

On 15 September we restart rehearsals after the summer holiday. We plunge into Herbert Sumsion's Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in G, to be sung on our visit to Peterborough Cathedral in November, but no doubt at Bledlow also one day: it will add to our repertoire.

The first run-through of the Magnificat might have been recognised by alert experts as a Magnificat, but it did not go well. None of the choir had sung it before: it improved over the next hour or so, but not a great deal. But that is the way things often go, and it will be alright on the night.

We rehearse again the next week, and this time we concentrate on the following Sunday Eucharist service at Bledlow. We sing "Sacerdotes Domini" by William Byrd, which we have sung before. We sing it through. We may sound as if we have all forgotten or are not concentrating on the meaning, which might be because of the effort of reading the Latin words: Jeff after the first sing-through takes us through the translation to point out that we are singing about priests taking care in conducting holy rites correctly to please God, not a list of telephone numbers. This is important, as singing a list of telephone numbers would be boring.

I do not know how many of the congregation could translate sung Latin as we sing it: it can be difficult to understand part-singing even in English, so a few may not have a clue what we are singing about. Even if we were singing in Tibetan or, say, Maori, it would still be more interesting if we understood and sang it with meaning, rather singing the tune only to "La".

We run through the hymns, and practice the Thorne "Mass of St Thomas", which we have sung many times, so that this does not take long, and we return to the Sumsion Magnificat. Again the first run-through is a little chaotic, but then detailed work improves it rapidly: it is just a case of working out how it goes over the next few weeks, as we are not performing it until we go to Peterborough Cathedral on 26 November. If we cannot learn it by then, we are pretty hopeless.

After the rehearsal I check the choir's learning pages on its website, and find out the other music we are singing in Peterborough which including Bairstow's marvellous "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence". I have not previously Tallis' "O Nata Lux: I cannot wait to start practising this new piece, as more Tallis is always exciting.

The Eucharist service is lovely, as always with Jennifer presiding, and the following week's Harvest Festival is also a treat, the Choir singing the Anthem "Praise, O Praise" by Martin How MBE, a contemporary composer (born 1931, and still composing, according to Wikipedia). I quite miss "Thou Visiteth the Earth" perhaps with Mike Beattie singing the tenor solo, but we can't sing the same thing every year!