

Choir Notes - March 2022



After Christmas there is a performance-free month, so we get stuck into our next cathedral visit, which is to Salisbury (*left, by Constable*) on 26th and 27th February - Evensong on both days and Eucharist on the Sunday; so much singing - Hurrah! And what great singing! We have little time to rehearse enough music for three services in Salisbury, so we must resurrect repertoire for a running start.

So, we have Canticles in D Major by Sir (Alfred) Herbert Brewer (1865-1928: he spent his entire career as choirmaster at Gloucester, his home town; he knew Elgar, Parry and Sibelius among others, taught

Howells, and was knighted in 1926). It's several years since we last sang this, and a debate follows about what we learned it for, with Ripon or Winchester cathedrals suggested. I check on the choir website later, and it was 2017 in Winchester - so, five years ago. We are far from perfect on the first run through, but not disastrous either. This is for the Sunday Evensong.

We have the unusual Philip Moore (1947 - still alive) canticles for Saturday Evensong. Much of this is plainsong with explosions of jazzy bits. Like much music, it is difficult, until you work out what is going on. We sang this in Coventry in 2016. New members have joined us, which is great, as numbers dipped a little over the pandemic. We welcome Kate and Fiona as sopranos, Debbie as an alto, and Rupert, a bass. I hope that they get as much thrill from singing with us as we all have been enjoying for years.

The next week we concentrate on Joseph Haydn's (1732-1809) *Kleine Orgelmesse* for the Sunday Eucharist service. We have also done this before. It is great fun, and not too difficult. In the *Kyrie* we repeat 'Kyrie Eleison' and 'Christe Eleison' many times, as usual in the first movement of a mass. Jeff tells us to sing it differently each time, with increasing desperation, as if God can't hear us at first, or maybe mercy is not available at first request to such sinful singers. With his own increasing desperation, he suggests that we think of a different colour each time that we repeat 'Kyrie'. I try, but I find it hard both to sing in colour and listen to what comes out. I hope that my red and orange are different from my blue and green. Jeff asks us to sing the final 'Amen' as if we mean 'aren't we clever'. I think that we manage that.

Then, a week later, we concentrate on *Oculi Omnium* by Tomos Owen Jones. This is short but tough, to be sung throughout as if saying the vowel 'oo', whatever the words are, while saying the words so that they make sense and can be heard. This is to get a rounded, smooth sound, not just as a lip-strengthening exercise. It is hard to say what is difficult about this, but Jeff clearly wants it to sound better. We improve over the rehearsal, but it remains in need of further practice, but it will be alright on the night!

We are also practicing *Exsultate Deo* by Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725) - easy, but speedy - and *O Nata Lux* by Morten Lauridsen (1943 - still alive) - *slowissimo*, but difficult: you have to count as far as nine, or even higher, quite slowly for some notes, trying not to breathe in, so turning purple.

On 10th February, Jeff is absent, so Cynthia takes the practice. We sing, *inter alia*, the Haydn *Sanctus* from the Mass. We sing '*pleni sunt coeli et terra gloriae tuae.*' I am thinking '*plena est Cynthia factorum musicorum.*' She tells us that Haydn was (a) a naughty boy, (b) a fine boy treble singer, and (c) a perpetually cheerful man. Because of fact (b), his choirmaster wanted him to become a castrato, but his dad, an earthy peasant, said no, causing fact (c). He was then expelled from that choir for surreptitiously cutting off the pig-tail of a chorister in front of him (fact (a)). It is certainly true that Haydn's music is incredibly cheerful. *Quod erat demonstrandum.*

We greatly appreciated the fact that some members of the congregation came to hear us sing in Salisbury. It always means a lot to us to have you there to support us when we sing in cathedrals.

Rob Hill