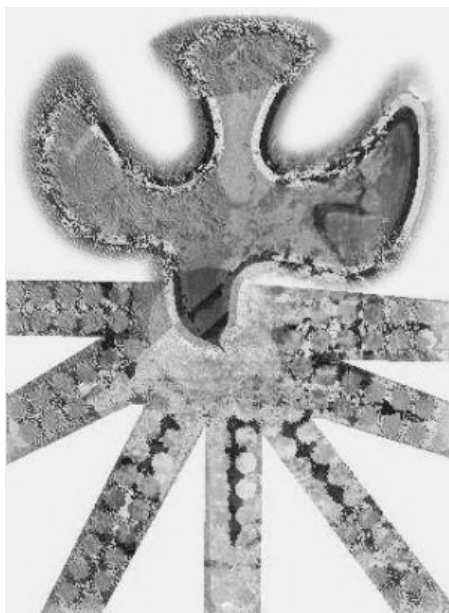




**Some stories behind
people's favourite hymns**

372 - Come down, O Love divine (Chosen by Bev Thompson)

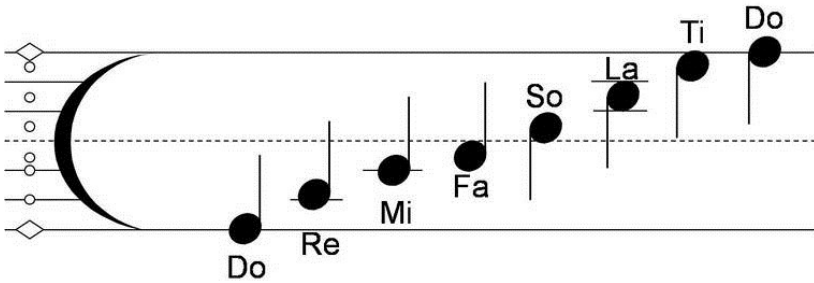


When I was 10 years old and at an 'all boys' school in Doncaster our class had a visit from a Mr 'Pip' Appleby who worked for the BBC Schools Broadcasting Service. He was looking for 7 or 8 boy trebles who could sing a little, to perform a simple hymn tune as part of an educational programme. I was one of the chosen few. We had a day off school and had to go to the BBC studios in Leeds where we practised and then recorded 'Come down, O Love Devine' to the tune of Down Ampney. It must have been alright as we later listened to it being broadcast and being played to the whole School.

That wasn't the end of it as, because of the broadcast I was asked to join the choir of St Georges Church (now Cathedral). This was my first introduction to Church music and, indeed, to religion and becoming a Christian, as my parents, who would say that they were 'Church of England', didn't actually go to Church.

By a strange quirk of fate there was a male alto in the choir called Rupert Hughes and, although I didn't know it at the time, he was my eventual wife's father. And so, 'Come down O Love Devine' was a turning point in my life and I will always associate it with my long and happy marriage to Jean and our children and grandchildren and indeed to our extended family here at Elvet over the last 43 years. So please join with me in singing it lovingly, as it is a personal request from each and every one of us for the Holy Spirit to come into our lives to inspire and influence us with His grace.

370 - Breathe on me, Breath of God (Chosen by Bob. Raymond)



I must apologise in advance for this being a self-indulgent exercise without a profound message but I hope you may find it interesting. To explain my choice of hymn I need to take you back to the summer of 1940 - the year of the Battle of Britain - to Seaham, Deneside Junior Mixed School. I am eleven years old and in the top class of the school and we are learning hymns for the school assembly. The tall windows are wide open because it is a very hot morning.

Our teacher Mr Armstrong is singing and beating time with his cane - a short rattan instrument bound in several places with black insulating tape for he used it with such vigour that it often split and needed repair. He uses the same cane to tap out the rhythm as he points out the notes on a tonic sol-fa chart fastened to the blackboard. We learned all our hymns in this way and I can still remember the tonic sol-fa of many hymns for which I can no longer recall the words. If you will excuse my voice I will sing you an example – Do Me So Me Fa So La Te Do - Me Me Ray Do Te La So - Ray Ray Do Te La Do Me Ray - Me Ray Do Te Do Do Te Do. I hope you were able to recognise “Let us with a gladsome mind” as it is still clear in my mind even though I learned the notes over seventy years ago.

