

JOYFUL NOISE? THE WHY, WHAT AND HOW  
OF MUSIC IN CHURCH

Tim Rishton

**Holy Trinity Press, Skipton ISBN 0-9554393-0-2 p/b 250pp £15.75**

This ambitious book sets itself a huge brief in the form of a handbook for the parish organist, covering everything from accompanying hymns to using humidifiers – primary, and sometimes pressing matters, all of them, and the advice here is immensely sound, wise and informative. Just as useful are passages about humility, diplomacy and courage. Then there's how, diplomatically, to engage with the loud singer in the congregation who has his own tempi, phrasing and compulsion to *rallentando* at the end of each verse; or how to make expressive use of silence. A rich, deeply considered compilation. In fact, if only the book had an index it would recommend itself as an indispensable *vade mecum*.

An illuminating feature is its references to Lutheran practices in Norway, where Rishton has taught. It reminded me of the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, with conventional courses in performance and composition, but also qualifications in Teaching and Church Musicianship. At a stroke Finland has largely eliminated what are two perennially problematic areas of British musical life.

Where Rishton is most interesting (in the Why? section) is where he is also most contentious. Recognising candidly 'a substantial group of agnostic organists', he argues very firmly that church musicians should be 'theologically competent', and goes on to lament 'that we have lost sight of the biblical concept of music as spiritual warfare'. When that expression first crops up it is in the context of Joshua, trumpets, shofars, and so on, but later it becomes clear that what he really means is something much more militant and (if my residual theological memory serves me right), actually rather Manichaeic – so, quite frankly, not all that attractive to people of a more quietist disposition. Is he really unaware of, or is he blinded by, his own conviction to the complexity of this issue? And, indeed, to the irony that some of our best hymn/religious composers have been very considerable doubters? But he actually cites one of them (VW) with (innocent?) approval. Better, I think, to have made this the subject of another book, and to have concentrated instead upon the handbook, which is arguably its real forte anyway. Even at this rather high price, it's worth it for that.

**PETER DALE**

---