

Swithun or Schafernaker

Have you been wondering if the weather is going to remain fine for your forthcoming holiday or are you hoping for rain on your parched crops or garden? I think it would be reasonable to opine that, as a nation, the British are obsessed with the weather, which forms a part of almost every casual conversation. According to research conducted in 2015, 94% of British respondents admitted to having talked about the weather in the past six hours, while 38% said they had done so in the past 60 minutes, if extrapolated this means that approximately 33% of the population are talking about the weather at any one time. Nowadays we can access a constant stream of highly accurate predictions regarding the weather every minute of the day with information available on line, on a multitude of apps, in our cars, in the press and of course we can always watch Tomasz (voted in 2017 the most popular weather presenter in the UK) on our TVs!

Accurate weather prediction is of course vital to many aspects of life today but it was also pretty important to our forebears who did not have access to our sophisticated weather prediction so, in July a century or three ago who was going to answer the question “is it going to rain today?”

To read the full reflection please click on the link below;

Although weather forecasting can be traced back as far as Babylonian times it really did not achieve a sound scientific basis until the work of two naval officers Francis Beaufort and his protégé Robert FitzRoy whose names will be familiar to weather reporting aficionados. Interesting perhaps for us also is the fact that Beaufort was considerably aided in the systematic collection of weather data from Coastguard stations by William Whewell, Master of Trinity College, Cambridge. But to return to my original question, how did our ancestors know if it was going to rain in July? The answer of course is not entirely simple but observation, weather lore, superstition and tradition all played their part along with St Swithun (Swithin), whose commemoration is on the 15th July, taking centre stage in the old proverb;

*“St. Swithun's day if thou dost rain
For forty days it will remain
St. Swithun's day if thou be fair
For forty days 'twill rain nae mare”*

So, you might well ask, who was this Swithun and how is he supposed to determine the weather? Well to keep the answer reasonably brief, suffice it to say that Swithun was the Bishop of Winchester from 852 to 863 and was best known in his life for his piety and his zeal for building and restoring churches. Swithun was a humble man who invited the poor to his banquets to exclusion of the rich and asked that after his death he should be buried against the outside wall of his cathedral in order that people could walk over his grave and raindrops from the eaves drop upon it. Apparently, all was well immediately after Swithun's death when his wishes were observed but in 971 it was decided to place his remains inside the Cathedral and as this was being done there was a torrential downpour marking Swithun's displeasure. Swithun only had a short period of rest after this move since, in 1093, he was moved again to a grand shrine within the new Norman cathedral, which became the site of many miracles but no further water.

The weather legend can be traced back no further than the 17th century and is severely limited also inasmuch that it only applies to rain that falls upon St Swithun's Bridge in Winchester! As with many folk tales there has been some scientific basis to the weather pattern behind the legend in that around the middle of July, the jet stream settles into a pattern which, in the majority of years, holds reasonably steady until the end of August. When the jet stream lies north of the British Isles then continental high pressure is able to move in; when it lies across or south of the British Isles, Arctic air and Atlantic weather systems predominate.

Following that rather lengthy introduction I should like to offer you a selection of music relating to both Winchester Cathedral and Rain.

Judith Weir (b.1954) was born in Cambridge and studied music at King's College from whence she graduated in 1976. Judith Weir has had a distinguished career in composition with her greatest successes being in the field of opera and theatrical work although, that said, her orchestral and chamber works have also achieved international recognition. In July 2014 Weir was appointed as the first female Master of the Queen's Music and I am sure many of you will have enjoyed the anthem she composed for Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee Service in St Paul's Cathedral last month. In 2001 a piece entitled "***The Welcome Arrival of Rain***" was commissioned from Weir by the Minnesota Orchestra on the occasion of the orchestra's¹ centennial, it was first performed on 22 January 2003. The work is inspired by the arrival of the monsoon in India, when aridity is pierced by life-giving rain; and humans, animals and vegetation revel in sudden activity and fertility. Although the monsoon is expected yearly, its arrival is always joyously surprising. The music's title was inspired by a passage from the 18,000 verse Hindu text, Bhagavata Purana. The work is performed here by the BBC Symphony Orchestra.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZU4PBYjDtkw>

