

Issue 2

May 2021

# *Cantemus News*

*L e t u s s i n g !*

**Unitarian Societies Day  
Friday 18th June**

**2021 Virtual UMS Conference  
Saturday 14th August**



*Unitarian Music Society*



[www.unitarianmusic.org.uk](http://www.unitarianmusic.org.uk)

# Letter from the Chair

Dear Music-loving friends,

I have been Zooming around the country, attending services and less formal gatherings, enjoying meeting up with old friends and also making new ones.

What I have found is that there are many new and interesting approaches to worship and with this, also the involvement of music. Not all to my personal liking, but interesting to ponder on as our movement moves further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



There are of course the more traditional 'hymn sandwich' services, some accompanied by the chapel's organist recorded playing the accompaniment, others using our UMS CDs.

There are some services with very 'original' structure and sometimes a very unusual choice of music. As the 'lockdown' rules ease most chapels will resume their former ways, but many of those who embraced the new technology are planning to continue to use it to support a wider congregation, either those who no longer can physically attend but also those who live far from a place of worship.

What I have also become aware of is the number of talented and music-loving people our movement has, many of whom are not UMS members, so I encourage you all to look around your Unitarian community and spread the word and encourage everyone to join in on our Societies Days session.

The '*What's in a Name?*' topic for discussion in the first issue of Cantemus News was very pertinent and I personally think that it would be great to widen and encourage musical activity and inter-action throughout UK Unitarianism; remember our aims are:

- to provide a focus for all Unitarians interested in music, particularly its role in Unitarian worship.
- to provide music education in the widest sense.

I sign off in sadness that this is yet another year when we cannot join to make music together.

With love

Valerie

*Valerie Walker, UMS Chair*

# LOOKING FORWARD

As I write this, it is the first morning in May. The sun is streaming into my flat in Brighton, the birds are singing and I too, feel especially cheerful. The planning sub-group had a meeting on Thursday and it just felt as though all of our plans are coming together.

I'll begin with the date that comes first - the Societies Day in June. UMS has been allocated one hour on Friday June 17th in which to showcase our society. Planning the conference has seemed quite straightforward (to me) because each of us have attended so many, we know the layout, what people like, it's old hat. But the socs hour is new, uncharted territory. It has been...nerve wracking and we've started to feel the pressure. However, with most things in life (well, in my life) once you devise a plan and write a to-do list, all the worries are somewhat mitigated. And now, we're onto a cracker.

Yours truly will be leading, so I'll open with a quick hello and then an introduction of who we are. The hour will then be split into sections titled - "What we do, Why we join, Where we're going." Keep an eye on your inboxes, because we've come up with a list of questions that we'd like you to record, or video, yourself answering and we'll use these throughout the hour. Because why would the movement want to hear just me the whole time? Yes, I love this society, but I'm not the only one. We're over subscribed every single year, there's a reason for this - and it would be great from everybody's voices to tell the movement why. Favourite memories, bonds made and why you attended the conference in the first place - we want to tell it all! However, we are a music society, not a talking society, so everything will be interspersed with musical excerpts, from our informal concerts, to set works, to (hopefully) you playing or singing at home. The title of our hour is, after all, *Sixty Musical Minutes with UMS*. I hope that you'll get involved, and that you'll come and support us too!

The second item on the agenda is of course, our Virtual Conference in August. We've drawn up the itinerary but still have some things to finalise (and it's a little way off yet) so this will be circulated, along with the Zoom link, nearer the time. We thought a day seemed like a long time but actually, we filled it up pretty quickly! Along with opening reflections and epilogue, we'll also have some vocal and muscle stretches to start the day, an hour of singing our favourite pieces that David Dawson composed, a musical quiz (which I am so excited for!), of course our AGM - where we will appoint a new Chair - and a session where we discuss the future of UMS. I am so looking forward to this day. I think it's going to be vibrant and fun, and although I am sad that we will not all be together, I am so happy that we will be making some form of music together. And next year, the sub-group can really get our hands dirty organising an in-person conference!

