

Choir Notes for December 2021

When I left you last month, Jeff had Covid, and had to self-isolate. He recovered quickly, but Cynthia led the next rehearsal from the organ. She has to listen to us and remember what needs correction after we stop, as well as playing all the right notes herself. She does not tell us to stand up straight like Jeff, perhaps because she has to look towards the organ, so cannot see us singing.

At the next rehearsal, Jeff walks in, and he is On Fire! Not literally, but I look round for the fire extinguisher, just in case. We sing. He tells us to stand up straight and to look in the mirror tomorrow and try to smile, to remind us what that looks like. He wants us relaxed but energised. He wants rounded vowels. He wants us to make a beautiful sound. We try again. We practice "*I Give You a New Commandment*". Jeff says that he wants it sung sparkily, in the manner of Diana Ross. Hmm, I can't think off-hand what she sounded like, but he says that the idea is glamour rather than sound imitation.



On 14th October we rehearse Responses by Humphrey Clucas (left: 1941 - alive and well). These are like brass fanfares, where we basses are the trombones, and other voices the higher instruments up to piccolos. We all blow hard in the opening. Performances on YouTube are different: many choirs sing them in a pretty manner, instead of blowing at gale force. Jeff asks us to try again and make it stunningly beautiful. We do it again and he says "Well done", rather than "Stunningly beautiful", which means that we can still do better: there is time yet before we sing it in public.

We sing at Holy Communion on 24th October. We sing "*I give You a New Commandment*" as smoothly as warm custard - delicious! We have not sung the Thorn Mass for about two years, and we only rehearse briefly just before the service, but it sounds OK.

Then, horror! Have you seen "*Dawn of the Dead*" (1978 - George A Romero), or "*I Walked with a Zombie*" (1943 - Jacques Tourner)? Well, this is worse.

Jeff WhatsApps us that he wants a rehearsal in a dance studio equipped with full-length mirrors, so that we can see how we look when singing! Jeff often remarks that basses look miserable, and tells us to look in a mirror to see if we can remember how to smile (as above). Will the basses collapse when they see their zombie rictus with mouths open just a slit instead of wide as they should be when singing? Can I find my late mother's reticule with the smelling salts?

At the next rehearsal, Jeff explains the point. He says that singers develop unconscious tics and grimaces, some of which he demonstrates. He says a mirror is a great teacher to rid us of these.

Jeff, I have had some of my unconscious tics and grimaces for a long time, possibly from childhood, and I doubt if two hours in front of a mirror will cure them. It might work to lash me tightly to a pew, and inject the twitching parts with Botox, but I'm happy to try anything, so let's give it a whirl.