

The Cahersiveen Church Choir

There has been a choir in the O'Connell Memorial Church for many years. A great number of special occasions have been honoured and enhanced with the addition of the beautiful music provided by dedicated and committed parishioners who gave their time and energy in this service. We are fortunate to be blessed today in that we still have a fine choir of talented and committed individuals performing this service for our church.

Music over the years

Music particularly choral music has been an essential part of Christian worship from the earliest times. At the last meeting of the disciples before the Crucifixion Saint Matthew states in his Gospel 'when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives'. Also, Saint Paul in an epistle encouraged the Ephesians and Colossians to use psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. This tradition comes to us from the Old Testament and the ancient Israelites.

Musical instruments were not used in the early Church but the organ was used as early as the seventh century. Saint Pope Gregory the Great (540 – 604) introduced plainchant or what became known as Gregorian chant which has been widely used in the celebration of mass and other liturgical events right down to the present time. Latin, the traditional language of the Catholic Church, was the language used in mass and Gregorian chant.

Very little is known about the music of the early Celtic church. The Antiphony of Bangor, composed at Columban's old monastery in the late seventh century, gives us much information about the metre of hymns and other chants but it does not contain the musical notation. Early Celtic hymns, associated with Saint Patrick and Saint Columba, including the still extant, Saint Patrick's Breastplate, can be traced to the sixth and seventh centuries. In ancient Celtic Monasteries the singing of psalms and chants would have been a regular feature of daily life. It is reasonable to assume that some were obviously grounded on Latin models but others would have come from a Celtic or probably an Eastern background.

In more recent times the Choir of the Daniel O'Connell Memorial Church of the Holy Cross has given distinguished service to the people of the parish of Cahersiveen. From High Masses to Corpus Christi Processions, Ordinations, Ecumenical services, Christmas Carols and the opening of two new Churches and for many more Church events the parish choir was always available.

From the early twentieth century the the fine operatic voice of Mrs Margaret O' Donoghue (nee Keating) wife of Dr John O' Donoghue and mother of Noreen O'Connell, The Irish House, was heard over decades at all Church liturgies. Mrs O' Donoghue was trained by Herr Gamure in Cork over three years and sang with the Moody-Manners Opera Company in London. Other voices in the choir during these years were Mary Bride Hogan, Mrs O' Donoghue whose husband was Manager of Russell's stores, Pat Godfrey, Tommy Moore and Jimmy Griffin, the Fairgreen. The organist during these years was Sr Xavier with Sr Laurence assistant organist. The

voice of Denis Dwyer was a constant feature of Church services in the 1930's and 1940's.

In 1949 Monsignor John Lane, a former lecturer in Maynooth, was appointed parish priest in Cahersiveen. He saw the need for a new church choir and approached the Presentation Sisters and the Christian Brothers as both Secondary Schools had choirs. Liam Hurley was appointed choir master and a choir composed of the students from the secondary schools was established. Sister Laurence Mealady was the organist and Sister Agnese O'Sullivan assistant organist. This choir provided the sacred music for the official opening of both the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Filemore and St. Joseph's Church, Aghatubrid. Christmas carols and music for the Easter ceremonies were also provided by the parish choir. Church liturgies in those years would have included the singing, in Latin, of the Kyrie ("Lord have mercy"), Gloria ("Glory be to God on high"), Credo ("I believe in one God"), Sanctus ("Holy, Holy, Holy") and Agnus Dei ("Lamb of God").

On April 27th 1960 the Centenary Celebrations of the Christian Brothers included a High Mass celebrated in the presence of Bishop Moynihan and Bro Clancy Superior General of the Brothers. The combined choirs sopranos, altos, tenors and bases, over 100 voices, of the CBS and Presentation Convent sang the entire mass.

In 1973 Fr P.J. O'Sullivan was transferred from St. John's Parish, Tralee to Cahersiveen as curate and immediately started recruiting for a new Church Choir. The first rehearsal took place in the Presentation Primary School on 10th May. The Organist was Sr. Agnese O'Sullivan. When Fr. O'Sullivan was transferred to Kenmare Sr. Agnese took over the organization of the Choir until Ita English took charge in 1993. Many others, Barbara Gloinson, Mary O'Connor- Murphy, Cormac Dineen, Annette Landers, and Sr. Evelyn Maguire, provided excellent Organ music on many liturgical occasions during this time.

Soloists who performed with the Choir were Mary Jo Evans, Siobhan O' Driscoll, Aine Ni Gabhainn, Gabrielle Brisch – Middleton, Marion O'Neill and Gavin Ring, Ted Casey, the McCrohan Brothers and Danny Connor.

On Sunday the 5th August 2007 the Church hosted a concert, An Evening of Church Music and Songs, to mark the official beginning of the restoration of the magnificent Magahy Organ and Church. Professor Gerard Gillen and John O'Keeffe, two of the most prominent organists in Ireland and indeed in Europe, provided a feast of beautiful Church music in conjunct with singers Cabrielle Brisch – Middleton, Patrice O' Connor, Dean Power, Gavan Ring and Cormac Dineen.

Handel's Messiah was performed on Friday 14th December 2007 by The Kerry School of Music and Performing Arts under its Director Aidan O'Carroll. The performance, which was recorded for posterity, was made possible with the generous support of Kerry County Council. Adolf Packeiser as Director of the Kerry Orchestra has performed with the unique Orchestra and as a soloist at many Church liturgies over the years.

DVD's of both An Evening of Church Music and Songs and Handel's Messiah are available from the parish office.

On October 2012 Marion O'Neill was appointed Choral mistress with Paddy Casey organist. Since then the Choir has participated in many liturgical events such as the Thanksgiving Mass for the Presentation Sisters after 172 years (1840 – 2012) of unselfish service to the people of the area, the return on 6th September 2013 of the former parish priest Canon Billy Crean after his ordination as Bishop of Cloyne to celebrate mass and the visit on 12th October 2013 of our new Bishop Ray Browne.

Special Choir Events

This is a selection of the many events that the Church Choir has sung at over the years. Please do let us know of any events that we could include here.

1975 Bicentenary Celebrations for the Birth of Daniel O'Connell at Derrynane Abbey ; **Sean O'Riada's Mass**

9th Aug 1980 Final Profession of Sr. Margaret McCormack

26th May 1985 Consecration of Bishop Diarmuid O'Suilleabhain in St. Mary's Cathedral, Killarney

27th July 1986 The visit of Cardinal Tomas O'Fiach

July 1986 Competing in 'Togha is Rogha'. Directed by Fr.Micheal O'Dochartaigh

31st July 1988 O'Connell Memorial Church Centenary Mass

17th June 1990 Ordination of Fr. Pat Murphy and Fr. Tony Griffin

26th Nov/3rd Dec 2000 The Diocese of Kerry Millenium Pageant 'Dance of Life' at the Green Glens Arena, Millstreet. Directed by Fr. Pat Ahern

20th November 2004 Celebration Mass for 164 years of the Presentation Sisters in Cahersiveen. Broadcast live on Radio na Gaeltachta

November 2005 The 150th Anniversary of the Consecration of St. Mary's Cathedral, Killarney. 'Song of the Living Stones', directed by Fr. Pat Ahern, Choir Director Pdraig MacIntyre.

2013 The Gathering, O'Connell Memorial Church

12th October 2013 Visit of newly appointed Bishop of Kerry, Dr. Ray Browne.

Other events that our Choir regularly performs at include :

Annual Ecumenical Service at St. John the Baptist Church, Knightstown, Valentia

Variety Concerts at the Convent Hall

Christmas Lights Ceremony in Cahersiveen