I hope this gives you a good idea of what's in store for the society in the coming months. If you have questions, queries, or anything that you'd like to get involved with, please email me at [unitarianmusicsociety@hotmail.com](mailto:unitarianmusicsociety@hotmail.com). Thank you so much for everybody who has already come forward to lead sessions and contribute in whatever way, we really appreciate it.

Until I see, or write, to you all again... Keep on, keeping on.

*Elizabeth  
Organising Sub - Group*

# Volunteers – WE NEED YOU



Do you have musical-related topic  
you are passionate about?

Would you like to have 50 eager music-minded  
Unitarians hanging on your every word?

**Then we have the platform for you!**

We have 4 EXCLUSIVE 15 minute slots available during  
our Unitarian Music Society Virtual Conference  
for participants to inform, educate and delight our  
members with any music topic they love.

Would you be willing to do a talk  
as part of our programme?

*Please contact the UMS Sub Planning Group via  
Elizabeth Rosenberg  
[unitarianmusicsociety@hotmail.com](mailto:unitarianmusicsociety@hotmail.com)*

*( Organising sub-group - Elizabeth, Jo, Isabelle, Elly, Esther and Lyanne )*

# Thoughts on a Vision for UMS

The starting point for me is the setting out of our Aims as in the Constitution:

The aims of the Society shall be:

- a to provide a focus for all Unitarians interested in music, particularly its role in Unitarian worship.*
- b to provide music education in the widest sense.*

These are in my view sufficiently flexible to allow for a wide variety of responses in *what* we actually do and *how* we do it. We have done pretty well in the past, I think, in terms of the wide variety of things we have done - different types of music, how to use music in services, in practical terms singing, playing, even dancing. All sorts of music combos! And as to *how* we do it, hopefully it's mostly done in an atmosphere of fun, friendliness and mutual respect, the best contexts for learning. We should continue in that vein.

**What might change?** Perhaps an even broader range of music genres and also learning how to harness new technology to achieve our aims.

We should continue to provide bursaries for young people and encourage them to participate. There are implications that come from this - 1) this costs - so our healthy bank balance should not burn a hole in our pocket; we need to have funds available for bursaries (and we won't always be able to raise as much money through CDs); 2) we need to ensure there is sufficient in our programmes (content and style of delivery) to entice young people to sign up to our conferences; and 3) we need to consider what conference dates might work best for young people and, where necessary, their parents.

Weathering the storm of the pandemic. Regarding personal storm weathering, I could say something about the Self Isolation Choir but perhaps someone else will cover that as an article. But sufficient to say learning and recording with the Self Isolation Choir (and in my case the Orchestra too) has helped to keep us sane and busy. I am sending a picture of Helen recording the soprano part of Allegri's Miserere (with its top Cs!) in our conservatory - the nearest we get to a Sistine Chapel in our house!



*Best wishes, Richard and Helen Merritt*



# Music at Dublin Unitarian Church in a time of pandemic and lockdown

The minister and congregation of Dublin Unitarian Church, like everywhere, have had a confusing and upsetting time since March 2020. Over four distinct periods, each with their own distinct set of characteristics and issues that were necessary to address, we have had to adapt our services and broadcast it in different ways. Congregational and choral singing has been against the rules so my task has been to create or source music for use in the church service.



We settled, after a while of experimentation, on a service with 6 gaps for music - 3 hymns, something after our silent meditation, and music at the beginning and end of the service. At the beginning, when the service was pre-recorded and assembled using computer software (coincidentally but happily and conveniently by me), I would record the music on my piano at home and then 'fly' it (with the other contributions sent to me by email by our minister and readers) into the sound-editing software from where I could create an mp3 recording.

I made an executive decision at the time that simply to play the hymns (with all the verses) might be nice for people who would like to sing them but, for some, the act of singing them on their own might be a bit longwinded and, maybe, miserable so, instead, after playing one verse, I decided to improvise with the tunes a bit to lead the listener on a bit of a musical adventure before arriving back to the tune for a final play through - two verses played straight separated by an improvisation informed by the hymn, part performance, part worship aid. This was initially confusing for some of our congregation who were hoping to sing at home but has been accepted as a deviation from the norm to try and allow for the adaptations that are necessary at this time. Once the congregation are allowed to sing again, I will be happy to go back to playing the hymns straight for the congregation to sing to. I fear this may be a while away.

