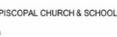


We are CONNECTED by Music

Communal worship lies at the heart of Saint James' spiritual life, and music plays an important role in almost all of the worship services that we offer. It is the mission of Saint James' music ministry to aid the congregation in offering up praises to God.

Episcopalians have a musical heritage that is one of the world's richest and most deeply spiritual. For over 500 years, Anglican church music has sought to tell the Christian faith in authenticity and truth. Our music is not a homogenous product, but an extremely diverse and multi-layered art form that celebrates and encompasses many different traditions.



CHOIR ROOM VIEW

SEP 23, 2016

Kerns Group Architects, P.C.
105 N. Maple Ave., Suite 202
Falls Church, Virginia
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Renovated and Expanded Music Room to be Dedicated in 2018

You might be interested when singing hymns, to read the small print below each one and note the many and varied sources of the poetry and the music.

One of the most exciting and most anticipated outcomes of the CONNECTED Capital Campaign will be the creation of a permanent, dedicated space for our thriving music program. The renovation plans include adequate space to store robes, music, and instruments. Once the renovations are completed Jesse, the adult choir, the children's chorale, and the hand bell choir will have the rehearsal space they need. The planned music space will also free up the pews that are currently blocked with the hand bell tables.

We recently sat down with our own Jesse Ratcliffe to talk about who he is, how he came to be with us, and the importance of church music.

"The music is the momentum that keeps the sermon and the scriptures moving."



Why don't you start by telling us a little bit about yourself?

I am originally from Hinton, West Virginia which is a small, one stoplight town. I grew up attending a non-denominational country church. My parents are not musical - I was really the black sheep in that regard. The generations before my parents were the musicians - one great-grandfather who reportedly could play any instrument; a great-grandmother who was also musical; and my mom's dad could play guitar by ear, but no one was what you would

call a musician. However, it was my dad's mom who really fostered my love of music.

Tell us all of the instruments you can play.

I play the piano, carillon and organ. In middle school and high school I played the clarinet. I was in the marching band which was really the only musical outlet there was at my school. I have not played clarinet in years.

Do you have a favorite hymn?

I do have a favorite hymn - #390 "Praise to the Lord Almighty." I love that hymn because it clearly says what Sundays are all about. A person who has never been to church could walk into the sanctuary, hear that hymn, and get a clear understanding of why we are in church. The words are beautiful and powerful.

What kinds of music do you like? Do you have a favorite song?

I don't really have a favorite song, but I am a huge fan of 20th century impressionistic music - especially the French composer Debussy. My favorite organ piece to listen to and to play, *Prelude & Fugue Sur le Nom d'Alain* by Maurice Duruflé, is from this period. It is an homage to Duruflé's fallen friend Jehan Alain, who was killed (aged 29) fighting in the war in 1940. Duruflé manipulated the alphabet to find an equivalent for "Alain" in the notes ADAAF. I love that. I love knowing what a composer is saying with his music so you can convey that to the listener. In this piece you can literally see, hear, and feel an entire life played out. (NOTE: Jesse will be playing this piece as the Prelude on 11/6/16.)

How did you end up at Saint James'?

I heard about the job opening from my organ professor, Dr. Cooksey, at Shenandoah University. At the time I had a part-time position at a Presbyterian church; had finished grad school; and was looking for a full-time position somewhere. Repeatedly, I was passed over for jobs because so many places only wanted to hire you if you had a doctorate degree. When I heard about the job at Saint James' I was initially mainly interested because it was a full-time job, and because of the new organ. Then I met Pat Avery and she spoke so highly of Ben. When I came to Saint James' to interview I was so pleased. I could tell that what the church was looking for and what I wanted were the same things: enhance worship and make beautiful music.

You are so talented and accomplished. Why is Saint James' "home" for you?

Thank you! I have stayed at Saint James' because of the support and appreciation I receive. And that support was here from day 1. I remember that on my first day there was a staff meeting - mind you this was the middle of October - and I was handed a calendar for December. The schedule was a little overwhelming on paper, but the support and appreciation I felt in that room made the schedule seem less daunting.

I feel very much at home at Saint James' because I know that my serious commitment to my job is recognized. I'm not here just for the paycheck. I want to make an impact. It is such a joy to me that people know and appreciate my commitment to the church, and that extends past Sunday morning. Many parishioners come and hear me play at Luray. I even had friendly Saint James' faces in the audience when I performed in Edinburgh, Scotland. The support that I am offered really is remarkable and I am so grateful.

What is Saint James' biggest strength?

