

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. JOHN SANDERS
by John Brooks, Lay Clerk, Gloucester Cathedral Choir
from 1993 – 1994
MARCH 1994

John Brooks is an American organist, choir director and teacher, currently active in the Washington, D.C. area as Interim Organist-Choirmaster at All Souls Memorial Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C. A lifelong Anglican, Brooks's early musical training as a chorister in a large suburban parish outside New York City developed into a life vocation as a church musician. His bachelor's degree in organ performance is from the College of Wooster, and his Master's degree is from the Peabody Conservatory, Baltimore, Maryland. He is a former Fellow in Church Music of Washington National Cathedral. In 1992-1994 he worked in the U.K., first as a Choral Scholar at Wells Cathedral, then as a Lay Clerk at Gloucester Cathedral, singing under the late Dr. John Sanders. While at Gloucester, John Brooks taught in the King's School, and was privileged to sing in the 1994 Three Choirs Festival at Hereford. He is an active member of the Royal School of Church Music in America, and teaches on several of its Summer Choir Training Courses.

JWB : Dr. Sanders, it is a pleasure to be able to talk with you and record some of your thoughts and recollections on your early musical training, your 'distinguished career as Organist and Master of the Choristers at Gloucester Cathedral, and other topics. Your retirement from the Cathedral post takes effect on 1 May this year, and I personally am very grateful for the opportunity of singing in the choir under you this year. Perhaps we should begin this interview with your early years. Were you a chorister in your home church, and when did you become interested in church music?



JDS : In fact, I didn't belong to the Church of England to start with; I was brought up as a Methodist. I began to take an interest in the organ in our church, and as a child I used to creep in secretly without anybody knowing, turn the wind on, and play the Wedding March to myself! Then, I discovered I had a treble voice, but in our church there was no opportunity for children to sing because all the choirs were adult choirs. I was asked to sing solos in the Sunday services as a special feature of the morning or evening worship. Then when I went away to Felsted School I came under the Influence of the Church of England. At that time during World War 11, the school was evacuated to Herefordshire. The music wasn't all that marvellous, it was only a prep school in temporary location and there weren't many members of staff, but there was a little choir and a marvellous music master called George Thorne, who realized I had some talent and took me under his wing. There was also a lady called Mrs. Spratt who played the

organ, only she didn't play it properly as she didn't play the pedals! She encouraged me as well, so I began to learn the organ (without pedals!) and eventually started to play the hymn for school services. When the war ended and we came back to Essex where Felsted had its proper buildings, a chapel and organ, I had my first formal lessons there with Miss Joan Wake Cleveland. She was quite a character, and had connections with Gloucester and my predecessor, Herbert Sumsion. In the early days the cathedral choristers often came from poorer homes and the only way they got a Summer holiday was for the choirmaster to take them away camping. Miss Cleveland used to live near the farm in Somerset where Dr. Sumsion took the boys, so I knew about him and Gloucester early on. Later on, I became a pupil of Peter Goodman, who was on the school staff and subsequently became the City Organist for Hull and in fact quite a distinguished recitalist. His son Roy is now quite a well-known conductor, of the Hanover Band and the Brandenburg Consort. He was famous as the boy who sang the top C's in the first King's College recording of the *Allegrì Miserere* under David Willcocks.

Perhaps I ought to add that my family had been hearing about King's before I went away to school. I was at a primary school in Westcliff-on-Sea in Essex where we lived, and the lady who ran it was a Mrs. Carrington, whose son and grandson, Simon, became choral scholars at King's. And of course the grandson went on to become one of the founding members of The King's Singers .

So we were hearing an awful lot about King's then, and were encouraged to listen to the broadcasts of the Christmas Eve Service of Lessons and Carols during the war; the choir at that time was directed by Harold Darke as Boris Ord was away in the Forces. I listened to these wonderful broadcasts and that was another thing which got me interested in the English choral tradition. So, having had a Methodist background, I was introduced to the Church of England at Felsted, was confirmed, and then my interest in church music really developed .

George Thorne encouraged me to try for a scholarship at the Royal College of Music, which I did, and was fortunately successful. So I left school at sixteen, having done the equivalent of A-levels, and went to the RCM for two years.

