

RSOM CANADA

CANTABILE!

Advent 2017 Edition



The Silence of Expectation

By Dr. Michael O'Connor

This year we have been commemorating 500 years since the start of the Protestant Reformation, when a young Augustinian friar and theology professor posted 95 theses for disputation on the university notice board—the door of the Castle Church—in Wittenberg. While many of the commemorations have focused on matters of theology and institutional identity, we should not overlook the musical significance of this anniversary.

According to musicologist Robin Leaver, Luther's liturgical reforms responded to the "two basic silences" of the traditional mass of his day: the silence of the congregation attending; and the silence of the priest as he recited prayers at the altar. Luther gave voice to both. Under his leadership, there was a growth in congregational singing and choral education. There was a new musical role for the presiding priest, too, whose recitation of the Lord's words from the Last Supper were to be sung in a clear voice—proclaimed using the same musical formulae as the gospel reading, since they are also a proclamation of the gospel.

These principles have largely been adopted by all the main line churches in the West, where congregational singing is expected and where every word said or sung by ministers are expected to be audible and intelligible.

Does that mean that there is no room for silence in today's worship? Not at all. Indeed, because there is so much to listen to, the need for a deliberate approach to silence is as pressing as ever. And because musicians deal all the time with the integration of sounds and silences, they can help their congregations appreciate and embrace the role of silence in worship.

First, the silence before the music starts—taking a breath, counting beats, perhaps watching a conductor's raised hand. This is a silence of *expectation*; it declares that something of worth is about to be said, and that effort has been spent in preparing to say it.

Then there is the silence at the end of every piece, as the last notes fade. This is the silence of *contemplation*, sustaining the affect, wanting it to continue, or enjoying the resolution.

These silences are needed throughout our worship: the silence of *expectation*, a readiness to hear the word that is about to be proclaimed or preached, a readiness to engage with the action about to take place (such as the peace, or the reception of the Eucharist). And a silence of *contemplation*, making oneself hospitable to the message that has been sounded out, attending to it, listening with heart and mind (a scripture reading, or a prayer, or a sermon). Good liturgy will perform silence as deliberately as it performs music and words.

[Submit an event listing](#)

A message from the Board

“Stay awake! Be ready! You do not know the hour when the Lord is coming...” starts a familiar children's song set by Roman Catholic musician Christopher Walker. Yet, as soon as Remembrance Day is over (and even sometimes before that date) shops and seemingly everything else in public life and consciousness suddenly becomes Christmas-focussed, like that's the only thing left in the year of any significance. Black Friday, which is now a whole weekend (or week) event, brings North American consumerism to a chaotic riot, where “i” overtakes “we” and society entirely loses its collective mind. Society as a whole has become so obsessed with instant gratification, that we no longer know the concept of waiting, or saving up for something, or even accepting that we can't have the latest whatever-it-is. What are we, as church musicians, supposed to do?

Advent, which contrary to many “Advent” calendars, isn't 24 days long - that's December, which isn't the same thing at all - provides us with the much-needed space (albeit only 21 days or so this year) to stop for a while, quieten down our minds, hearts and, most importantly for us, our liturgies, and spend some time truly preparing - and waiting - for the right time to celebrate the Incarnation, and, with it, our salvation. Let's hope that, one day, the pathway we model may be understood and adopted by the society around us. To everything there is a time and season...

All of us on the RSCM Canada Board wish you a happy and peaceful Advent - and Christmas, when we finally reach it.

Andrew

Andrew Keegan Mackriell,
RSCM Canada President & CEO

Voice For Life & Singing Awards

The Voice for Life programme is available to choristers of all ages. There are five levels distinguished by colour: White (for beginners), Light Blue, Dark Blue, Red, and Yellow.

The choir trainer guides the choristers through the workbooks to completion. Presentation of medal and ribbon may be presented during the worship service or before the beginning of the liturgy. There is a short service of admission, and promotion, available from the RSCM.

The *Singing Awards* are part of the *Voice for Life* programme and are formal examinations.

VOICE
for LIFE

There are three levels: Bronze, Silver, and Gold, with each having specific requirements for the singing and spoken sections. The Bronze exam may be taken after the Dark Blue level has been achieved, Silver after the Red level, and Gold after the Yellow level. Requirements and repertoire lists are available at www.rscm.com, Singers section. The examinations are conducted by examiners who have been validated by RSCM Education through a detailed process.

The fall session is coming to a conclusion. Applications for the spring session are due by March 31, 2018.

In Canada, William Lupton is the administrator and chief examiner for the Awards. Two persons are nearing completion of their validation process and will be part of the examining team in 2018.

For further information regarding either the Voice for Life or Singing Awards, please contact [W. Lupton](#).



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