I learned “Breathe on me, breath of God” in exactly this way and, even though I had an intimate acquaintance with Mr Armstrong’s cane – though top of the class, I was frequently caned for day-dreaming and drawing in the margins of my work books – this does not spoil my memories. In fact, Mr Armstrong was very helpful to me, often finding art materials at a time of war shortages.

Now as I hear this hymn, I am back in that classroom, with the scent of new grass coming in the windows, the sight of rows of jars full of wild flowers and that wonderful smell, which only seems to occur in schools, of hot goldfish tanks on hot windowsills.

Happy, happy memories of a loved teacher and a well-loved school.

527 - Pray for a world where every child (Chosen by Martin Clark)

Author: Ruth Duck (b. 1947)

Tune: Haven; Composer: Ian Howarth (b. 1955)



Having been heavily involved in the compilation of *Singing the Faith*, I chose this hymn as an example of the way in which we sought to include new hymns that reflected contemporary individual, local and global realities and which offered a Christian response to them. Sung immediately before the prayers of intercession, the hymn's powerful prayer for pure motives in love and passion and its concern for justice, welfare and equality seemed particularly fitting at a time when the news has been dominated by Operation Yewtree, the necessity of food banks and innocent people suffering in many violent conflicts around the world. It was written by Ruth Duck, who is Professor of Worship at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois. The tune, specially composed for this text, and first published in *Singing the Faith* is by Ian Howarth, a Methodist Minister who was a fellow member of the committee responsible for compiling the hymn book, and is now Chair of the Birmingham District of the Methodist Church.

693 - *Beauty for brokenness* (Chosen by Jeannette Bygate)

A few years ago we went with the charity Global Care to Cambodia, to visit the orphanage of Rostitus Cheng in Poipet – for which we had been raising funds. Cambodia was obviously still very much a post-war country, and one of the first things we were shown when we arrived in the capital Phnom Penh was the school where, during the war in the 1970s,

torture took place on a large scale. People were brought here to “confess” – their only “crime” being that they were educated. From there they were taken to the “killing fields” where they were brutally killed in their thousands – young, old, children and babies – and dumped in mass graves by the Pol Pot regime. We also went to see these Killing Fields: it was a terrible place where the evidence of what had happened here was still showing beneath our feet. Nobody could walk round here dry-eyed. It was a place of total despair! And yet, in the middle of all this, we sat down at a rough wooden table with Titus who told us about his life ... And there was hope.

During the war, Titus and his mother had managed to escape across the border to Thailand. (His father had been murdered, and his brother died on the way.) Soon after that, his mother died, and Titus became a street-child, scavenging for food. Fortunately, a Christian woman took him in and raised Titus as her own child; she gave him schooling and told him about God and Jesus. Titus became a Christian and, after the war, he returned to Cambodia where he settled with his wife Maria and their two children. But there were/are many street children in Cambodia, and Titus could not forget that he once had been a street-child himself: Titus and Maria took in several children and, later, also started a school for slum children, giving them a meal after the lessons – their only meal of the day ... We visited the orphanage and school in Poipet, and – as Titus was in personal contact with the slum families – visited people in the slums, too: desperately poor, living in places you cannot really call dwellings, with hardly a roof over their heads, no facilities, no privacy, no nothing.

In the orphanage was an atmosphere of peace and love and the children were happy there! (How Titus came into contact with Global Care is another [wonderful] story.)

Last year we went back to Cambodia to visit the new home outside Poipet, in the countryside – for which our church had raised funds. A lovely place with a lot of potential – and happy children.

We were very pleased to see that nowadays many groups of (young) volunteers come into Cambodia to help people, to teach them and to bring them the good news of the gospel – Beauty for brokenness!