I studied the organ with Dr .John Dykes Bower, the Organist of St. Paul's Cathedral, and piano with Edwin Benbow, and had harmony lessons with William Lloyd-Webber, the father of the two distinguished boys, Julian the cellist, and Andrew, who has written all these wonderful musicals *Cats*, *Phantom of the Opera*, and the Requiem and so on. After the RCM I thought I really ought to try to go to University, so I started trying for organ scholarships at Cambridge.

I was successful, I think on my third attempt, to get the Organ Scholar place at Gonville and Caius College. When I wanted to leave the RCM, the Registrar said, "What do you

want to go to Cambridge for?"

I said, "To get some background," and he said, "You can get that by sitting in the cafes in Paris!"

Anyway, I didn't take his advice, and took the ordinary B.A. degree in Music, then stayed the fourth year to do the Bachelor of Music. During my time at Caius, the Director of Music was Patrick Hadley, who is of course well-known as the composer of the anthem *My Beloved Spake* and the lovely Christmas carol *I Sing of a Maiden* for treble voices. He was a great character! He had a wooden leg, was rather too fond of the bottle, and a lot of people thought he was a bit of an old buffer but, as I say, he was a real character. I had composition lessons from him and found him very helpful. His contemporaries were people like Warlock and E.J. Moeran.

In Chapel, I took a lot of the responsibility for running the music, and we had a male-voice choir of alto, tenor and bass Choral Exhibitioners, so I got quite an insight into men's-voice repertoire. I conducted the Cambridge University Musical Society Second Orchestra which gave me some orchestral conducting experience, and directed madrigal groups and so on. It was a marvellous time, and obviously one had King's and John's where one could go and hear the choirs, but I was so wrapped up in what I was doing at Caius that I seldom got to those places!

JWB : Who were some of your other mentors then?

JDS : Well, there was Thurston Dart, who was of course the great authority on early music then, and Hubert Middleton, who was a disillusioned man. He thought he should have been Professor of Music at Cambridge but they appointed Hadley instead! I continued having organ lessons with John Dykes Bower in London, but in fact I found I was my own mentor. We all did an awful lot on our own. We had a Gilbert and Sullivan society in College and used to put on concert performances of the operas, with orchestra - which I conducted. So really it was what you did yourself that counted.

JWB : So in a sense, those years were a practical "hands-on" experience .

JDS : - Oh yes, absolutely. People complain these days that university courses are getting too academic. Maybe they are, but in those days certainly the music course was really quite practically-based, and really did prepare you for a practical job in music.

JWB : What was Dr .Dykes Bower like as a teacher, and what was the St Paul's choir like at this time?

JDS : Dykes Bower was a very good teacher. The main thing he taught me was rhythm.

He set a very good example and you very seldom heard him play a wrong note. He was what you might call a fine intuitive musician and organist. I don't know that he was a "great" choir-trainer, and I really only heard the St .Paul's choir once or twice during that time. There was a remarkable alto there - Alfred Deller. Richard Latham, who ran the choir-training class at the RCM, used to describe the choir as "sounding like counterpoint with a cantus firmus by Alfred Deller." Whether that was an accurate reflection of what it was like I don't know !

JWB : Who were some of the other students in your year at Cambridge who went on into careers in music?

JDS : Well, I think most of them went into schoolteaching, and I don't think many of them are particularly well-known! Christopher Bishop, who was a year junior to me, started off as a schoolmaster, then was the International Recording Manager for Decca Records. When Sir Adrian Boult made any recordings, Christopher was his right-hand man. Then he went on to be Manager of, I think, the Philharmonia Orchestra, then the Scottish National Orchestra, and is now retired. There was another chap in my college called Peter Hemmings, who has had a remarkable career. He distinguished himself as Manager of Scottish Opera and really got it on the road, then he went out to Sydney as Director of the Sydney Opera House, and is now Director of the Los Angeles Opera in California .

JWB : He is certainly a very well-known figure in the opera world .

JDS : There were organ scholars at King's, like Hugh McLean who became well-known, and I'm sure, if I thought very hard, I could think of others ! Roger Norrington was at Clare College at the time, and used to play in my Gilbert and Sullivan orchestra, although he probably wouldn't like to be reminded of that these days !

JWB : You were required to do military service from 1956 to 1958. What musical opportunities were there for you in Germany then?

