with all other services in the Orthodox Church, involves a good deal of music in the Byzantine Psaltic Tradition most familiar to us in the sound of the chanting of male singers. The music is significantly more complex in terms of notation compared to our more familiar staff notation and reflects the particular characteristics and requirements of the chant including quarter tones which are generally alien to our conventional techniques. As I suggest we normally expect to hear orthodox music sung by male choirs but women are not excluded and in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America the Archdiocesan Women's Byzantine Choir of St. Kassiani was founded in 2015. It is a ministry operated and monetarily supported by the sisterhood of All Saints Greek Orthodox Monastery in Calverton, NY and operates under the auspices of the Archdiocesan School of Byzantine Music. We are going to hear the choir chanting the "**Greek Orthodox Hymns of Pentecost**"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELQDE2KCYUA&t=568s>

June each year sees the official birthday of Her Majesty the Queen marked by the Trouping of the Colour ceremony held on the second Saturday in June. The practice of officially marking the birthday of the sovereign was started in 1748 for George II, but it was Edward VII who instigated the practice of moving the celebration to the summer in the hope of better weather. June this year of course has seen celebrations on a magnificent scale to mark the Platinum Jubilee of our much loved and respected Queen, Elizabeth II. A Platinum Jubilee is a unique event in this country, is something that has rarely happened anywhere in the world and is of course something that none of us will ever see again. As she promised even before her accession, our Queen has devoted her whole life to the service of this Kingdom and Commonwealth and of course many of her subjects have known no other monarch. Those of us who are a little older may not have vivid memories of the Queen's accession but we almost certainly will remember Coronation Day the following year and how we marked that. We were living in Kent in an area of no TV reception at the time but I remember the bunting and a large cardboard crown above the door of our house. Shortly after the day, our school arranged a trip to the cinema in Dover to see a film of the Coronation, imagine my dismay when I contracted chicken pox and was unable to attend! All was not lost however since, on my recovery my indulgent maiden aunt in London took me to the Pathe News Cinema on the corner of Northumberland Avenue and Trafalgar Square where the film was still showing along with coverage of the conquest of Everest.

It is difficult to select music to reflect the Platinum Jubilee as the choice is so wide however, one piece comes immediately to mind and that was written by the great William Byrd in 1580 as a prayer for the wellbeing of Queen Elizabeth I. Elizabeth came to the throne at the early age of 25 and reigned until her death at the age of 69 which at the time was a 'long life' as the anthem prays. To my mind this music is so suited to our current Queen whose strong and steadfast faith has demonstrated that she most certainly does "rejoice in Thy strength"

***"O Lord, make thy servant, Elizabeth our Queen, to rejoice in Thy strength.***

*Give her her heart's desire, and deny not the request of her lips:*

*but prevent her with Thine everlasting blessing,*

*and give her a long life ev'n for ever and ever. Amen"*

The anthem is performed here to perfection by VOCES8, the Amen is sublime!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ued6yNZNto0>

The musical resources deployed at the Coronation are mind blowing, for example there were well over 375 singers in the combined choirs. In addition, there were 15 instrumental pieces performed prior to the service and, including the fanfares, no less than 22 pieces played or sung during the service of which six were first performances. One of those first performances was the "**Coronation Te Deum**" by the well-known British composer William Walton. Although not as familiar as his marches "Crown Imperial" which was commissioned for the Coronation of George VI and "Orb and Sceptre" composed for our Queen, the Te Deum is a complex, challenging and magnificent piece, which is sung here by the Choir of Winchester Cathedral directed by David Hill. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RARpx44QnzY>

**God Save our Gracious Queen (King)** is the *de facto* National Anthem of the United Kingdom although, like much of our constitution, that is not set out anywhere in statute or Royal Proclamation but rather has come about through custom and use. The origins of the tune and the music are effectively unknown although there are a good many claims and theories. The first record of the words is in "The Gentleman's Magazine" of 1744. This text gained considerable popularity as a consequence of anti-Jacobite feeling following the defeat of Prince Charles Edward at the Battle of Prestonpans by the inclusion of the following verse:

*Lord, grant that Marshal Wade,  
May by thy mighty aid,  
Victory bring.  
May he sedition hush,  
and like a torrent rush,  
Rebellious Scots to crush,  
God save the King.*

I make no comment as to its potential applicability today!!

In common with the words, there is much speculation regarding the source and authorship of the tune to the anthem which first appeared in the *Thesaurus Musicus* of 1745 with claims of John Bull, Purcell and an old Scots carol as the origin but scant evidence to support any. The most frequently heard ceremonial arrangement of the music is that of Gordon Jacob which was used at Her Majesty's Coronation. Gordon Jacob (1895-1984) was born in London although the son of an officer in the Indian civil servant based in Calcutta. Jacob was taken prisoner in World War I, and in the prison camp studied a musical harmony textbook from the prison library, he then began composing. After the war Gordon gained an ARCM diploma and was accepted as a full-time student at the Royal College of Music (RCM) in 1920. There, he was a pupil of Charles Villiers Stanford and Ralph Vaughan Williams (composition), Herbert Howells (music theory) and Adrian Boult (conducting) – some of the finest teachers in the world. Jacob went on to have distinguished career as both a composer and arranger until his death at his home in Saffron Walden. This recording was made in Westminster Abbey in 2011, it is outstanding.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j7ujvOWWfpY>

June 2022 has truly been unique and how singularly fortunate have we been to be able to enjoy and share in it. Thanks be to God.

**Keith Day**