Saint James' is bigger than just Sunday morning. There is always something going on. Always. Even in the summer when you might expect the church to be quiet and empty, you will see and hear so much activity. This church is all about community and working together. The preschool initiative, the free clinic, the food bank, the Green Team, the openness to the Jewish community, the multi-generational nature of the choirs and the flower and altar guilds - these are all examples of reaching out and welcoming engagement.

What impresses you most about the church?

I really see people carry forward from Sunday to Sunday the lessons of a Christian life. I call it being present Postlude to Prelude. People at Saint James' really live their faith and that gives me so much confidence for the longevity of Saint James'. This church will continue to be here making a difference in the lives of so many for a long, long time.

Why is music central to worship?

Music allows us to respond to the sermon and to the scriptures in a different way from the way we respond by spoken words. So much of our brains are activated when we hear music. A song can really resonate. When we hear a particular song we can remember family, friends, tragedy, and joy. We can be transported by the music. I know that every time I hear "How Great Is Thy Faithfulness" I see and feel so many memories of my mentor. The rich, musical

traditions of the Episcopal Church can really get us from Sunday to Sunday because we take the words we sing and the music we hear out the doors and into the week with us. The music is the momentum that keeps the sermon and the scriptures moving.

How do you make sure all believers (those beginning their faith journey, more mature Christians, male, female, young and old) feel included in the music?

Music is an emotional thing and I want to use music to engage as many people as possible. Many people come to Saint James' from other religious traditions - or even no religious traditions - so I try to honor that by using music from the hymnal and also using music from outside the hymnal. And I practice a lot. I think about pacing a song and breath marks. I want my playing to encourage everyone to sing. I am not playing *for* people. I am not there to give a concert every Sunday morning. Rather, I am playing *with* people. I play to accompany the singing. I don't want people to get lost trying to keep up.

What are the biggest successes you have seen in the music program at Saint James'?

On my first Sunday Bishop Gulick, who is also a musician, was here. That was a bit daunting. I played the Prelude and then the first hymn and only the choir was singing. I remember thinking "What did I miss?" and then, over the course of the service, I started to realize that this was not a singing congregation. So my first challenge was to get people singing. Now, three years later, I watch the videos of the services every week and I see and hear how confidently the congregation sings. It is just awesome.

The way the choir has dug deep, trusted each other, trusted me, and fully committed to working hard has also been a great success. It was a lot of work getting through that first Lessons and Carols three years ago. The choir and I had to learn to work together really quickly. Now our rehearsals are so smooth and fun. We don't see any limitations to the kinds of music we can make. We all just buckle down and do the hard work together. The congregation has been so generous with positive feedback and praise for our hard work, too. We all feel so appreciated.

What are you most looking forward to in the planned choir room renovations?

I cannot wait to have our own, dedicated space. We float around so much because there is so much activity in the church. All of the moving around can make it hard to get centered. I love how busy the church is, but I also can't wait to be able to be in one spot. The new space will make teaching so much easier. We won't have to spend time getting chairs in place or moving from one room to the next if our practice space is being used for another ministry or activity. It will be so great to walk into the choir room and immediately get to work.

What are you most proud of in your work at SJ?

Without a doubt I am most proud of the community the choir has built. When I first started at Saint James' the choir was a group of singers. Now it is a community. I see how people check in with each other and look out for each other. They have all allowed themselves to be known to one another and to me. This openness has allowed me to be a better teacher to them. I know who will respond to the history of the music, who likes the theory, who likes the emotional connection to the music. Now I can reach out to everyone and get everyone invested in learning even a particularly difficult anthem because I know how everyone connects to music. When every single person in the choir is engaged and invested in a particular piece of music - that is when we sound the best and when we are most connected to our ministry.

What makes you hopeful and happy?

My job here at Saint James' makes me hopeful and happy. I feel so appreciated and that makes me just want to work harder. There is such great leadership in place here. The church is growing. The school is doing so well. There is good, meaningful work to do here and so I feel very comfortable putting down roots in this community. I know that what I do makes a difference. I love working with the church and I love that the kids in the school are regularly exposed to organ music either by hearing me practice or accompanying their services. Before I found Saint James' I was doubting that I would find a place to do what I love doing. Now I get to do for a living what I had hoped I would get to do. How could I not be happy?

Is there anything else you'd like to add that we haven't touched on?

Well, the choir always has room for more people! The hand bells do, too. I would also love to see more kids in the Youth Chorale. I encourage anyone who loves music and wants to work hard, have fun, and be part of a great ministry to reach out and get involved.

**THANKS, JESSE, FOR TELLING US ABOUT YOURSELF AND FOR KEEPING US
CONNECTED!**