JDS : We all had to do National Service in those days, so, having done my degree at Cambridge, I was called up and went into the Royal Artillery, with a posting to the Delmenhorst Garrison near Bremen. The Commanding Officer there, Col .Warren, was a music fanatic and ran a choral society which he said I'd got to conduct. If anybody didn't turn up to rehearsal, such as the Quartermaster, the C.O. would be on the phone the next morning saying, "Where were you? "

It was quite a good thing as it gave me more conducting experience. We tried to start up a little garrison choir for the Sunday services but it fizzled out. The great thing about being in Germany was that I was able to go to the opera a lot, and of course every town had its own opera house. I got to the Bayreuth Festival, the Salzburg Festival, and there

were lots of concerts as well. It wasn't a wasted period at all, and in fact when the time came to look for a job back in England, I had been able to keep up my music so I wasn't too out-of-practice when I came for my interview at Gloucester.

JWB :_You were appointed Assistant Organist at Gloucester Cathedral and Director of Music at The King's School in 1958. What was it like working under Herbert Sumsion?

JDS : It was a marvellous opportunity because of all the aspects of the job; not only the school music but the Three Choirs Festival as well. I had quite a lot to do because Dr. Sumsion always used to leave the Friday and Saturday Evensongs to me, and also I became conductor of the St .Cecilia Singers which Donald Hunt had started up some years before when he was Assistant Organist.

We did concerts with orchestra with this group, but mostly the repertoire was of unaccompanied music, and we did try to specialize in modern music if possible. Very soon after Britten wrote his Missa Brevis we did that, and we did his Flower Songs and broadcast them on the BBC. In a way, although one learned from Sumsion, it was what you did yourself all the time that gave you the experience.

JWB : What repertoire did the Cathedral choir sing?

JDS : The choir did a lot of eighteenth-century stuff, a lot of Edwardian stuff, very little modern music, and a reasonable amount of sixteenth-century music. There were I remember, some quite ancient Lay Clerks, and I don't think many demands were made on them as far as repertoire was concerned! Various Assistants used to suggest things from time to time, particularly Donald Hunt and my immediate predecessor, Wallace Ross.

Music which had to be learned for the Three Choirs Festival was often taken into the regular repertoire, and both David Willcocks, who was at Worcester around that time, and Meredith Davies at Hereford introduced a lot of new music.

JWB : What was the choir's daily schedule? Was there still a daily Sung Matins for instance?

JDS : No, Matins had been abandoned by then, but when I left Gloucester in 1963 to go to Chester Cathedral, they were still singing Matins there twice a week. At Gloucester, the only weekday morning services were the boys-only Sung Eucharists on saints' days. The full choir sang Evensong every day except Thursday and, on Sundays, Matins was sung except on the first Sunday in the month when we had the Sung Eucharist.

JWB : How much actual training of the choristers did you do?

JDS : Well, I used to take the Probationers for a practice twice a week, and I was responsible for one of the morning practices with the full treble section, but Dr. Sumsion was away quite a lot so I often found myself in charge.

JWB : Was Sumsion composing much at this time?

JDS : No. The only things I remember him composing during the five years I was his assistant were the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in A and a Harvest anthem *Fear Not, O Land*. He had done his famous pieces like the Evening Service in G Major, the Te Deum in G and the Benedicite in B-flat before I arrived on the scene. It was only after he retired that a great flowering of composition happened.

JWB : Were the choristers always local boys?

JDS : Yes. King's was always a day school. Nowadays the boys are brought to the Cathedral in their cars, but when I first arrived they were all from within the city and came on their bikes, which they kept in the Cloisters during practices. It was unusual if a boy came from outside the city, as many do today. They were fairly average town boys – some were more academic, but generally they were rather slow-learning !

JWB : In 1963 you were appointed Organist and Master of the Choristers of Chester Cathedral, and Artistic Director of the Chester Festival. What are your memories of those years until your return to Gloucester in 1967?

