

CHOIR NEWS – March 2016

Practising for Easter, Jeff says “Is it Nothing to You” by Sir Frederick Gore-Ouseley (Bart.) (1825-1889) may be the gloomiest music ever written. He has a point, but this must be uncertain, as there are many contenders for that position. It is intensely gloomy. And interesting that it sets a verse from Lamentations:

Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?

Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is brought upon me,

Wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.

Many composers have adapted these words about Israel in Babylon to Easter, as if thought by Christ on the cross.

Practice pauses, and the medieval wall painting of Adam and Eve above the Church door catches my attention. Adam is delving, Eve spinning, and God is telling them they can't come back to Eden. Wonderful!

On Good Friday we sing "The Cross of Christ", an RSCM service assembled in the 1950s, including "Is it Nothing to You" and other pieces, all Victorian or earlier. Jeff injects a more modern element by adding Kenneth Leighton's Solus Ad Victimam. Dramatic, and also in contention for the gloomy music prize. But that is the point: to feel the pity of Easter. It is all wonderful for Good Friday.

And it provides an amazing contrast as a springboard for Easter Sunday. I think of Tom Daley diving in the Olympics. He runs along the diving board, which dips low and then sends him flying. We sing "This Joyful Eastertide", a boisterous belt at the Bledlow Easter Day Eucharist: total contrast with the solemnity of Good Friday.

Stuart King, musical director at St Mary's, Princes Risborough had kindly invited us to sing Evensong with them. We repeated "This Joyful Eastertide", as an Introit. The service was Stanford in B Flat, and the anthem "Sing We Merrily" (1962) by Sidney Campbell. It went very well, maybe aided by their delicious tea. Thank you very much.

We have begun practise for the Queen's Birthday Concert (June 11th in Holy Trinity). We have much music, and Jeff will choose what we sing: I hope we manage "Lay a Garland" by Robert Pearsall (1795-1856), gloomy, about death, but beautiful enough to strike the audience temporarily dumb, if we pull it off.

Much of the choir went to "Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street", directed by Jeff and performed at Frogmore Mill, Hemel Hempstead. If you didn't go, you've missed it, which is sad, unless it is repeated, and you get another chance. It was terrific, the singing, the acting, the orchestra, costumes, the set... I hope I haven't missed any aspect. The pace and movement were magic, and the grime, blood and muck was like swimming through a glorious sewer. Absolutely wonderful.

The 100 Club for Choir funds in March awarded 1st prize of £252 to Gerard Beattie, 2nd prize of £168 to Lee Byrne, and 3rd prize of £84 to Mima Manning: better luck next time if you, dear Reader, are not one of them.