

Choir Notes: October 2024



We return to work on 5th September after the August holiday. Jeff hands out two marvellous scores; first a *Mag and Nunc* by Thomas Tertius Noble (1867–1953), and second *And I Saw a New Heaven*, with words from the Revelation of St John the Divine and music by Edgar Leslie Bainton (1880–1956). Bainton (left), who was trained by Stanford at the Royal College of Music, held many teaching posts, and went on to run a conservatoire in New South Wales in 1935. Jeff says that it is the best church anthem ever written, and it seems to be the only frequently-performed piece by Mr Bainton. The Australian Dictionary of National Biography (available online), refers to him as a prolific composer, so there must be much more by him to be discovered. (I feel sure that Jeff has said “this is the best church anthem ever written” before, about other pieces, which is unsurprising, as Jeff gets us singing such cracking good anthems.)

The music was for Evensong at Saunderton on 29th September, so I do hope you were there. This was our only service in September. We had sung both pieces before, so we had plenty of time to learn them. I remembered the Bainton as being tricky, and we had only rehearsed it before, because Covid struck before we could perform it at any service.

Jeff says that he avoids music which is famous or too well-known, but then he gets the urge to do them, and re-discovers why they are famous: because they are very good! The Bainton has a lovely gentle section from *He remembering...* to *Abraham and his seed for ever*.

As always after the summer break, I have forgotten how to sing, but the rest of the choir are okay, so it is a good start to the new choir year.

The essence of singing in a choir is that you are buttressed by colleagues. The essence of “choir” is “more than one”, but on 12th September I am the only bass, and one of only two men, the other being a lone tenor. The tenor has the advantage here, as they are often alone, and so are used to it, while out of four regular basses, at least two usually come. And I do not know the pieces at all well yet! The advantage of two or more is that you learn from each other, and realise and correct mistakes. But Jeff is very helpful and kind, and it was fun to sing alone, and it probably helped to learn the piece, as I had to concentrate more than usual.

The pieces are much improved in the rehearsal, and Jeff says that if *And I Saw...* is not up to speed by the 29th, he can pull an old favourite out of the bottom drawer.

I listen to Harry Christophers’ ‘The Sixteen’, who seem actually to be 27 now, at the Proms. I doubt that they grimace at all. Jeff tells us often not to grimace. The problem, Jeff, is that I have no consciousness of what my face is up to. It is autonomous. Do you, dear reader, know all the time what your face is doing? I have little idea what I look like: if I see myself in a photograph, I think “who is that?” before I think, ‘well strike a light, ‘tis I’.

Rob Hill