JDS : Well, I would say that God didn't have as much money in Chester as he had in Gloucester. I didn't start off as Director of the Chester Festival, but actually was responsible for reviving it. There was a festival of mystery plays, but in fact the Chester Musical Festival had stopped at the end of the 19th century. I got it going again with the help of David Laing, who was Manager of the London Mozart Players at the time. We got him appointed Festival Administrator, and in fact the last big thing I did before returning to Gloucester was the Chester Music Festival, and it's still going. Now, the Cathedral choir was, well, difficult ! The boys did their best, but it was not easy. The Lay clerks all had houses around the Cathedral Green, courtesy of the Dean and Chapter, so you couldn't say, " Well, perhaps it's time you retired," because you'd be throwing the chap out of his house too! I couldn't see much possibility of change actually, so when the opportunity came to come back to Gloucester I was quite glad in a way, because I felt artistically, the choir was in a bit of a strait-jacket!

JWB : The Chester Miracle Plays are of course famous, and the lovely plainsong-style carol *Qui Creavit Coelum*, or *Carol of the Nuns of Chester* is well-known to choirs, in various arrangements. Are there any snippets of original Sanders incidental music for the plays, or anthems?

JDS : Not really! I did write the odd thing in Chester, but it wasn't really a composing time for me. We combined the music festival with the miracle plays and made a big thing out of it, but I don't think they do that now. The main thing about Chester was that I met my wife, Janet, there. Her father was the chairman of the Chester Choral Society and when I took that over I noticed that there was a young soprano who was watching the beat perhaps more carefully than the others! I was quite glad to come back south to Gloucester. I think once you've had a taste of Gloucestershire you always look on it as home.

JWB : During your time away, various changes had been set in motion concerning the Gloucester choir. How did you find standards on your return?

JDS : Very much better than when I had been Assistant! I think this was due to Seiriol Evans, a very musical Dean. He'd seen that something had got to be done about the choir and was responsible for getting in the first Choral Scholar-type singer in the bass section, in the shape of Barrie Thompson, when I was still Assistant. Michael Gillions, who had been a Choral Scholar at Christ Church, Oxford, was appointed to the tenor section, and later they replaced an old alto which improved things. Soon after I came back we had to find another new bass, which resulted in Bill Armiger coming in. Obviously too, we had to get the boys right and, honestly, I can't say that I was able to make much impression on them for the first three or four years. Gradually, the stature of the school rose, and we began getting brighter boys on entry.

Things also began to improve in 1971 when the old organ was rebuilt into a much more "singer-friendly" instrument than the old Harrison, which had a thick, opaque sound. The choir responded to the singing tone of the instrument, voiced on lighter wind pressures, so I think I'd point to that time when the choir began to improve noticeably. Also, in 1975 we took the choir to the South of France, and they really began to find their confidence then. I think ever since, one can say, hopefully, that they've gone on from strength to strength. But obviously, the quality goes up and down from year to year, depending on the material available!

JWB : Gloucester Cathedral has a particularly flattering acoustic for voices, although it is very reverberant. Do you feel acoustics plays a major role in the forming of a choir "sound"?

JDS : Yes I do indeed. A choir will naturally sing in a way which suits the building best. This building does have a "big" sound, but it's a kind resonance to voices. I have tried to get the boys to sing in an open, natural way, to complement the building's sound.

JWB : I know there are many church musicians who would be interested in your reminiscences about your involvement in the Three Choirs Festival, its personalities, and so on.

JDS : Yes, of course. Well, obviously the Three Choirs Festival is a great tradition and one is conscious of Elgar looking over one's shoulder, as well as Howells, Finzi, Vaughan Williams and people like that. By the time I got to Gloucester the Festival had lost a "father figure" really, in Vaughan Williams, who died in 1958, and people like Britten didn't take any interest in it.

Adrian Boult was prepared to take an interest though, and in my first Gloucester Festival as Director, I did get him to come down and conduct, Parry's *Symphonic Variations* I think it was. I think it's very important for the Festival to have a father-figure, and after Boult I suppose it was Charles Groves who took quite an interest. But of course he's dead now too, so we're lacking that kind of figurehead again.

I suppose the most notable episode which sticks in my memory was when we came to the 250th Festival here in Gloucester in 1977, when we commissioned Malcolm Williamson to write his *Mass of Christ the King*. Well, he didn't finish it on time and there was this big shemozzle with bits of manuscript arriving daily and him expecting us to do it! In the end we did half of it, and the complete performance came the next year in London, in Westminster Cathedral, with Charles Groves conducting and with the Festival Chorus .

JWB : What is your opinion, by the way, on the commissioning of new works?