During July, August and most of September, we were back in the church with a limited congregation (pre-booked) and I played music in the appropriate spaces each week while we broadcast the service on Zoom for those who were not able to attend in person. From September 20th 2020, Irish government restrictions asked us to stay at home for a second lockdown. In place of our pre-recorded services which were considered very dry and not very interactive, we broadcast our services for 2 ½ months on Zoom from home.

This afforded me the opportunity to film my contributions and put them on YouTube (look for my Corona Music playlist if you are interested). I also took the opportunity to record some of them on the organ in the church which was fun and gave our congregation a reconnection with the church building, some of them for the first time since March. I also took the opportunity to intersperse some YouTube videos of favourite classical, choral and secular songs using videos from YouTube, in some cases highlighting musical acts from Ireland who I count amongst my friends and otherwise focusing on repertoire that would aid our worship.

Since the New Year, and Ireland's third lockdown, our minister and one reader have been back in the church using our new webcam to broadcast the service, but with no congregation. At the time, I made the suggestion that, in order to allow for maximum safety possible, and in line with government requests to curtail unessential journeys, that I would record my musical contributions on a CD to be played in during the service. This has proved very successful and has allowed me create musical contributions with multiple musicians and singers which wouldn't have been possible live due to restrictions and geographical limitations.

We have had two joint services this year with a congregation in New York City, in May and December. For the second, which was on the day that would have been our annual Carol Service, I took it upon myself to co-ordinate a composite video of the carol *O Little Town Of Bethlehem* using elements of both American and British tunes (it is also on YouTube). The process was tricky enough for both me and less technically minded congregation members to get their heads around but those who took the challenge committed with great energy and we got the job done. At the time, I was hoping not to have to do it again (first time out, it was a lot of work) but, actually, our church choir (with various friends) have done another three since - *All You Need Is Love* (for Valentine's Day), *Here Comes The Sun* (for the Spring Equinox), and *If Ye Love Me* by Thomas Tallis (for Easter) although we haven't taken on the extra pressure of the video element so these ones aren't on YouTube. The congregation love hearing the choir and the variety of having different musical offerings in the service so these performances have been very much appreciated.

I'm currently preparing a fifth choir musical offering - this time of David Dawson's popular anthem *Let This Be A House Of Peace*. Margaret Robinson kindly forwarded an email to the UMS membership to see who would like to get involved - thanks to those of you who replied. If you are interested but haven't come back to me yet, there's always time - I'm at [josh@joshjohnston.com](mailto:josh@joshjohnston.com)

It's been a challenging year that has required patience, flexibility, resourcefulness, good humour (not always in full supply from me but I try) and positivity. This year has taught us in Dublin about all of these things as well as providing us with new technical skills and processes which we will not jettison just because we are back in the building. Despite the trauma and hardship, it has been a positive learning experience for us.

*Josh Johnston*



The GA has a new website as we all know. It is using the Wordpress format and will be asking congregations to reconfigure their sites later this year. They will be offering a template to help with this changing process.

I have greatly enjoyed and appreciated working with John Wilkinson on both the Glasgow and UMS websites. I contributed the design layouts and he has been our technical wizard, bringing them to life, on-screen. Together, we hosted and up-dated the site. John plans to take his much deserved retirement fairly soon so we need to find someone in our membership who has a working knowledge of Wordpress to take over. Failing that, our society will need to pay for a commercial hosting service.

I will be stepping back from all website involvement at the same time as John. I am too long in the tooth to start learning Wordpress and my input has always been the *design* element rather than the technical know-how.

