

## Choir Notes – July / August 2024

Jeff tells us that J.S. Bach's (1685 - 1750) *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring* is 'hackneyed, but really quite beautiful'. I feel insecure on hearing that, as I didn't know that anyone - even a choirmaster - is allowed to use 'hackneyed' about Bach. Someone might arrest Jeff and take him away. I think that the piece is dangerous, as the long stretches of gentle organ accompaniment might put listeners asleep, to be woken with a shock when the choir crashes in. It is better sung at Matins, as, if it were sung after a heavy meal, a choir might fall asleep, too, in the quiet bits, so not come in and wake the congregation, so the whole church may slumber, while weeds cover the churchyard, until a fairy prince kisses a princess. To avoid dullness, Jeff asks us to concentrate on words in the piece, like 'soaring' - an exciting image (not to be sung as 'sawing', as of timber). We hope that the wedding of our PCC Secretary's daughter goes well on 22<sup>nd</sup> June and that we make the anthem exciting on the day.

We carry on with Macmillan's (1956-extant) '*A New Song*', which uses words from Psalm 96. We have practised it a lot, and we note some improvement. Jeff says that it is really very simple. And then a story comes into his mind about Ivan the Terrible (1530-1585), whose architect built Moscow cathedral for him, but Ivan then put out his eyes to prevent him building another one more beautiful than his somewhere else. Rough, eh? The more we practice the Macmillan, the more Scottish and weird I find it. Weird in a good sense, like the *Psycho* music by Bernard Hermann (1911-1975) is well vicious for the shower stabbing scene, though weird and unbeautiful. The Macmillan could accompany three weird sisters loitering on a blasted heath to give malevolent, misleading prophesies to any itinerant warlord passing by between victory in battle and home. Terrific!

At the Pentecost service at Holy Trinity, we have well-loved hymns. We sing a Gloria to the tune *Cwm Rhonnda*, (normally *Guide me, O thou great Redeemer*), with the rest of the Mass to the new (to us) service by Richard Shepherd (the *Wiltshire Service*), which, like most good music, grows on you. Cynthia says that we must sing with a glottal stop in '*Hosanna in*', which otherwise mutates to '*hosannerring*', a word which does not exist. Jeff urges us to keep our faces immobile, free from grimaces or strain, and recommends Botox injections, like the singer, Cher. He tells of one of his students, who, to improve her breathing through her nose, tapes her mouth shut for singing exercises which she practices in bed with her husband similarly gagged for practice. This is also a recommended cure for asthma.

At the next rehearsal we look at the music for the concert on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> July at Bledlow, in aid of Norbert's farm project, the Asilomar Foundation (in your diaries, please! - Norbert will be there - fantastic!). This includes *Sure on this Shining Night* by Morten Lauridsen (b.1943), very Mortenesque, pretty and moving; *Down by the Sally Gardens* (trad. Irish), a song sweeter than which you rarely get; and *Wellerman*, a whaling song, famous in recent years as sung by Nathan Evans, a folk singer who was a postal worker before hitting the big time with this song.

The bass part of *Stand by me*, arranged by Mac Huff, is a rhythm section with very few words at all. The bass lyrics go *bm-chk-bm* over and over again, almost throughout. The last time that Jeff trained the basses to sing the words without a consonant in *chk*, but that pesky *k* kept resurrecting itself. Things must be getting serious, as this time he says that he will kill any bass who puts a consonant in *chk*. We still put it in first time round, but luckily both of us (me and Mike only, today) do get to go home at the end of the rehearsal.



There is more new music to learn: two pieces by Ola Gjeilo (b.1978, left), both beautiful. Jeff expressed his love of his music after playing it to his piano teacher ('That's beautiful! - 'Not the way you play it, dear!'). In *Ubi Caritas* by Mr Gjeilo, there is one part where the rest of the choir sings *Ubi Caritas...* but the basses don't sing the *ubi*, just joining in with *caritas*, which is unusual. Jeff speculates that Mr Gjeilo might have lacked good basses in his choir, able to come in on time, like most basses anywhere. There is discussion as to whether we basses should sing *ubi* anyway, but we try without, and Jeff says that the late entry has a nice effect: so watch out for that, when you come to the concert!

Before the concert we will sing Evensong at Saunderton on 30<sup>th</sup> June (the fifth Sunday of the month), and then there is Matins at Bledlow on 21<sup>st</sup> July, so we have plenty to work on before our summer break.

We give a warm welcome to new soprano, Lucy, who comes for the first time today, and we are told that she will be back.

Rob Hill