JDS : This commissioning business is very dicey because you never know what you're going to get and whether it's going to be finished! I think my first effort at commissioning was with Alun Hoddinott, in perhaps my second Festival about 1971, when we got him to write a work called *The Tree of Life*. Every Sunday he would drive down from Cardiff at about eight o'clock in the morning, with about ten more sheets of manuscript which he'd just finished, and when things were getting a bit desperate he'd add a bottle of champagne just to keep things sweet!

Actually, I think one thing festivals can do is to arrange for second performances of deserving works, or do repeat performances in succeeding years. We did the Williamson piece at Three Choirs in this way, as well as Gerard Schurmann's *Piers Plowman*, for instance.

JWB : Was Herbert Howells involved much in the Gloucester Festivals during your years here?

JDS : He did come to the Festivals as a visitor, not regularly, but several times off and on. We did involve him a bit in 1977, and he wrote a special Fanfare to immediately precede Elgar's arrangement of the National Anthem. We did his *Hymnus Paradisi* in that Festival and he came to the performance and was very moved, I remember. He went to the Worcester and Hereford Festivals as well, but he was getting to be a very

old man by then, so we didn't involve him very much. He was always hovering around in spirit though, if not in person!

JWB : Talking about Howells one is always reminded of the magnificent settings of the evening canticles which he wrote for several cathedral and collegiate choral foundations. What are some of your insights into the *Gloucester Service*?

JDS : Well, I think it's one of the finest; I would couple it with the *St. Paul's Service* and the one for King's College Cambridge, as examples of his best work. Now, Howells was obviously influenced by the buildings for which he was writing, and at Gloucester we have this unique" echo, "or reverberation. At the beginning of the Magnificat on the second page where he intertwines the two treble parts, he's clearly exploiting this rather confused echo-y effect. Howells of course is notoriously difficult to sing. Apart from the actual notes, I think it's the phrasing and breathing which are the most difficult to cope with. I often think that in his later music particularly he treated the voices like organ pipes and just made them go on and on with nowhere to breathe! In the *Gloucester Service* you've got to fix individual breathing points very often, such as in that two-part treble section. It's a difficult piece: the notes are difficult, the rhythms are difficult, and it should only be attempted by a competent choir!

JWB : Was it the result of a commission or a specific request?

JDS : I don't think so. It was written in 1946 I believe. Having been born in Lydney just the other side of the Severn here, and having been an articled pupil of Brewer, Howells had a tremendous affection for this building, and I think he wrote the service because he just wanted to!

JWB : He used to comment on various settings having personal associations with buildings or people, so that would make sense.

JDS : That's right. With the *St. Paul's Service* for example, the building there is even more resonant than Gloucester, so the rate of harmonic change is governed by the acoustics. That phrase at the end of the Gloria in the *Gloucester Service*, where the choir sings "as it was in the beginning" and the boys soar up to that wonderful top A, is an example of Howells thinking of an arch of sound; he's obviously thinking of our vaulting and the Perpendicular arches in the Quire. It's impressionistic music, in the way that Debussy and Ravel sort of waft about without much form!

JWB : Moving on to your own interest in composition now, do you find it easier to write on commission, or perhaps to fill a musical need in the liturgy?

JDS : To be honest, I've always composed on request, really. In a busy life, much as one would like to compose for the fun of it, I've never really had the time to do that. The

impetus has usually come from somebody saying, "Can you write this for us?" as in the case of my *Reproaches*. Alan Dunstan, our former Precentor, wanted very much to use the new Holy Week services from the Alternative Service Book and asked if I could do something with the *Reproaches*; I think it's resulted in one of my best pieces! The only thing is, I didn't like the modern translation, "My People." I liked "O My People," like "O Vos Omnes," which I felt was much more expressive, so I inserted the "O!"

JWB : Did you have a period style in mind? The piece is so wonderfully chromatic and poignant that it reminds me of a latter-day Gesualdo!

JDS : I think, yes, Gesualdo was the person I had in mind! I rather like his shifting harmonic style. And again, this building! A lot of my music, like that of Sumson and Howells, has been influenced by this building and acoustic.

JWB : Your *Te Deum*, written in 1960 for the Cheltenham Bach choir, is another striking piece, very extrovert in style, demanding for singers and organist, and with a sense of spaciousness. Were there any hidden influences here?

