



## Choir Notes: The Choir in a Virtual World

The world always needs possibility thinkers to survive and thrive. Faced with lockdown, one such possibility thinker emerged in the form of Stephen Bartlet-Jones. As other churches were scrambling around, wondering how, with the churches closed, they might reach their congregations, Stephen was putting together full-scale online services. The job he has done is nothing short of amazing, starting with Mothering Sunday on 22<sup>nd</sup> March.

My part in this process began with me trying to get the choir to rehearse a piece on Zoom, with the intention of recording it as the first anthem. The result was hilarious. The time lag on Zoom makes it impossible for a choir to sing even one phrase in time with each other. So we resorted to everyone videoing themselves singing on their own along to a conducted track. The tracks were all sent to me but, unfortunately my tech resources let me down, and Steve Daly very kindly stepped into the breach to stitch it all together. He made a great job of it and it was slipped into the second service on Passion Sunday.



Soon after that, I began mixing the anthems myself, in audio form only. I send a video to each separate voice part to the choir. Each of them records themselves by listening to the track on headphones whilst singing into a separate device so that the recording picks up only their voice and not the backing track. They send that to me and I, William Avery or Stephen, “mix” it.

The mixing involves lining all the individual tracks up and trying to make them fit with each other. This is more difficult than one might expect as the different individual interpretations of the conducting, when seen in isolation, can produce very varied results. Added to this is the fact that some individuals may hesitate or make a mistake. It’s much more difficult to sing a part in a choral piece when not supported by other choir members. We must also sort out tuning issues, background noise, wrong notes and anything else that prevents the recording from being of the best possible quality. There can be literally hundreds of edits in each hymn or anthem. Once everything is as good as we can get it, we add an acoustic. Once the audio track is complete, we add either the words of the hymns or an appropriate video or pictures during an anthem.

I’m not the fastest at it and it can take many hours to finish each anthem or hymn. For many of the weeks, Stephen Bartlet-Jones was not only organising the services but making the learning/backing tracks for the hymns, along with videos, collecting them, mixing them, sorting out the readings, readers and intercessors, lining up Norbert’s audio and video tracks (which are recorded separately) and putting the whole thing together before up-loading it for us all to see. In addition to this, Stephen has written and arranged various hymns and anthems, written poems and composed backing music and made videos to accompany them and much, much more. He has combined this with being a full-time barrister, with the courts back in business, albeit on-line, being a husband and being a father to three children, with all that this involves!

For the job which Stephen has done, in my opinion, he deserves to be canonized. The average congregation on-line has been over 400. That means that the wonderful messages from Norbert, along with the fellowship of our lovely parish are being heard by an audience far wider than our normal one.

The services have also given our choir a real purpose in these difficult times. In many parishes around the country the choirs are producing the occasional hymn. My neighbour related to me, a few days ago, her amazement that her church was able to have the occasional hymn sung as a solo with an accompaniment recorded remotely. Cynthia is recording our accompaniments and the members of your choir are spending hours each week recording the hymns and anthems.

Personally, I believe that, in many ways, lockdown has been a great thing. In the case of our parish, it has produced an amazing spirit of possibility thinking and a real “can do” attitude from so many people. As a result, the parish of Bledlow is more widely known than it was before, and an enormous number of people are hearing the message and being given strength, support and comfort through this time. Bledlow is the most amazing place of which to be a part.

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Choirmaster