I was confirmed on the 16th April 1961 by Faulkner Allison the then Bishop of Chelmsford who, I have to say made a big impression on me at the time. Shortly after this event Bishop Faulkner was translated to Winchester and I can remember now my disappointment that our lovely bishop had been spirited off to some alien diocese. My feelings were somewhat mitigated by pride when our parish priest explained that the Bishop of Winchester ranks only after Canterbury, York, London and Durham in the Church of England hierarchy and thus it was a great honour for Bishop Faulkner to be selected as a successor to Swithun. Geoffrey Stephens (1934 – 2020) was a successful British songwriter who, at one time managed the singer Donevan. In 1966 Stephens wrote a song in 1920's style entitled "***Winchester Cathedral***", the song was popular and Stephens quickly formed the "New Vaudeville Band" to perform it, the song was No 1 in the US charts and reached No 4 in the UK. Here is an original recording.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0GcPYzYYM9M>

Living for almost 40 years in northern Alaska, John Luther Adams (b. 1953) discovered a unique musical world grounded in space, stillness, and elemental forces. In the 1970s and into the '80s, he worked full time as an environmental activist. But the time came when he felt compelled to dedicate himself entirely to music. He made this choice in the belief that, ultimately, music can do more than politics to change the world. Since that time, he has become one of the most widely admired composers in the world, receiving the Pulitzer Prize, a Grammy Award, and many other honours.

“In the Rain” is one of four electro-acoustic soundscapes under the title of “the place we began” recorded in 2008. You will either love or hate this piece but, either way do listen to it and think of the footsteps and the rain falling on Swithun’s grave.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpuZ654e6Pc>

Frederick Chopin (1810 –1849) has figured in these reflections previously and, without doubt, will do so again. Born in what was then the Duchy of Warsaw, Frederick was quickly recognised as a child prodigy and by the age of seven he had already given public concerts. In 1830 Chopin moved to Paris where he met a great many of the finest musicians of the time including Franz Liszt with who he formed what was said to be a love-hate relationship. Over 230 works of Chopin survive; some compositions from early childhood have been lost. All Chopin’s known works involve the piano, and only a few range beyond solo piano music, as either piano concertos, songs or chamber music. Among his works Chopin composed 24 Preludes for piano, one in every available key; the **“Raindrop” Prelude in D flat Major, Op.28 No.15**” was written in 1838 while he was staying in at a monastery in Valldemossa, Mallorca supposedly for the benefit of his weak chest, unfortunately the weather was wet and the monastery damp!

The work is played on this recording by one of the greatest pianists ever, Joseph Horowitz (1903 – 1989). Horowitz was born to a Jewish family living in Kiev in Ukraine, which at that time was part of Imperial Russia. The young Joseph was taught piano initially by his mother and then at Kiev Conservatory where his talent was recognised by the Russian virtuoso pianist Alexander Scriabin. In 1925 Horowitz left Russia for Germany on the pretext of study under Artur Schnabel but he did not return to Russia but rather stayed in the West playing in Berlin, Paris, London and finally New York where he made his debut under the baton of Sir Thomas Beecham who was also making his own New York debut. Horowitz went on to play under Toscanini and most of the great conductors of the time but, like Chopin, he always suffered from anxiety and frequently doubted his own abilities as a pianist. The following performance leaves me in no doubt at all!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_6APTb3RNQ&t=137s

We are recently returned from our customary visit to the West Coast of Scotland where I was delighted to feel some rain and see the grass and bracken green with plenty of water in the burns and lochs, this is incidentally a practical issue for us as well as a pleasant sight since the house in which we stay takes its water supply from the hill therefore forty days without rain could be quite uncomfortable! Hamish MacCunn (1868 – 1916) was a Romantic Scottish composer and teacher whose musical style was often likened to the literary style of Sir Walter Scott. Given what I have just written it is perhaps not surprising that MacCunn’s first significant, and probably most successful work **“The Land of the Mountain and the Flood”** takes its’ name from Scott’s work “The Lay of the Last Minstrel”, canto vi, stanza 2. MacCunn spent great deal of his life in London where he was a Professor at the Royal College of Music and also a conductor with the Carl Rosa Opera Company. Sadly MacCunn died at the early age of 48. The work is played here by the Royal National Scottish Orchestra under Sir Alexander Gibson.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c4p7SLbWdGg>

