

Choir Notes: May 2023



Thursday 9th March: to Bledlow for a rehearsal. Jeff suggests singing *Dear Mother of Mine* by Jimmy Osmond for Mothering Sunday, but there is no four-part harmony version, so it's back to *Ave Maria* by Arcadelt. Then we practise *O Vos Omnes* by Tomás Luis de Victoria, a reflection on the crucifixion. It includes the word *viam* ("way"), which Jeff accidentally reads as *vitam* ("life") and says, "It's Life, Jim, but not as we know it" and collapses with the giggles - a contrast with and release from this most serious music.

On 16th March we learn that Pat Napper, who sings with us occasionally, has fallen and fractured bones - get well soon, Pat!

I am late for the rehearsal before the Mothering Sunday matins service. The choir is singing the Arcadelt as I come in. I rarely get to listen to the choir: it is hard to listen when concentrating on singing. The choir sounds great, and I wish that I could listen more, but then I would sing less!

On 23rd March there is no rehearsal, because Jeff is rehearsing Lord Williams's Festival Choir at Long Crendon Baptist Church for its performance of Verdi's *Requiem* on 25th March in Thame. This is still Bledlow Choir news, as Jeff has got five of our choir members to join in with them.

Jeff is driven by inexhaustible energy to teach singing, set up concerts and rehearse choirs. He has written on Facebook that he is new to conducting orchestral music, a key secret to success being to get good players. He also conducts Aylesbury Choral Society singing Haydn's *Creation* with an orchestra at St Mary's Church in Aylesbury on 1st April (including two members of Bledlow's choir). I sing at Thame. The capacity audience is wildly enthusiastic at the end. I go to the *Creation*, and it's great.

Jeff is passionate about church music, and the threats to it. The Lord Williams's bass section is old, with no-one who could be described as young, or even less than pretty old. Choral singing of classical music has a long amateur tradition in Britain, but it may be dying, for lack of young replacements. It cannot have been helped by the BBC's decision - since reversed temporarily - to axe the BBC Singers.

On now to Good Friday.

What is the point of a conductor, you might ask, if you don't know. Can't people just sing? One answer may be to conduct *O Vos Omnes* on a Good Friday. The congregation can't see Jeff's face, but it varies between grief, anger, and pain. We sing his emotion. I listen later to a famous choir on YouTube, which hits the right notes in the right order and on time, and does all that superbly and much better than our choir, but it misses the anger, a main point of the piece. Tomás Luis de Victoria is remarkable: the depth of emotion in his work is amazing, and should make toes curl. His *O Vos Omnes* replaced Gore Ouseley's *Is it Nothing to You* in *The Cross of Christ* anthology that we sing. It is from the same biblical passage but the Tomás Luis de Victoria is in Latin, while the Gore Ouseley is in English. I hope that singing in Latin means that the congregation does not concentrate too hard on the words, but can just let the emotion wash over them. The rest of the service was fine, but less shattering than the Victoria!

We sing again on Easter Sunday too, but just *This Joyful Eastertide* by Charles Wood (pictured), an old favourite from our repertoire.

Our next cathedral visit will be to Guildford, where we shall be singing Evensong at 5.00pm on Saturday 10th June.

Rob Hill