We owe John a huge debt of gratitude for all his help (as do many churches and chapels). He recently commented in an email to me - *“ Hope this doesn't seem too unkind but at my age it's now down to the younger generation to take on the responsibilities. I think the GA template offer is a reasonable one, and is already working for the Manchester District - I might be able to offer some support on a short term basis. Remember I'm retiring but I'm not dead yet! “*

I am told that Wordpress is fairly user-friendly. We need to discuss this situation at our forthcoming virtual AGM in August. Unlike a chapel or church website, the UMS website information does not need to be constantly up-dated, so it should not be too much of a challenge to run. **Would you be willing to take on this role for UMS? I would love to hear from you!**

**Lyanne Mitchell** - [lyanne.mitchell@mac.com](mailto:lyanne.mitchell@mac.com)



*I hope to have all issues of Cantemus News posted on our UMS website (while it exists in its present form.) This will allow members to revise issues before each deadline for contributions.*



## Some musical musings

This is something of a potpourri, hence the title! Some musings as I read through the first issue of Cantemus News.

First of all, I would like to congratulate Lyanne on the first issue. At last I can read through it online without playing 'hunt the page' first - I usually gave up! The font is large enough to read easily and the layout and graphics are lovely. Top marks, Lyanne!



I think the title for the news sheet is great and also love Lyanne's suggestions for a new title for the society - though I will struggle not to think of it simply as UMS! Perhaps we need a competition to see who can come up with a new title based on the same acronym?!

At our last conference back in 2019, I was telling Adrienne about my Zoom violin lessons and she suggested I should write about it in Cantemus. I never got round to it then, so here goes.

The company organising the lessons is called *My Space Music*, and was specifically organised to enable children in far flung areas of Britain to access quality music tuition across a broad range of instruments. Because the teachers don't need to be local, the company is able to recruit the best from around the country. I have had a number of teachers over the years, both as a child and as an adult, but learnt so much more in the two years in which I had these Zoom lessons. Indeed, Jack was a victim of his own success. After two years I felt I needed time to apply all the techniques I had learnt, so for now my lessons have ended.

Music has very definitely sustained me through this past year. Despite no orchestra or any other opportunity to share, I felt the daily hunger to play my violin. Another bit of technology that has been a lifeline is an app called *Tomplay*. For a monthly subscription this offers online sheet music for most instruments from *Twinkle Twinkle* to Grade 8 and beyond. Not only this, but through the backing track one can select to hear the solo part, the piano (or orchestra) part, or both, to play along with. A marker in the score follows the music and helps keep you on track.

When my mother passed away in January this year, I was determined to keep playing, but hadn't the heart to play my favourite pieces, so I practiced scales and studies instead! No loss when I got back to playing pieces again.

And now we are well into spring 2021. Sad that there will be no conference this year, but I remain positive and definitely believe there will be a conference again - sometime!



*Esther Hudson*



## FEEDBACK FROM LAST ISSUE

It has always seemed to me that UMS provides an excellent programme for its members and doesn't require too much fundamental change but rather a development for the future built on that.

The name is fine.

To be more integrated within the Unitarian movement using the gifts of our musicians to provide good quality, useable music for the movement eg. to build on work such as is being offered by Uni-sing and Music in the Air – Myrna's Monday evenings training sessions.

Castle Donington Fellowship hasn't been meeting other than informally with each other on zoom, by email or on the phone. The NUF don't meet either. However, members of both have benefitted from all that has been offered on-line and have seen and heard ways in which visuals, music and meditations have been shared and used from around the world.

Yes, zoom is here to stay, used in new and developing ways not instead of meeting together but rather integrating with it as members from the UMS as some are beginning to do already eg. Josh and Mark Hutchinson. Congregations and groups are crying out for more home-grown material free from copyright restrictions. The material produced doesn't have to be only hymns but music which would be useable within a worship service or gathering.

I'm sure others will come up with far more inspired answers. I know too how, like Josh, Lyanne has been working on hymn writing as we move forward. There are others in the movement too and I know that Myrna is working towards this on her Monday evening zoom sessions. She is a gifted teacher.

I was looking forward to the new hand bells being played at Hucklow this year and am in discussion with Josh about a new piece written especially to celebrate this, which will also include other instruments. However, much will happen before we all meet again at Hucklow, but in the meantime I'm glad to see other UMS members working hard in the background towards a wonderful reunion of musicians and almost musicians.

