



Choir Notes: September 2021

17th June: To Sam's barn at Bledlow Ridge (left) again to rehearse. It is so lovely here, being out of doors with great views over Radnage, and birds whizzing by as you sing. Not everyone has been able to come, but the sound is great. One plane flies over, but is hardly noticeable. It is raining outside, but dry within. A pretty white mother-dove is nesting in the

roof beams with chicks, but flies off when we start to sing, which I hope is not a comment on the sound.

Most of the time is spent rehearsing '*O be Joyful*' by Adrian Batten (1591-1637). After a run through, Jeff asks if we can think what the mood of the piece should be. Hmm, the choir thinks: could be a cheerful piece, we might need to smile. Jeff points to the word solemn occurring several times. But then he points out that, curiously, it is always on two quavers, rather than the two slower crotchets that one might expect: it is cheerful after all - the composer was having a joke.

And not only that, it is in Renaissance hip hop time, about 350 years before it was thought that it had been invented in the Bronx in the 1970s. The rhythm is designed to excite by throwing you off beat. Jeff tells us to stand up straight, throw out our chests and go for it. It sounds a lot better now than a few minutes earlier!

Then we practice '*Expectans Expectavi*'. There is little time left, after the Batten. There could be no bigger contrast, as this is contemplative and solemn. Did Jeff plan it this way round to calm us before bedtime? We sing it far from perfectly, but haven't completely forgotten it from last week, and it should be ready for performance soon: Jeff says that we might perform this when we next go to St Paul's Cathedral.

24th June: To Sam's barn again. '*O be Joyful*' is being sung at Holy Trinity next Sunday, and needs fine tuning. Have you ever seen "*A Short Drive in a Fast Car*" by John Adams (born 15.2.47) performed? It involves much percussion. When I saw it, two percussionists rushed to and fro across the back of the stage, shaking things here, banging things there, and blowing whistles, all to different rhythms. Why mention that? Because Jeff wants faster and faster, and then walk about while singing randomly round the barn. It helps you realise that you can remember the music without reading it, as it's difficult to read while negotiating a randomly moving crowd.

22nd July: Our first practice back at Holy Trinity after the relaxation of lockdown. We are still socially-distanced but do not wear masks. It is great to be able to hear and be heard properly again. We practice the *Venite* and *Benedictus* from the psalter, and the anthem for Sunday, from the '*Rising of the Sun*' by Sir Frederick Arthur Gore Ouseley, 2nd Baronet (1825 -1889). Did 'fag' then not mean either cigarette or lackey, or did the 1st Baronet and Lady Ouseley take their eye off the ball when they named him? The piece is quiet but parts make you want to go fortissimo. Jeff has to rein us in and stop us labouring each syllable with a heavy stress in places, but we soon get the hang of it, and it is much better sung smoothly and calmly, as he wants.

Then the holiday period is with us, so now we go quiet until September!

Rob Hill

The virtual services can be seen & heard via the parish website

(<http://www.bledlowparish.org.uk/Coronavirus%20online%20services.htm>) & at

www.bledlowvirtualsevices.uk