

Choir Notes - April 2022



On 13th February we sing at Eucharist at Holy Trinity. The anthem is *Oculi Omnium* by Tomos Owain-Jones. He wrote it for us in lockdown in June 2020 and it appeared in the virtual services that year. It is tricky for a short piece, although it is hard to say why. We may just need time to get used to a new composer and singing it “live”. He is a student of Jeff’s in Cardiff, and I am sure that he is heading for stardom. We are also to sing it at Salisbury.

Four days later, we rehearse for Salisbury - there will be only one more rehearsal after this in Bledlow. We are to do three services. We start to learn the two psalms for the Evensongs. Jeff records himself singing them, which is a brilliant learning tool for home practice. Jeff points out some tranquil bits (eg water tinkling over rocks) and more violent parts (eg retribution on transgressors of the Law), as understanding the meaning leads to more meaningful singing.

A week later, it’s our final rehearsal. There are still troubling parts, where I think, are we going to manage this? *O Nata Lux* by Lauridsen suffers a train crash the first time through, and is little better on a repeat. Jeff is unruffled. Does he have nerves of steel? He just says that we will have to work on it a bit on the day, and we put it aside for now.

You know how sometimes someone says something nice, which you know from the tone will be followed by “but...?” Jeff says, “It’s lovely to have so many men in the choir...” What is the but? “...but I prefer the girls”? He says, “...but it would be even better if you would look at me and come in with the rest of the choir”. Oh, dear!

Our Salisbury weekend begins on Saturday 26th February. One thing - among many - that I like about cathedral visits is the many people who ask where Bledlow is. It must seem unpromising, a village choir from somewhere so small that you’ve never heard of it. I hope that we surprise them when we start singing! Their resident choir will be excellent, but they sing here every week, so nothing special, whereas we are having fun in a great cathedral, and have only one chance to get it right.

Jeff goads us to greater efforts with pleasant irony. He says that all music is story-telling, and if we get the point of the stories, the sound follows. His work must frustrate him at times, as he has to tell us the same things again and again - like to watch him all the time. Sometimes he says if you do what I say, that will make it Christmas for me, and we do it, and Jeff’s Christmas arrives! We try hard to give Jeff many Christmases!

In the evening, we go to Baroushka, a Lebanese restaurant, organised by Lou out of the kindness of her enormous heart, and we get stuck into mountains of food. Please do try Baroushka for a treat if you are in Salisbury and you like Middle Eastern food.

It’s hard to pick a musical high-point in a weekend of services. The Evensongs both go well, but the overall winner for singer of the trip must be Cathy Stone, with the *Benedictus* solo from Haydn’s *Kleine Orgelmesse* at the Sunday morning Eucharist, hitting the high notes dead centre, while Cynthia twiddles gloriously on the organ to accompany her.

So a huge thank you to Jeff and Cynthia for bringing us through the weekend triumphant, and to our visiting supporters from Bledlow, Saunderton, Horsenden and beyond. We hope that some of you saw the Sunday services on the livestream. Salisbury have since written asking us back next year.

Mike Beattie WhatsApps the choir in the days that follow, suggesting that we do something in support of the emerging refugee crisis in Ukraine. This idea develops into an on-

line recording of the Ukrainian folk song *Plyve Kacha*, and arranging a retiring collection at Good Friday's *The Crucifixion* by John Stainer. More details to follow.

Rob Hill