JDS : I suppose Britten might have been an influence, and in actual fact, although I didn't know it at the time, I seem to have quoted an arpeggio figure from Walton's *Coronation Te Deum*!

It was written with a big chorus in mind, and although we do it with the Cathedral choir, I sometimes feel a bit sorry for the altos and boys having to go up to top E-flats and B-flats! I think it is more effective with a bigger chorus really, and it has been orchestrated too.

JWB : You have written some lovely anthems and carol arrangements as well, which are ideal for any choir. Do you have a favourite piece amongst your music?

JDS : Well, my really favourite piece is a song cycle for soprano, clarinet and piano called *In Praise of Gloucestershire*. I think that, along with the *Reproaches*, is my best music. The anthems and unaccompanied pieces have a place in my affections as well, such as *My Beloved Spake* which, again, is very effective in this building.

JWB : What other secular works have you written?

JDS : I've got a commission to write a thirty-minute choral and orchestral piece for the Gloucester Choral Society, which is celebrating its 150th anniversary in 1995, to be based on Gloucestershire history, I don't quite know what to call it - I thought of "Glevum Scenes", Glevum being the Roman name for Gloucester. I've also written another song cycle, based on Painswick, which was commissioned last year by that town's Festival. It's a very historic place, what with Painswick Beacon, which probably

had a Stone-Age settlement on it. And of course, it was a real "beacon" which, when the fires were lit, warned local people of impending invasions. The work is for baritone and piano, and seems to have been quite well received. I do say this, though: I find my inspiration most with sacred words, and in general I'm not much good at writing music without words!

JWB : Do you feel that the modern liturgical texts today are a help or a hindrance to composing service music?

JDS : Personally, I don't like the modern language services very much, as I don't think they fit the atmosphere and architectural symbolism of our great cathedrals. They would probably fit better in a more intimate setting in a parish church, but in a cathedral you've got to have a spacious liturgy and spacious language. Everything goes a bit slower, because of the space. Sometimes, I find using the modern words does provide fresh inspiration, and I'm not against using them, but I don't like them as much as the old words! In a way, the older words are much easier to set to music; some of the rhythms in the modern settings of the liturgy don't honestly lend themselves to music. Sometimes they are, well, too "chatterbox" and colloquial.

JWB : Who are some of the composers in England today who you think are saying important things musically in their works for the church?

JDS : Well, I think some who have died recently, unfortunately, like Kenneth Leighton. I think it's very difficult for a modern composer to write for the church because, well, church choirs aren't like the BBC Chorus! They're not used to, or happy, singing what you might call "ultra-modern" music. A composer like Leighton knows about the human voice and its limitations. Jonathan Harvey is another composer who has got something to say although he is pretty "out-and-out" sometimes! We did a thing of his at Three Choirs called *Ludus Amoris* and that was a bit over-the-top; it had a staged student demonstration in the middle of it! I think his smaller anthems like *I Love the Lord* and other things he wrote in his "Winchester era" are effective, but you've got to have a jolly good choir to sing them! I think there's quite a vogue these days for the music of John Tavener. He's got something to say, although he often takes an awfully long time to say it! His music strikes a chord with people today in its slow-moving, meditative approach, and I personally find that this strikes a chord with me. Composers have to take the limitations of the voice into account as I've said, and if they're writing for a cathedral choir, must realize the choir is already carrying a heavy daily load of music which has to be learned and sung. If you want to write things for the church you've got to write things which are, hopefully, fresh, but at the same time, not too demanding technically.

JWB : I'd like to return to the Three Choirs theme for a moment. During your years here at Gloucester Cathedral and with your colleagues Roy Massey at Hereford and Donald

Hunt at Worcester, you have maintained the Festival's honoured place in English music and introduced many significant new works to the choral repertoire. Lately there has been opinion voiced over the issue of the Festival bringing in an outside overall Artistic Director, rather than having each cathedral organist take charge musically, in "his" Festival year. What are your thoughts on this?