Whenever we sing this hymn, it brings back memories of Cambodia, and it never fails to move us. In fact, we call it: “Our Cambodia hymn”.

410 - Lord, Your church on earth is seeking (Chosen by Janet Davies)

As some of you will know, as a newly married couple, we went to live in the Bahamas for three years- Colin to work in the High School run by the Methodist Missionary Society, and I to work in banking for two years, and then for the local airline.

We spent six months living in the house of the headmaster of the school- the Rev. Geoffrey Litherland, whilst he and his wife were on furlough in England, and for a further three months when Geoffrey came back alone as his wife had had major surgery and remained at home to recover.

During this time, The Methodist Church in the Caribbean held their conference in Nassau, and Hugh Sherlock who was based in Jamaica was the president of conference. He was entertained by us one evening, and what a charming, thoughtful entertaining man he proved to be, and, of course, an excellent preacher and teacher at the services he conducted.

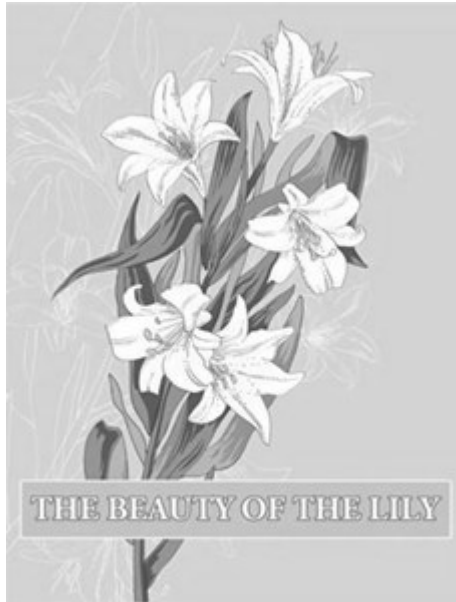
We had a holiday in Jamaica, three days in Kingston and eleven days in a small guest house fourteen miles and 148 hairpin bends from Kingston in the Blue Mountains. This was where the English soldiers stayed during the very hot, humid weather to escape from the heat and diseases in previous times. When in Kingston, on Sunday afternoon we decided we would walk to the harbour to look at the ships. We were stopped by a local policeman and told we should go no further, as being white he could not say that we would be safe. We turned around, and he watched us walk quite a distance back towards the hotel. The next evening, we decided there was a film being shown that we had wanted to see but missed earlier so thought we would go. The hotel receptionist saw us about to leave and asked where we were going, when we told him, he insisted that we had a taxi, and when it arrived he went out with us, and told the driver that he must find out what time the film ended and to be certain to be waiting for us- just in case!

In the mountains we stayed with two sisters who were lovely and looked after us incredibly well. One morning, with another young couple we went for a walk higher up than the guest house, and came out onto what had been the parade ground for the soldiers. Coming towards us was a very elderly Jamaican man with a wooden tray on his head, loaded with bananas. We asked if we could buy some, and they were the most delicious ones we had ever tasted- small, sweet, and warm from the sun. We had quite a conversation with him, although we found the Jamaican accent a little difficult to understand, as no doubt, he found our accents equally strange.

I hope these two snapshots give a flavour of the Jamaica in which Hugh Sherlock lived and worked. "In the streets of every city where the bruised and lonely dwell, Let us show the Saviour's pity, Let us of his mercy tell" This is one of my favourite hymns because of the memories of the holiday we spent in Jamaica, but of the lovely people we met there, and especially the time we spent in the company of Hugh Sherlock.

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord

(Chosen by Alan Rodgeron)



Described as a battle hymn, a good cowboy hymn!

All of my favourite hymns have one thing in common; I call them blasters as they're longing to be sung.

Mine eyes have seen the glory fits into the blaster category. I cannot imagine anyone not knowing the tune but if so, it's so simple you'll soon pick it up, as you'll want to sing it.

A hymn everyone in the congregation and the choir will enjoy singing.

One which some of us will be singing or humming into this afternoon and even the days ahead.