

Choir Notes – December 2022



A month of pleasure and incident. After our visit to St David's Cathedral, we sing at the Remembrance Sunday service at Holy Trinity on 13th November. We sing well-known hymns, the National Anthem, the *Kyrie* from the Casciolini Mass and the Harris *Holy is the True Light*, which we sang as the anthem in Wales, so it needed only slight attention to reach performance standard. On the morning of the service, we learn that we are also to sing Psalm 46 (*God is Our Hope and Strength*, to music by Martin Luther (1483-1546) – yes, the one who started the Reformation, and wrote good hymn tunes when not too busy).

The next day we are ready for Evensong at St Paul's (*above*), again using music sung at St David's, as there is no time to learn new things or even to practice old repertoire between the two visits. We are to sing the Statham Canticles and *Insanae et Vanae Curae* by Haydn. The acoustic in St David's was not lively, so *Vanae* should terrify the congregation even more in the ringing acoustic in St Paul's - perhaps the congregation will see elephants charging West to East, pursued by roaring lions.

So then, to St Paul's. I am early, so take a detour: I cross the Thames at Charing Cross, walk along the South Bank, and cross the Millennium Bridge, to get good views of the cathedral from the south. You get in through a small door on the north side into the crypt to an underground rehearsal room, where Jeff rehearses us swiftly, since we are accompanied by organist Sam Laughton, who has a slot of only 30 minutes booked in to re-learn the organ upstairs.

Then we practice in the choir stalls. Wherever we go visiting, there is initial sound orientation to get used to the acoustics, and calm down, and then it is just fun, as we are so well rehearsed! The cathedral writes afterwards to congratulate us, using a template as they write too many such letters to compose afresh every time; but we are invited back, and Jeff says that not everyone gets invited back, so we are doing well.

The next event is the Advent Carol Service at Saunderton, which I think is as much fun as St Paul's. Certainly less grand, but also less space to fill with noise (friends in the nave at St Paul's couldn't hear the words, as they were lost in the space) and more relaxed. We sing '*Adam Lay Ybounden*' by Boris Ord, a carol sing most years, because it is great! Earthy is good, medieval is good, and Cynthia reminds us that Mr Ord realised late in the evening before the King's College Advent Carol Service that he had no anthem for the first lesson, so he knocked one up smartish. What genius! Had he taken longer, would it have been better? It could not be better. Short, but sweet.

Rehearsals for Christmas services at Holy Trinity follow. We are to sing an arrangement of the *Carol of the Bells*. Jeff helpfully asks us not to get our dings and dongs muddled, which is not totally easy, as there are many of both. We are also to sing *I sing of a Maiden*, not with music by Britten, but a version by our own wonderful Fiona Jacob. Learning any new composer's work is initially a strange experience while you struggle to work out what is happening, but we soon get a grip of this lovely piece.

Only one more rehearsal before the Christmas Carol Service. So much beautiful music to remember and keep in your head. It should be lovely!