

## *The Crystal Ball*

*Music for March 2017*

With this month we begin the season of Lent, the time of self-discipline without chocolate, Alleluias or the Prayer Book psalms to sustain us; but there is much fine music for this time of the Church year, and we begin on 5 March with one of the greatest of the short anthems of penitence, Purcell's *Thou knowest, Lord*. Written for the funeral of Queen Mary, and shortly afterwards used at the composer's own funeral, this poignant and deeply-felt setting of one of the Prayer Book funeral sentences still retains its power to move both singers and hearers.

The following Sunday, 12 March, we have a familiar chorus from Stainer's *The Crucifixion*, which I probably don't even need to name. *God so loved the world* is not to everyone's taste, but to many it is the musical epitome of Lent and Passiontide, and there is no denying the effectiveness of Stainer's writing in this chorus.

However, if you have a preference for earlier music, your desires will be fulfilled on 19 March: *Sicut cervus* is one of the best-known motets by the master of the High Renaissance, Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina. This setting of the opening verses of Psalm 42 ('Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks') is a joy from beginning to end, as the fine-spun lines of counterpoint unfold and intertwine with grace and apparent inevitability towards a satisfying final cadence. Anybody would think it was easy to write like this . . .

And finally we have Choral Evensong, restored to its usual fourth-Sunday slot and by a happy chance falling this year on Mothering Sunday; which means that our music need not be quite so penitential that day. We nod to Lenten austerity with the plainsong responses, and with the Tudor miniature *Call to remembrance* which serves as our introit; but Ireland in F – another addition to our repertoire – is a cheerful and tuneful setting of the canticles, and Bairstow's response to the Nunc dimittis antiphon *Save us, O Lord* is in the high Romantic tradition, with strong melodic lines, fine part-writing and an independent organ part which complements the voices without overpowering them. We hope you will join us.

*Succentor*