

Material to support Christopher Maxim's article 'Where is Thy Zeal' in *Organists' Review*, Vol.XCV No.1, No.373 (February 2009), pp. 31-37.

In full, the title-page of the prime source of Battishill's anthem *O Lord, Look Down from Heaven* reads:

Six Anthems
and TEN CHANTS
Composed by the late
M^r Jonathan Battishill,
Organist of Christ Church, Newgate Street,
S^t Clements Eastcheap
and formerly of St Paul's Cathedral.
DEDICATED BY PERMSSION, TO THE
Hon^{ble} George Pomeroy,
By JOHN PAGE,
Vicar Choral of S^t Paul's Cathedral.
FROM THE
Original Manuscript in his Possession.
London.
Printed for the Editor N^o 19, Warwick Square,
Newgate Street,
1804.

The same volume contains the following article:

MEMOIRS of the late Mr. JONATHAN BATTISHILL,
COMMUNICATED BY
DR. BUSBY.

When Death deprives the world of an individual, whose genius and professional learning hath attracted general notice, the Public feel a secret concern at the loss; and while his Friends indulge the tenderest sorrow, and drop on his tomb the tear of involuntary lamentation, they are anxious to learn those particulars rendered interesting by distinguished merit.

The Reverend Mr. JONATHAN BATTISHILL, formerly rector of the parish of Sheepwash, near Hatherleigh, in the County of Devon, and Grandfather to the late Mr. JONATHAN BATTISHILL, had two sons, Jonathan and John. The former served his clerkship in the profession of attorney at law, with Mr. Basil Hearne, of Paternoster-row [sic], father of the present Sir William Hearne, Knight, of the same place, and afterwards married Miss Mary Leverton, of Great Torrington, in the above county, by whom he had issue, of which the Subject of this account was the only survivor.

Mr. JONATHAN BATTISHILL was born in London, May, 1738. [D]iscovering at a very early age an uncommon genius for Music, and having an excellent voice, he was, in the year 1747, placed in the Choir of St. Paul's, and under the tuition of Mr. SAVAGE, then Master of the young gentlemen of that Cathedral. He was soon qualified to *sing at sight*; and before he had been in the Choir two years, his performances there gave proofs of his native taste and improving judgment which astonished and delighted his hearers. On his voice quitting him at the usual period of life, he became an articled pupil of the above Master, under whom he continued his professional studies with an ardour and success, which, together with his superior understanding, love of reading, and high relish of the beauties of our best authors, soon attracted much notice and admiration. In contemplating the works of the great Cathedral Composers, and other first rate Masters, his penetrating mind never suffered an excellence of melody, harmony, or modulation to escape him, nor rested satisfied till he had fully discovered his Author's meaning. This anxious research, aided by constant practice on the *organ*, at once stored his mind with those riches of harmonic combination and evolution on which he formed his style, and gave him a command of hand adequate to the execution of whatever his imagination suggested; and at the expiration of his engagement with Mr. SAVAGE, he came forth the one of the first *extempore* performers in this country; having among his particular friends and admirers the late Dr. ARNE, Dr. HOWARD, Dr. WORGAN, Mr. STANLEY, and Dr. BOYCE, for the latter of which Gentlemen, he officiated some time at the Chapel Royal, St. James's.

He had now just arrived at manhood; and having a pleasing though not powerful voice; a tasteful and masterly style of execution on the Harpsichord; a fund of entertaining information

acquired by extensive reading; a pleasing manner, and a gay and lively disposition, he possessed, in an eminent degree, the power of tendering himself agreeable in every Company; and his society and instruction were courted by Persons of the highest Character and respectability. Every encouragement was offered to excite his future efforts, and promote his professional success; and no prospects could be fairer or more flattering than those with which he commenced his professional career.

Soon after his leaving Mr. SAVAGE, he was solicited to compose some Songs for various public occasions; and produced some of the best Ballads of that time; among which was the celebrated hunting song of "Away! To the Copse lead away!" Not long after this he was engaged at the harpsichord at Covent Garden Theatre, when he became acquainted with Miss DAVIES, pupil of Dr. HOWARD, an admired vocal performer at that theatre, and the original representative of *Madge*, in the opera of "Love in a Village." To Mr. BATTISHILL this young lady, whose elegance of figure, and beauty of countenance, heightened by the attractions of an excellent voice, and a sweetly simple style of singing, gave her hand, when she immediately quitted the stage, to which he never permitted her to return.

