

# Choir News

## October 2020

### Lockdown stories

#### **Derek Stone (Tenor)**

According to Sir Alec Guinness “a superb tenor voice is like a silver trumpet muffled in silk”. That is a nice thought, but silver is in short supply for your average tenor and, while others may have silk, we generally rely on sandpaper. This is not usually a problem because, when we sing together, we can always blame the basses or the altos if the tenors sound more flamingo than Domingo.

Unfortunately, our natural ability to coat ourselves in Teflon has become... er ... unstuck in the post-Covid era. There is just no hiding from the caterwauling from the iPhone on hitting “replay” and, while Stephen is a whizz with his audio-mixing equipment, he is not going to be able to make a mouth-watering pavlova with these ingredients.

To address this dilemma, the tenors have had to resort to something called “technique”. Apparently, this is used by a group of people called “musicians” to produce something called “harmony”. Technique can actually make the sound that comes out of your iPhone surprisingly not unpleasant, provided you observe the following:

*Rule 1:* vowels are your friends. When you were young and your dentist fired up his drill and told you to go “aaaah”, this was just his way of getting you to practice making a nice round sound.

*Rule 2:* consonants should be short and sweet (like a good tenor). If you think of pegs on a clothes line rather than size 12 bovver boots you won't go far wrong.

*Rule 3:* diphthongs are like diphtheria, avoided at all costs.

*Rule 4:* resonance is real. But it lives in your head where normal people keep their brains.

*Rule 5:* high is not mighty. If you are going to sing high notes like a parakeet playing a vuvuzela, keep a lid on it.

*Rule 6* involves recording Jeff on his practice tracks and sending them back to him hoping he doesn't notice. But we don't talk about that rule, obviously.

#### **William Avery (Bass):**

I sing with two other groups as well as with Jeff (two choirs) so that makes 4. All but one have re-started singing live. Some fellow singers when meeting again have said that this is their first singing since March.

Well, that's not my experience. Because of Jeff and Stephen for Bledlow, and their counterparts for the other groups I have sung a lot albeit mostly to myself! It has been great that the switch to virtual singing happened so quickly, so important in keeping groups together but I worry about those who have dropped off for a range of reasons and may not feel able to attend a live rehearsal.

By the time you read this I will have attended a Bledlow choir rehearsal to record The Lord's Prayer. It was a wonderful experience.

However, the stand out event for me was at St Mary's Wendover on 20<sup>th</sup> September. 6 of us sang live for the first time since lock down two pieces, Lead Me Lord and Ave Verum Corpus, during the distribution of communion. I just about controlled tears of joy to enable me to keep a steady line as I realised how much I had missed the joy of singing together with like-minded people and the feedback from the congregation was almost overwhelming.

### **Ralph (Bass) and Maggie (Alto) Westby**

We had a sabbatical from singing with Holy Trinity (HT) Choir in late December because we were heavily involved in the second Chinnor Passion Play (CPP) April 2020. We spent January and February preparing and rehearsing for the play.

The lockdown stopped CPP in late-March, so we joined the ranks of people singing online. At least we were singing again!\*

We recorded ourselves, most weeks, with HT's "sing into your phone" (from which we learned a lot about ourselves). Thanks to Jeff, Stephen and Cynthia for making it happen.

Over the summer, we ran our annual Come and Sing event online (on Zoom), which went ahead in September with 48 singers, raising money for our chosen charities. Afterwards, singers also recorded themselves on video for a "takeaway" from this online event.

Ralph is now working on a promotional film for the next CPP, be that in 2021, or later..... silver lining beginning to show here?

And singing: yes, doing that as often as we can, albeit online, or in the shower!

### **Rehearsals re-start**

We all, including Jeff, wear visors, and he stands behind a plastic screen, so can't hear or correct us much at all. The visors muffle the sound, but the outcome should be better than zoom! And it is wonderful to be singing together again.

### **Harvest service with small choir**

On a wet morning, choristers had to come through flooded roads to make up a choir limited to six. There was no rehearsal and the congregation could not sing. Attenders said they could hear okay, even with us singing socially distanced in visors from the bell tower. They were just pleased to hear live singing.

The anthem was *A Gaelic Blessing* by John Rutter, which together with the two hymns recorded earlier were also used in the virtual service with "Thanks to you", composed by Stephen a year earlier for Norbert. Cynthia wrapped up the service with the Toccata from Symphony No. 5 by Widor, which you can hear time and again on the virtual service.

### **Rehearsal 8/10/20**

Many of our male voices met in Holy Trinity at 7.30 p.m. and spread about the Church to socially distance. We recorded a Pater Noster in Latin. We could have dressed in cowls, had we had them, as it had a truly medieval feel. The Church is lovely in daylight, but lovely in a different atmospheric way when it is dark outside (one of the beauties of evensong in mid-winter darkness). This was recorded for the following Sunday's virtual performance, so I hope you have all heard it by now!