

# Tradition of Evensong

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Evensong within the Anglican Church is what remains in non-monastic churches of the daily round of seven offices from matins through to compline. The Book of Common Prayer took the principal offices of the Roman Catholic liturgy, matins, lauds, vespers and compline and recreated out of them a morning and an

evening office, the first called matins the second 'evening prayer', or 'evensong'. These offices of the Anglican Church have been in use ever since the first BCP of 1549. For one reason or another, the place of matins has been overtaken either by silence or a celebration of the sacrament of Holy Communion. But

evensong soldiers on. In fact, it is in rude health, not least (and perhaps fundamentally) because of its music, its 'song'. The BBC tried in recent years to make less of it in their schedules, but there was a fierce and articulate reaction against the downgrade, and today the weekly relay of evensong from some cathedral or college chapel is as firmly in the schedules as it ever has been, with even a repeat during the week.

How does the liturgical format of evensong shape its musical properties? The office comprises on each occasion a recitation of psalms set for the day, an office hymn (optional), the evening canticles (Magnificat and Nunc dimittis), and an anthem (optional also, but rarely omitted). Some versicles and responses make up the rest. For the musician this format offers distinct categories of repertory. The psalms are rotated over a month. Given their extensive nature, the pragmatic solution to their delivery is to employ either plainchant or Anglican chant (at root a harmonised chant, but no longer linked to modes or psalmodic inflections). Along with the versicles and responses, this part of the office is strongly repertorial, as might be Mozart symphonies for a symphony orchestra

