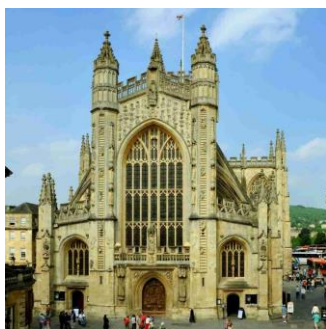


Choir Notes - September 2025



Summer has ended, the nights are drawing in, and we have come on 11th September to our first rehearsal after our summer break. Now, I usually have completely forgotten how to sing at our first autumn rehearsal. I cannot read the music, sing the right notes - or any notes - or watch the conductor. But this year I went to Jeff's excellent "Great Malvern Festival of Singing" organised through his company, They Shall Laugh and Sing, where we learned Brahms' German *'Requiem'*, various Renaissance pieces for a Compline service, and Will Todd's *'Mass in Blue'*. So I do feel that I might be able to sing the right notes in the right order at the right time.

We gather with joy, but without Joy, who has gone to South Africa.

The next service at which we shall be singing is the Harvest Festival on 5th October. We will sing an anthem, new to the choir, by Sir Edward Elgar (1857-1934), *'Fear Not, O Land'*, but we are not starting on that just yet.

Instead, we practice pieces for our visit over the weekend of 1st-2nd November to Bath Abbey. I have never sung there, but I have visited as a tourist, and marvelled at the sculpture on the west front (see picture), showing angels climbing and descending ladders. Bath is a lovely city, as most of you will know, but on a singing weekend there is no time for sight-seeing, unless you book an extra night in your hotel to get more time there.

We are also singing at a wedding on 20th September. We will sing Rutter's *'Gaelic Blessing'*. We do not have enough sheet music to go round tonight, so we sing it through just once. This satisfies Jeff that we still remember it well, and we will pick it up quickly next week.

Then we sing *'Preces and Responses'*, new to us, by John Sanders OBE (1933-2003), an eminent musician, organist of Gloucester Cathedral from 1967 to 1994, and director of the Three Choirs Festival from 1968 to 1994. He wrote *'The Reproaches'*, which we sang at Easter. It is a gloomy, dramatic piece, and difficult to sing, but his *'Responses'* are easier, and even sight-singable. They will be polished and burnished and rubbed to a sparkling finish, and perhaps even varnished by Jeff before we sing them at Bath.

I commented last month on Jeff handing out a selection of old and yellowing scores, which he had not tried before. One set of canticles was by Derek Holman (1931-2019), which I doubted we would see again. It was only sung briefly, and taken back in again. Jeff now produces it for us to sing in Bath, so I have to eat my words. We make a brave attempt to sing it by sight. We stop every so often to be corrected, but we don't do badly. And I think that the piece will grow on us.

Someone questions what will be the temperature in Bath Abbey. A chorister recalls that on a previous visit they had the floor up to install under-floor heating, so it should be as warm as toast. Jeff says not necessarily, as there will probably be a man like Kip, running around trying to get it to work.

Then we sing the *'Gloria'* from the Mozart (1756-1791) Mass in C Major which we sang recently in St Albans. This will be the music for our Eucharist Service in Bath. Jeff then remarked that it almost sings itself. And we haven't lost our grip on it since St Albans. So, all is looking good for Bath, with plenty of practice time yet.

Rob Hill