

## Choir Notes – February 2021



It is the Thursday before the Carol Service to be held on the Sunday before Christmas. We run through the programme quite quickly, to remind ourselves how the carols go. My only hitch is that I seem to have completely forgotten the bass line in *Silent Night*. I only have to sing 'Ah' in the first and third verses, and a few German words in the second, with which my 'O' Level German from 45 years ago helps me. So what is going wrong? Greg, my fellow bass, has trouble too: do we have simultaneous musical amnesia? Is there a cure? No, thank goodness, the problem is that some of the choir has our arrangement of the carol, and part of the choir another. Cynthia has the other one, so we are trying to sing our version in competition with the organ, and the organ wins. The music is swapped and all is fine.

We have recorded music for the Christmas Virtual Services to be worked on electronically by Jeff and Stephen. Their recording of *Sleep Holy Babe* is available, as I write, on the Red Kite Radio website with contributions from many other choirs. I wonder who is singing, as it sounds as if it is coming from some immense cathedral, the sound is so lush, but it is just us in Holy Trinity, Bledlow. Jeff and Stephen really do an incredible job. So the choir is now ready for the Carol Service.

But what is best about singing at Christmas? It is everyone knowing the songs and singing together, mostly at full throttle: but not this year! Only the choir can sing, and the congregation must remain silent to guard against the virus. I hope that the magic can still shine through. I wonder if someone in the congregation might slip up and let out a squeak after Cynthia plays the introduction on the organ, but no squeaks break through. I cannot tell how good we sound, as I am concentrating too much on staying alert (not always successful), watching Jeff (not always successful), and sounding nice (guess). All audiences know the difference between a good and bad performance. I think that we sound all right, but we may not be fully in practice at singing together or, in some cases, singing at all. Kerri, who sings the solo first verse of *Once in Royal David's City*, tells me that she has not previously sung since well before the lockdown, as she has been so busy with pregnancy/birth/new baby, so her performance is the more remarkable for that. Isn't this the best, most Christmassy carol?

We sing an unusual version of *Away in a Manger*. We wouldn't get away with this with a congregation singing too, as much of a congregation would not know this version, and might miss singing a favourite tune, but the choir enjoys it. 'Carols for Choirs' says that it is a traditional Normandy carol, but it sounds more to me like mature English Cheddar than sweet Normandy brie!

We are more used now to singing with visors: perhaps we won't be able to sing without them after the pandemic peters out and we are otherwise back to normal.

Then we arrive at Christmas Day, and gather again. A small choir, as the pandemic restricts numbers. Andy in the congregation tells me afterwards that we sounded quite full-voiced, which is gratifying. The carols were repeated from the carol service except for *It came upon a Midnight Clear*, which we have not practised at all in advance, and I have forgotten the words of some verses, which makes it more difficult. If you can't get the words yourself, it is easy to think the whole thing is a disaster, but everyone else is fine, so with luck no-one noticed me.

And so home, and farewell to another singing year. This year was mostly silent and then "virtual" for us until November. It is hard now to remember the spring, when we sang happily without knowing we could be stopped. We had cathedral visits planned including the American Cathedral in Paris, and St Paul's Cathedral. Not all members of the choir have been able to resume live rehearsals, but when they can, I can say that it will be great to meet again and sing together at full strength!

*Rob Hill*

*The virtual services can be seen and heard via the parish website at <http://www.bledlowparish.org.uk/Coronavirus%20online%20services.htm>, and at [www.bledlowvirtualseervices.uk](http://www.bledlowvirtualseervices.uk)*