*Joan Wilkinson*





## UMS Summer Conference 2022

I wrote a short article for the last issue of *Cantemus*, giving an update on "*Oliver's Journey Home*." My contact in Bridlington has not come back to me, despite a follow-up email, so maybe they are not interested or are not yet in a position to say either way.

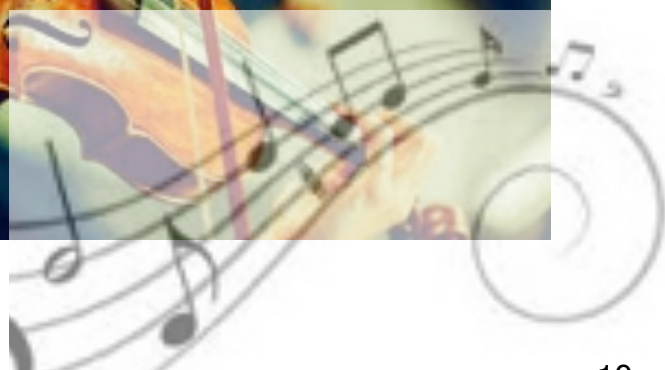


Be that as it may, I feel that the Society owes it to David to make the musical the centrepiece of next year's Conference as 'the main work.' I can't tell you how many hours of work went into its composition and I think it would be a great shame if we didn't make the effort to honour his intentions and bring the show to life. Most of you know how lively and appealing the music is and I think we would have great fun putting it together.

I understand that we will be honouring some of David's contributions over the years at this Summer's virtual conference. When we meet again in '22 there might also be a place for a short retrospective of the works we sang under his baton over the years. These items would be a fine tribute to his memory - our way of expressing gratitude. I'm sure Christine would be delighted if we showed appreciation to David in this way.

Such are my thoughts, and I will leave them with you to ponder.

*Nick Morrice*





# What's in a name?



There have been a few responses to the idea of changing our name - replacing the word 'Society'. Here's a selection of the comments :-

I said when the suggestion first came out that changing the name is a good idea. Having thought about it, I can't come up with any other alternative to the two suggestions. Of the two, I slightly favour 'Unitarian Music Makers' because the acronym UMM is better than UMN. (There is also an allusion to Elgar's setting of the poem 'We are the Music Makers' which we did one year I recall.)

**Adrienne Wilson**

I'm not too worried about the word 'Society' but 'Unitarian Music Makers' is a good name and certainly less formal. 'Network' to me seems only marginally less stuffy than 'Society' actually, but I would have no objections to our using it.

**Richard Merritt**

**Joan Wilkinson** thinks our existing name is fine.

**Esther Hudson** likes the suggestion for a new title for the society - though she will struggle not to think of it simply as UMS! She comments that perhaps we need a competition to see who can come up with a new title based on the same acronym?!

I would be happy to vote for *Unitarian Music Makers*. This name sounds friendly and far less formal. I believe it gives us a younger image.

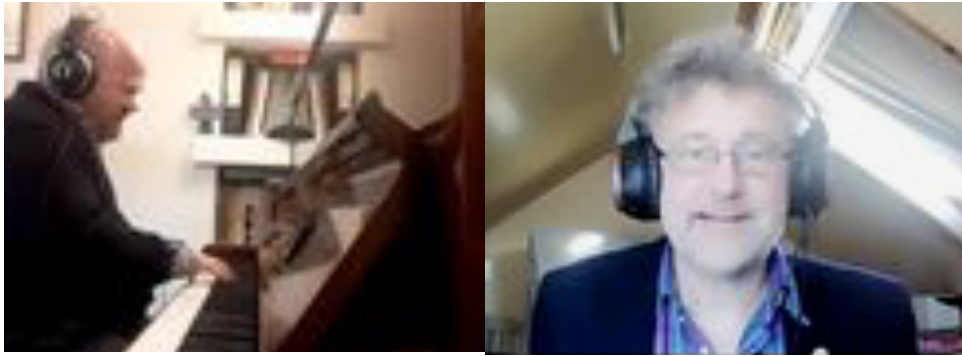
A change of title signals that we are moving on and evolving. We have been forced to take a serious break because of the pandemic and the tragic loss of David Dawson. This is a good time to take stock. I hope there will be time to discuss this name issue at our virtual Conference in August .

