

LINKS

THE BEST SINGING I EVER HEARD

At Guildford, in 1971, there was an International Conference on the Holy Spirit, part of which was a festival of praise and worship in Guildford Cathedral. I have never seen a cathedral so full of people or of the Spirit of Christ.

Standing in front of me was a young man, from his appearance a pastry-cook or a car-mechanic, lapping up every moment. And as we sang hymns, he would raise his arms to Heaven like David and sing too. Only he didn't actually "sing" — he bellowed!

Clearly he was tone-deaf — what my music teacher would have called a "foghorn" — and his variations in pitch bore absolutely no relation to the tune that most of us were singing. But he didn't care — he was singing to his Lord, and he sang with joy and a sense of abandon which at first upset my musical sensibilities, but then began to make me laugh inwardly. Not at him, you understand, but with him: his tuneless roaring had opened my heart to the meaning of true worship.

Now, that's not to suggest that I would advise him to stand at the front of VRS and do a solo, unless the Lord has miraculously given him a gift like Caedmon's in the intervening fifteen years. But when you come down to it all of us are, relatively speaking, a bit like my foghorn friend. None of us here has the makings of an international music star. God has blessed many of us with musical gifts of different sorts, but most of us would be embarrassed at being heard on local radio, let alone the world stage. Our talents are more modest: many of us are untrained, and all of us relatively

inexperienced. If true worship depended on worldly criteria, we would be in a sorry state!

But, praise God, it doesn't! God is pleased when we "'shout with joy to the Lord" (Psalm 100 v1), and the Bible tells us all to sing, not just those who sound like Caruso. As far as I'm concerned, what's good enough for God is good enough for me. If I hear music in the church, I endeavour to ignore the style, the technique and the stage-fright, and to praise God for a heart that wants to glorify its Saviour. I can testify, having played in churches up and down the country, that where a whole congregation does this, rather than passing critical judgement on the performance and the performer, it's a lot easier to sing well for the Lord***