JDS : There seems to be a move these days in some quarters, to denigrate the abilities of the Cathedral organists of Gloucester, Worcester and Hereford to actually conduct "big" works in the Festival. If, as some people wish, an outside artistic director was appointed and the cathedral organists became only chorusmasters, then I think this would be a great loss to the Festival. For one thing, the organists wouldn't take the same interest in it, because all of them are capable of being more than chorusmasters and, secondly, you would take away some of the local "flavour". The great thing about the Three Choirs is that it springs up from the locality, and these days the *raison d'être* of the Festival is the performance of large and smaller-scale choral music, by the local choral societies and cathedral choirs. They don't bring in the Brighton Festival Chorus or the London Symphony Chorus like they do in other places, so the backbone of the Three Choirs is the great Festival Chorus of local people. Then, there is all the volunteer effort. There are the odd paid secretaries, but your Festival Secretaries, your Treasurer, and your Chairmen and so on, are all doing it for nothing. If you take away that local element, you take away the essence of the Festival. If you bring in a lot of outside help, you will alienate your local people and lose local support.

JWB : I personally agree with you wholeheartedly. Certainly for many American church musicians and Anglophiles (and I am both!), the Three Choirs Festival has always been one of the cornerstones of the English choral tradition in its broadest sense, born and bred in the three counties and with the particular "flavour", as you say, of each cathedral and its history, musical associations, and resident area musicians .

JDS : Well, I think the locals quite like to see their local man "on the box", so to speak, conducting in his home cathedral. As long as he conducts things which are within his capabilities, then I think you're all right. If you have people with delusions of grandeur who "take on" things that are beyond them, then I think they should be criticized ! And remember, a cathedral organist can ask advice of anyone he chooses, and if he wants advice from an outside person, that's all well and good, and he can bring in guest conductors for the orchestral concerts. But I don't think overall direction should be imposed from outside. Another thing is the Festival's social aspect. It's been described as one of the friendliest of music festivals, where people in the audience actually talk to each other! Again, if you alienate the local support, you will lose that friendliness !

JWB : I know many feel as you do. It is a wonderful experience to attend the Festival and be drawn into its activities and ethos by the local people. Long may it flourish ! I

feel privileged to be part of this year's Festival in Hereford, and know it will remain in my memory as one of the high points of my musical life.

Finally, Dr. Sanders, your last major undertaking before retiring from Gloucester Cathedral is the upcoming tour to Canada and the United States which the choir makes in April. This is its third trans-Atlantic tour and I wondered what your recollections are of the previous two, and your expectations for this one?

JDS : For the first trip in 1989, we went for just over a week, and sang six concerts and three services in that time, which was of course completely crackers! We learned our lesson, so the next time we went in 1991 it was for ten days and we actually did only six concerts, which worked out very well, and that's what we're doing this year. As far as the welcome was concerned, I'd say it was overwhelming! Obviously, amongst the Americans who know about it, there is a soft spot in their hearts for English church music. Wherever we went, they couldn't have been kinder in their hospitality and all the arrangements. Our first visit to Gloucester in Massachusetts and to Boston, and that lovely New England area made a great impression, as did Washington, D.C., especially as we were there at the right time of year, when all the cherry blossoms were out! I think on the second trip we didn't find the countryside quite so interesting, though Atlanta and Macon in Georgia were very nice, as were Charleston in South Carolina, and Savannah with all their lovely old buildings and churches. And, of course, Orlando in Florida was memorable for the boys because of Disney World! It didn't matter about Britten and Howells and all that! Mark Batchly, our former Assistant Organist, wrote a marvellous commentary on the 89' trip, with such insights as, "Why does the bacon always come out looking like a bus ticket?" and so on! Staying in people's homes you do get a "taste" of America, and it's wonderful.

We are looking forward to going to Canada on this trip, where we haven't been before, and hope to get the same reception we've had in the States. Of course, it will be marvellous to see New York City, if only briefly, as well as the "cradle of independence" (is that right?) Philadelphia! We want these trips to be not only musical, but educational, at least as far as the boys are concerned. So, needless to say, we are all very excited about the tour!

JWB : Dr. Sanders, it has been a pleasure to talk with you at this length about your career. May you and Mrs. Sanders enjoy a satisfying "semi-retirement" since you will be keeping on with your work as Director of Music at Cheltenham Ladies' College, and with composing. Thank you very much indeed for your kindness in this interview. I am sure musicians will be looking forward to new works from you in the years ahead, and that you will have more time to enjoy Three Choirs Country!