**Lyanne Mitchell**

*PS - at the risk of being facetious, if we added an 'H' for happy...our new acronym would be 'HUMM'.(only joking!)*

## Unitarian Music Makers

*'We are the music-makers,  
And we are the dreamers of dreams,  
Wandering by lone sea-breakers,  
And sitting by desolate streams;'*



## MindTravels

This is a new creative venture between myself and Rev. Mark Hutchinson (Cotswold Unitarians). Meeting him in Great Hucklow at a UniComms conference in 2016, I got a lift back to Manchester Airport from Mark and we talked about the weekend and what we were both doing - personally and in our separate congregations.

Mark took a copy of *The Shape Of Things*, my 2010 piano solo CD and began using it to underscore services of reflections and meditation sessions he was leading as a lay preacher. Later, he suggested to me the idea of creating new reflective meditations using his words and my music.

In November 2019, we met in Dublin and recorded a session with him bringing words to the studio and me completely improvising behind. This will eventually form the backbone of a CD but that is for the future - we decided soon after that maybe we were leaping forward too quickly.

In November 2020, we were asked to create a video reflection for International Transgender Day of Remembrance in association with Rosslyn Hill Chapel. This has spawned a series of video reflections which we have undertaken to produce on a (roughly) fortnightly basis since the beginning of December.

We have a Facebook page - all are welcome to like and share and the videos are also posted on their release on my YouTube channel and Instagram.

<https://www.facebook.com/mindtravelsattentions>



*Josh Johnston*



## Upholding Musical Traditions or which direction(s) are we going-in with our service music?

Many Unitarians were raised as Unitarians. Some, like myself, joined late in life. I am a North American ex-pat, living in Germany, and I belong to EUU (Unitarian Universalists of Europe), which is comprised mostly of ex-pats like myself.

American UUs are very diverse, and I wonder what musical traditions we have that unify us? In our group some like traditional hymnbook hymns, some like 'popular' music, and some like New Age. Should we try to include something for everyone in our services?

I come from a Methodist background, and am used to hymnbook hymns, many of which are from British and European sources. I was trained as a classical musician, and I love good 4-part harmony. So, the trend I see, getting away from what we have in our hymnals, disregarding the traditional, alarms me.

Progress is good, and inevitable, as we try to be inclusive and attract young people, but where are the roots that unify us? Congregational singing is a powerful unifier, so what we sing should be accessible, relevant, and appealing.

I would love to hear from you. Maybe we could have a discussion at our next UMS meeting.

*Marcie McGaughey*



## **IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM UMS SECRETARY**

This is a reminder to UMS members of the renewal date for Unitarian Music Society (UMS) MEMBERSHIP, as it is *before* the virtual UMS AGM in August.

***Please send your payment by Friday 13th August at the latest.***

**UMS Membership rates** for the year  
**1<sup>st</sup> July 2021 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2022 are:**  
Individual **£7**; Youth (aged 18-25) **£2**; Youth (under 18) **free**  
**Churches:** Voluntary Contribution

Thank you - regards  
Margaret R

## **... And Finally ...**

**Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this issue. Your participation is much appreciated.**

Please send contributions to issue 3 of *Cantemus News* to -  
[lyanne.mitchell@mac.com](mailto:lyanne.mitchell@mac.com)

(or post to 49 Mount Stuart Road, Rothesay,  
Isle of Bute, PA20 9EB)

**No later than FRIDAY 24th SEPT (earlier if possible)**

Best wishes, Lyanne Mitchell  
*Cantemus News Editor*



*See you there!*

<b>Friday 18th June</b> <b>2.45 - 3.45</b> <b>'60 Musical Minutes with UMS'</b> <b>Zoom Societies Day</b>	<b>Saturday 14th August</b> <b>UMS Virtual Conference</b> which will include a mini-tribute to David Dawson
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