

Choir Notes – November 2024

One aspect of getting back to choir after the summer break is that the evenings get earlier, fast: it is getting dark as we arrive for practice, and it is black as ink as we come out. Still, it is a treat to see the moon shining behind the lime trees along the edge of the churchyard from the church door. For me, probably the best view in Bledlow!

We begin the month continuing to practice canticles by Noble, and *And I Saw a New Heaven* by Bainton, about which I wrote last month. It takes much rehearsal to get the Bainton right - Noble is easier. By the time of the Saunderton Evensong service on 29th September, we have learned it, enabling me to watch Jeff conducting it, something which is not always achieved enough. This was our only service in September, but we are singing at the Harvest Festival on 5th October.

So, on the 3rd October, we start learning *Look at the World* by contemporary composer John Rutter, who of course writes much popular choral music, a lot of it composed for his own famous choir, the Cambridge Singers.

A new tenor, Joe, joins us! Jeff did not know that he was coming and asks what voice he sings, and is both staggered and delighted when he says tenor, as we are short of those, while basses are two a penny. There is much chat going on until Jeff calls for order, and tells us that someone threw a piece of cheese at him at the supermarket today. Oh dear! What weight of cheese, how hard, where did it hit him and did it hurt? But he then says that he riposted with “That’s not very mature”. I hope that Joe stays!

Jeff likes Rutter pieces. They are often similar, sort of “rutterish”. Many artists find a winning style, or are fascinated by a particular theme, and work it out moving in various directions. Perhaps because of the Rutter pieces we have sung in the past, we pick this one up quickly. It is written partly for children’s voices, and Jeff asks the female choir members to put some child-like wonder in their voices, as they sing about going out into the wonderful world of nature. Mike, Jeff’s dad, mutters, “Let’s go back indoors”. Jeff (with a twinkle) asks, “How did you get so old, father?”

We practice the usual harvest hymns to remind us of the harmonies for Sunday’s service, including of course *We Plough the Fields and Scatter*, always great to sing, and I expect that the congregation will belt it out (I mean tunefully, but lustily, sing).

Then Horror! Shipwreck! Catastrophe! I fall ill with a cold. I learned from Covid the word ‘super-spreader’, and I remember well when we sang Stainer’s *Crucifixion* on Good Friday in 2022 when most of us caught Covid. So I stay away and catch up with events second-hand from Greg later.



The news is that the choir’s visit to St Paul’s Cathedral on Monday 16th December may be our last for an indefinite while. We have been five times since first singing there in January 2019, with 2020 missed because of Covid. We haven’t blotted our copybook at all: it’s just that they have a new girls’ choir from autumn 2025 and they will sing Evensongs on Mondays, the day when the cathedral used visiting choirs. We are redundant! But the silver lining is that cathedral choirs visit other cathedrals, and they also need holidays! So we may be in with a chance, if less than the once a year which we have become used to. Please do come to St Paul’s - the cathedral opens about 4.30 pm for the service at 5 pm. It has been a joy to sing Evensong there. Jeff wrote “Scaling the heights” about our debut there: do read it on the church website <http://www.bledlowparish.org.uk/Choir.htm>. There is a link to the article at the end of the first paragraph on the page.

Lucy Czakan asked the choir to sing at the Service of Thanksgiving for her late husband, Waldi (above), on 11th October. Jeff and Cynthia, together with Lucy, chose the Polish hymn *Serdeczna Matko* (*Beloved Mother*), to be sung by the choir only, and a short anthem taken from the start of Bach’s *Jesu, meine Freude*, (*Jesus, my joy*). After that, Kevin, and then Lucy and her daughter, Grace (who both sang with the choir at St Paul’s in 2019), paid tribute to their brother, husband and father, after which the choir hummed the opening bars of *Serdeczna Matko* before Cathy and Louise sang the two verses in Polish. The choir “oohed” the harmonies and then repeated some of the words in Polish. The family were visibly moved - as were the members of the choir - during an emotional service, which was attended by 242 people.