

THE CHRISTMAS JETHRO TULL

It must be a decade ago that we started playing benefit concerts in churches and cathedrals during Advent. And I hope you find that we merry men have prepared a tasty aperitif of seasonal tunes and Tulloid classics to whet your appetite for the Christmas feast.

It was at Lincoln – the tenth great church we'd played like this, if memory serves – that I was asked why we do it. And my first answer was and remains that the main thing is to encourage you all to dig just a little further into that hard-pressed Christmas trouser pocket to support your local cathedral.

Look around you. Beautiful isn't it? But it costs the earth to keep it standing here - and the world has changed a bit since those medieval or Victorian master-masons and labourers put it together, so we're not going to be building any more of them. Seems to me that a couple of fund-raiser gigs between schlepping around the world on tour and going home to hang up our stockings is a worthwhile thing to do.

And please be assured we're not taking a Yuletide dram off you. The proceeds from ticket sales – tickets you've been kind enough to buy to join us at this concert – go to support the fabric and running costs of this lovely cathedral. A big thankyou from me, then, for supporting us in supporting your local spiritual asset.

So our first reason is largely architectural. But there are a couple of other reasons. You might call them a holy trinity of reasons (though not in front of the Dean).

My second reason is selfish: I like the challenge of playing some of these most unusual "venues" at the end of the year. Concert halls have their idiosyncrasies. But cathedrals are something else entirely. I love to see whether these cavernous spaces, mostly built hundreds of years before electronic amplification was ever even imagined, can respectfully be tamed for the kind of musical fare that we have to offer you.

Careful deployment of multiple speakers, time delayed as necessary to focus the sound down the long nave and across big spaces plus the judicious use of light arrays to show the backdrop of architectural magnificence are the stock-in-trade of we musical cathedral-dwellers. I arrive in the cheaply-rented white van driven through the night via a motorway caff and a Travelodge or Premier Inn near you. Just like the old days, loading up the bandwagon after the show. Does a man good to push, shove and shoehorn amps and drum kits into impossible spaces. All hands to the pump. Cheapskate that I am....

Thirdly and finally, there's something else going on and it's this: It does us good to be here. My disclaimer, as always, is that I don't count myself among practising Christians – but if they keep practising as much as I carry on practising my flute, one day we might all get some of it right. The world's full enough of people giving religion a bad name just now but, from all that I know of it, the Anglican brand of Christianity that this cathedral lives and breathes is – at its best at any rate - warm-hearted, generous-spirited and welcoming of the old not-quite-sures like me.

I firmly believe that people of enquiring mind or of resolute faith need all the encouragement they can get in these increasingly secular days – and as our cathedral shows do pull in one or two people that may not have visited before, we hope that we're doing a bit of encouraging too.

My thanks to the various people who help in these endeavours should be mentioned here. Where would we be without our Field Chaplain, the Revd George Pitcher and the local Cathedral staff and

organisers who are really the folks who make it all happen? My usual band and crew happily give up their Christmas holiday time to take part and help fulfil their, and our, spiritual needs. Even hardened drummers seek the solace of the Mistletoe, the heady aroma of mulled wine, the gentle icy fingers of Jack Frost.

John O'Hara, Piano and organ.

David Goodier, Bass guitar.

Florian Opahle, Guitar,

Scott Hammond, Drums.

And, of course, our special surprise guests joining us this evening.

That in a nutshell – or a codpiece by any other name – is why I'm here. Why are you? As we send you out tonight into the cold December air with, I hope, a warm song or two ringing in your ears, some of the answers to that question might surprise you as much as what's in that parcel Auntie Mildred has left under the tree with your name on it. They certainly surprise me. Meanwhile, A Very Merry Christmas, one and all.

Ian Anderson

Jethro Tull