

MUSIC SUNDAY 2026

I want to begin with my own personal tribute to the greatest and most colourful British artist of our generation, David Hockney who died last week. He smoked, I think, more than Maggi Hambling but his zest for life, experimentation, and joyful creativity remained undimmed. It is difficult to think of him resting in peace but I pray he will be welcomed into the glorious technicolour and wonder of heaven.

Today is 'Music Sunday' which I have never kept as such before, but encouraged by the RSCM, to which our choir has long been affiliated – I think it is good to give thanks for the beauty and art of music which serves the liturgy of the Church so faithfully and, yes, I would say, colourfully. The sounds you hear so regularly in this Church, lifts our hearts, bodies and souls to join our worship with all the angels and saints.

I say this as someone who cannot play an instrument or read music but falling in love all those years ago with someone who did, and sang, and conducted so many children, well enough said! When I first met Liz in London, she was also a member of the London Choral Society with weekly rehearsals in south Kensington. Their conductor was a very young and handsome, Simon Rattle! When I went on to theological college, there was a big concert coming up in the Albert Hall so I went along with several of my friends, pointing out all the sopranos, as you do. There was an interval of course, and the second half was much anticipated, Vivaldi's 'Gloria' but then

my mates were whispering quite loud (as ordinands and clergy seem to do), 'Where's Liz?', 'We can't see her!' I was concerned to say the least...but we were all reunited afterwards much to my relief. Liz went to the loo in the interval and then coming out (it is a huge space of endless doors and corridors), she couldn't find her way back to the stage. She got lost. The second half had begun so, yes, some official said to her, 'I can show you to the bar instead!'

There's a happy ending – she is still singing, she's not retired, she formed a children's choir, the 'Zingy Singers' at St Mary's Primary school and Sarah accompanied them on the piano for their special end-of-term 'do's'.

So for a non-musician I can honestly say that the gift of music means the world to me; and how lucky we are to host so many wonderful concerts here; how fortunate we are to live on the doorstep of Snape Maltings, and the Britten-Pears legacy.

I am sure you will also have noticed the picture of our own Musical Director, Chris, on the back of your E-News. He is inside our organ and having a blow, I think, to check just one of our pipes. It is exciting backstage there if only to see the sheer number and panoply of pipes which make up this 'king of instruments'. It is the most valuable possession of any church to insure, and the regular maintenance and tuning (to coincide usually with our big festivals at Christmas and Easter) costs anything up to £500 each time. So is it worth investing in and caring for when our Organ Fund is so low?

Yes of course, so your generosity today in particular is much appreciated as we build up that care for present and future generations. St Paul says this quite openly to the good people of Colossus, in Chapter 3, verse 16, in today's first reading. Every artistic possibility can only be offered with gratitude in our hearts. And in our context and Paul's, it is less about concert performance or perfection, it is about service to our Creator God, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is a great vocation and it has to be shared, in unison, or do I mean, with 'fortissimo'?

Lastly, I want to remember today our composers. In the pop world you will recall the great double act of Elton John and Bernard Taupin, the latter providing the lyrics (the wordsmith) and Elton (the tunes). That arrangement and partnership is still familiar to contemporary church musicians and composers. I think of the famous Dean of Chichester, Walter Hussey, who commissioned Leonard Bernstein's exuberant 'Chichester Psalms' in 1963, asking him to include a "hint of West Side Story". I think of a commission in my last Parish when Malcolm Archer was invited to write an anthem using the famous words of the Beatitudes. Sir John Rutter is still going strong, conducting and composing, a true servant of the Church and, like David Hockney, such a popular, energetic and joyful character. Today we say thank you to them all and with Mary's 'Magnificat', the greatest Christian Song for every age, we can gladly sing:

“Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord: unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice; tender to me the promise of his word; in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.”

AMEN.