

## Choir Notes – December 2021

Christmas is an exciting and busy time for all choirs. But it is especially exciting for us this year, as on 13<sup>th</sup> December, we are singing Evensong at St Paul's Cathedral again. Rehearsing is fun, but the thrill of singing is performance, and the grander the venue, the greater the thrill. We have cathedral dates for next year too, at Salisbury (26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> February), at Gloucester (23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> April) and at Lichfield (28<sup>th</sup> May). We appreciate parishioners' support at these away events, so please come and see us there, and visit these lovely cities: there are often tea and cake shops near cathedrals!

There was a plan to rehearse on 11<sup>th</sup> November at a dance studio. I psyched myself up with deep-breathing and mind-calming exercises, but it is postponed by a week at the last moment, as choir members are ill or away. Jeff is keen to hold it with maximum numbers present, as he hopes for improvement if he gets most of us there, so more deep breathing will be needed until next week.

So, we rehearse at Holy Trinity, with no dancing. We run through Stanford's Canticles in G. *The Magnificat* will be sung at the Advent Carol Service, and it should be magical.

I get asked by a friend to join an ad hoc choir for a funeral. We sing *Abide with Me*, *The Day Thou Gavest*, and Psalm 23. We rehearse for 10 minutes. Everyone has sung them before. We sing with no conductor. It sounds a bit like a tannoy announcement of trains arriving at a vast London station. The relevance? Without a choirmaster and practice, it doesn't sound great. We are so lucky to be able to practice every week with Jeff, so that we can do a good job!

Then, the next week, we go to the dance studio. One wall is entirely mirrors. We do no dancing. I suspected that we would, to prove to us that we don't need to read the music, as we avoid ramming each other. But we just sing, with Jeff asking us to watch him and ourselves in the mirror. I wish that my eyes could swivel independently, but I can only glance from Jeff to my reflection and back again. I get hooked on looking at Jeff and look at myself less than I should, as this may be our only practice ever with mirrors. I fail to spot any tics or grimaces, and think that I am still and impassive-faced, but I bet that I tic and grimace like mad when I look at Jeff, so can't see myself.

The 25<sup>th</sup> of November is spent practicing for the Advent Carol Service. I think that we all may have expected to fall flat on our faces singing *Der Englische Gruß*, as we are bound to trip up over the German: singing in French is bad enough, but German! It goes well, and Jeff thanks us all for our hard work at home.

Then we have the Advent Carol Service itself at Saunderton. We sing the Stanford *Magnificat* in G, with Louise's solo as Mary. It is cold at the start with our breath coming out in vaporous clouds as we sing, but Louise's solo should warm the hearts of everyone present. I can't wait to hear it at St Paul's, where it will fill the cathedral with beauty and loveliness.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of December, we mostly practice for St Paul's. We have been learning the music on and off for several months. Jeff tweaks bits here and there, but then says that we are the most practiced that we have ever been for a cathedral visit. Is it wise to say this? Let's hope that the Fates weren't listening. I will report next month on how it went.

*Rob Hill*