Winchester Cathedral has a long history of choral music which can be traced as far back as the 11th century, so not so long after Swithun was bishop. Nowadays the Cathedral has boys and girls in the main choir although only boys attend the Pilgrims School, which is the Cathedral Choir School with the girls, who are older than the boys, being drawn from schools in the local

area. England is one of the very few remaining countries in Europe where cathedral choirs sing regularly as part of daily worship. This living tradition remains the envy of choir-masters around the world and a joy to all of us who are privileged to listen. In this 2010 recording we hear the boys and men of the Winchester choir singing "**O Magnum Mysterium**" which although it was written by the American composer Morten Lauridsen, demonstrates perfectly the unique sound of an English Cathedral Choir – just magic, do sit back and let it envelop you as their voices fill the longest medieval cathedral in the world!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bkIDNnZ9pMk>

Dame Edith Sitwell (1887 – 1964) was a distinguished poet and critic, she and her two literary brothers made a major, if at times somewhat eccentric, contribution to English poetry and literature during the first half of the 20th century. Edith Sitwell was born to aristocratic parents who, in the manner of the time, largely ignored, and in her view, neglected her. As a consequence she in turn deserted her parents and went to live with her Nanny, when her mother died, Sitwell refused to attend the funeral. During the Second World War Sitwell's poetry received a good deal of attention and what is probably her best-known composition, "Still Falls the Rain" was published in 1941. The poem is deeply symbolic and is inspired by the bombing of London during the blitz when the bombs fell like the rain, day or night, without concern for those on whom they fell. The poem is written in seven verses, one for each day of the week with each one reflecting some aspect of the world's suffering and the suffering Christ endured for the world. Benjamin Britten set the poem to music for the unusual combination of Tenor, Horn and Piano in his **Canticle III "Still falls the rain" Op.55**. The work was first heard in the Wigmore Hall in 1955 with Peter Pears (Tenor), Dennis Brain (French Horn) and the composer (Piano). The first link below will take you to a reading of the poem by Sir John Gielgud and the second to a performance of the Canticle.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hpgXNp3iiE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-9bvZV5hH8>

Mention of Charles-Marie Jean Albert Widor (1844 – 1937) usually calls to mind the brilliant but somewhat hackneyed Toccata from his Fifth Organ Symphony, however, there is a great deal more to the man than this one piece which, incidentally, a good many performers take at a pace Widor never intended. Widor was born into an organ building family who were friends of the great French organ builder Aristide Cavallé-Coll who facilitated Charles-Marie's organ studies to the extent that, at the age of 24 Widor was appointed organist at La Madeleine in Paris. The following year at the age of only 25, with the support of Cavaille Coll, Saint-Saëns, and Charles Gounod, Widor was appointed as "temporary" organist of the Grand Organ in St Sulpice which was the magnum opus of Cavaille Coll. Widor went on to hold this "temporary" post for 64 years! Winchester Cathedral too has a splendid organ although only around three quarters of the size of the instrument in St Sulpice, The Winchester organ was built for the Great Exhibition in the Crystal Palace by the renowned English organ builder, Henry Willis who also built the Royal Albert Hall organ. On the advice of the cathedral organist, Samuel Sebastian Wesley, the Dean and Chapter purchased the organ which was installed in the cathedral in 1854. The organ was rebuilt in 1938 by Harrison and Harrison of Durham and remains in their care as do many of the cathedral organs in the country. Widor composed some ten organ symphonies and we are going to hear the 'Vivace' from his Organ Symphony No. 6 in G minor played splendidly on the Winchester organ by Richard McVeigh former Assistant Organist who is now a freelance musician.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gDgM8Hu0g54>

I hope you have found something to enjoy in this reflection and that, whether St Swithun sends us rain or shine we can always remember that these are God's gifts for which give thanks. May we also, even in these difficult economic times, remember how privileged we are and follow the example of Swithun both in his humility and his compassion for those less fortunate than himself.

Keith Day