Not long after his marriage, the place of Organist in the united parishes of St. Clement, East-cheap [sic], and St. Martin Orgar, became vacant, to which he was elected; and also, soon afterwards, to that of Christ-church [sic], Newgate-street [sic].

About this time Mr. BATTISHILL published a set of twelve airs, the melodies and harmonical construction of which bespoke a highly florid fancy, and a degree of science and judgement much beyond his years and practical experience; but the circumstance which established his reputation as a Composer, was the high style in which he soon afterwards acquitted himself in furnishing, in conjunction with Mr. MICHAEL ARNE, son of Dr. ARNE, the music of *Almena*, an English Opera, written by Mr. HOLT, and produced under the direction of Mr. GARRICK, at Drury-Lane Theatre, about the year 1764. In Mr. BATTISHILL'S portion of the music, there were come Chorusses [sic] which, for their science, dignity, and fire of expression, deserved to be classed with the greatest production in that species of composition; while several of his airs, particularly the two Bass songs, "Pois'd in Heaven's eternal Scale," and "Thus when Young Ammon march'd along," both sung by the late Mr. SAMUEL CHAMPNESS, strongly picture his energy and vigour of imagination, and prove that he felt the Character for which they were written. This piece was shortly afterwards succeeded by the *Rites of Hecact*, a musical drama, in which his powers were again displayed in an eminent degree; especially in a song beginning with "A fond Father's Bliss is to number his Race," the melody of which is particularly rich and dignified. But neither these avocations, nor the attention demanded by his pupils, wholly diverted Mr. BATTISHILL'S mind from Cathedral composition. Retiring occasionally from the gay and busy concerns of life, he indulged that propensity which had its birth in the Choir, and produced a number of Anthems, the excellences of which have been universally confessed and admired. Among these we have particularly to name his "Call to remembrance" the artful and close *imitations* of the opening movement of which are inimitably fine, while the beauty and sweetness of melody in the succeeding movements are every where [sic] original and striking. He also, at the express

desire of the Reverend Mr. CHARLES WESLEY, brother of the celebrated Mr. JOHN WESLEY, and father of the present scientific and ingenious Messrs. CHARLES and SAMUEL WESLEY, set to music a collection of Hymns, written by that Gentleman, the melodies of which are peculiarly elegant, yet exceedingly chaste and appropriate.

In the Catch and Glee style he has given the most convincing examples of his diversity of taste and ingenuity; in evidence of which it is only necessary to mention his "O my Clarissa, thou cruel Fair" – "I lov'd thee, beautiful and kind" – "Consign'd to dust beneath this Stone! – and "Ye Shepherds and Nymphs of the Grove." About the year 1770 he was among the Candidates for the gold medal given by the Nobleman's Catch-club at the Thatched House, St. James's-street [sic] to the Composer of the best cheerful Glee, which Medal he obtained by his charming and well known glee for three voices, "Underneath this myrtle Shade." As proofs of the beauty and originality of his fancy in ballad composition, every one [sic] will admit the charming pastoral melody of "Ye Shepherds and Nymphs of the Grove" -- the mellifluous and affecting air of "When Damon languished at my Feet," formerly sung by Mrs BADDELY, in the Tragedy of the Gamester, -- the expressive passages in "When Beauty on the Lover's Cheek," in Almena, and above all, his popular and universally admired "Kate of Aberdeen," sung by Miss Polly Young, at Ranelagh, the beauty and sweetness of which will be felt and acknowledged in this Country as long as taste for vocal music exists.

Mr. BATTISHILL, having possessed such extraordinary resources of mind, heightened and polished by early study and practical application, the world will naturally be surprized [sic], that during so many of the latter years of his life he has appeared so seldom in the list of Publishing composers; for excepting two excellent collections of *three* and *four-part* Songs, published by subscription, twenty-six years ago, and a few Airs composed for a work projected about twelve years since by Mr HARRISON, late of Paternoster-row [sic], nothing from his pen has appeared within these last thirty years.

