

16th May 2021

Conducting

**“It is better to conduct with the ear instead of with the arm:
the rest follows automatically.”**

Richard Strauss, On Conducting Classical Masterpieces

I was at the special Service to mark the union of the three parishes I wrote about recently. With Covid restrictions, numbers were restricted, with everyone socially distanced and bedecked in a variety of masks. It was very strange, but everyone approached the event in a positive frame of mind.

As part of the “official” party, I was in the church’s chancel area, facing the worshippers. It was an uplifting act of worship, and we sang three good hymns. Well, actually, we *didn’t*. You can’t, wearing a mask. And the Covid regulations don’t permit singing in churches anyway. But, with words on a sheet, we stood to “sing”. The organist played with all the usual dynamics, louds and softs, and with a descant on the final verse. But it was hard not having the “full-on” singing such an occasion deserved.

During the second hymn, my eye caught an elderly lady, probably singing behind her mask, with her head nodding rhythmically to the music – and she was gently conducting with her right hand. Every phrase, every line, every verse, conducted in 4/4 time, and, at the conclusion of the final verse, her invisible choir was brought off positively with a firm flourish. Was she conducting herself, me, those around her? As I watched, I decided she was conducting no more or less than a celestial choir. No singing? The whole place was *filled* for her by a massed choir of thunderous praise.

We’re told we should “dance when no one is looking and sing when no one is listening”. But I’ve got a new one now. We should conduct when no one is singing! The lady wasn’t conducting by her hand, or even “with the ear” as Richard Strauss suggests. She was conducting from the heart. *That’s* what came automatically to her. Richard Strauss also wrote, “Conducting is, after all, a difficult business – one has to be seventy years of age to realise this fully!” But there again, as that lady taught me, when you’re over seventy and completely absorbed in praising God, *even* with no one else singing, conducting isn’t really such a difficult business at all.

A prayer for today

*I praise you with my voice. And when my voice falls silent, I praise you with my heart,
and join with countless others in thankful praise. No one can silence that. Amen*

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