The fact is, his library, which was constantly encreasing [sic], and at one time consisted of between six and seven thousand volumes of the best editions of our Classical Authors, employed all the hours not occupied with his Pupils or festive friends. To this latter neglect of musical study, we are to attribute his not becoming the greatest musician the Country ever produced (Purcell [sic] excepted) and the loss of many a composition that would have done honour to the Catalogue of English music.

To this division of his time we are also to impute the late decline of that promptitude and warmth of imagination which had formerly been inseparable from his performance on the Organ. Yet he sometimes, even to the last, recovered a gleam of his native fire, and in finely-conceived *fugues* poured forth all the powers of harmony and responsive melody.

Mr. BATTISHILL was blest with an uncommonly strong constitution, but late some professional disappointment, together with this insuperable grief for the loss of his friend Colonel MORRIS, killed in Holland during the late war, visibly preyed upon his health; and he became so ill during the autumn of 1801, as to be confined to his Chamber. He was advised to try sea-bathing and the air of Margate, but these rendered him no service. He returned from that place rather worse than when he left town; and, agreeably to the advice of his Physicians,

took apartments at Islington, where his general debility still continued to encrease [sic], and where he expired on Thursday, the 10th of December, 1801, aged 63 years.

During his illness many of his friends were solicitously attentive to his situation: amongst the kindest of whom were ROBERT JAMES, Esq. of Queen's-square [sic]; Miss POPE, of Drury-Lane Theatre; Mr. GEORGE PEPYS, Finsbury Square; and Mr. GROOMBRIDGE, Organist, of St John's Hackney. On the Tuesday following he was interred, according to his dying wish, by permission of the Dean and Chapter, in the vaults of St. Paul's Cathedral, near the grave of Dr. BOYCE, on which occasion his own excellent Anthem, "*Call to remembrance,*" was performed by the Gentlemen of the Choir, as also Dr. BOYCE'S funeral anthem, "I am the Resurrection and the Life," and a Burial Service composed for the occasion by the writer of this account, whom the late Dr ARNOLD joined as one of the chief mourners, succeeded by ROBERT JAMES, Esq. Mr. CHARLES WESLEY, Mr. GROOMBRIDGE, Mr. WELDON, Mr. GLENN, and Mr. PAGE.

Mr. BATTISHILL'S retentive faculties were as remarkable as his quickness of conception, and vigour of execution, what he once read or performed he scarcely ever forgot; and the longest compositions of HANDEL, CORELLI, or ARNE, were always sufficiently within his recollection to render the assistance of the text unnecessary. His reminiscence with respect to dates and other circumstances was truly astonishing. He always knew where and with whom he had dined on any particular day, however distant, and could even recollect the subjects of conversation. If he once heard any music, it was indelibly written in his mind: and his memory remained so long faithful to him, that dining with Dr. ARNOLD no great while before his death, played to that Gentleman by rote; passages from the Doctor's Oratorio of the "*Prodigal Son,*" which he had not heard for nearly thirty years, and which the Doctor himself had totally forgot.

From what has been said of Mr. BATTISHILL'S compositions, the reader will collect, that they were marked with a peculiar strength of Idea, great force and justness of expression a masterly disposition, and a happy contrivance in the parts.

Among his amiable qualities are to be reckoned his great good-nature, unlimited generosity of temper, tender humanity towards real merit, wherever he found it, and a manliness of mind that rendered him superior to the littleness of professional jealousy.

Great Queen Anne-Street.
Cavendish-Square.

For a picture of Battishill see:

<http://www.npg.org.uk/live/search/portrait.asp?name=&search=as&desc=&grp=1028%3BComposers&lDate=&LinkID=mp53911&rNo=0&role=sit>

There are several recordings of *O Lord, look down from Heaven*. Both *Call to remembrance* and *O Lord, look down from Heaven* have been recorded by the choir of New College Oxford on one disc: <http://www.newcollegechoir.co.uk/crd/crd3510.htm>