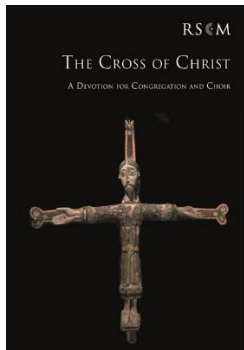


Choir Notes April 2023



9th February: to Bledlow for rehearsal. We prepare for next Sunday's service. We run through the hymns quickly, and Casciolini's *Agnus Dei* (sung before) and then start on *Sicut cervus* by Giovanni da Palestrina (1525-1594), briefly touched on last week, but now subject to serious study. Jeff says if you sing it for months, you continually find new things in it; but we have only the one practice, before the service, so we may just skim the surface. Our first attempt is poor, must try harder. Jeff asks us to try singing the Latin text with a Russian accent. I think of the few Russians I have known, but they have spoken English perfectly, and I can't for the life of me think what a Russian accent is like, so I think while singing 'Boris Gudunov, Ivan, Sergei, Natasha', which is all I can think of to help. I can't hear much Russian accent around me, so maybe others have trouble with this direction. Jeff then asks us to try in the style of Wagner, so I think of Valkyries, and that is better. I don't know what the rest of the choir thinks about, but they sing fff. The words mean *As the hart longs for water, so my soul longs for thee, O God*. Kinda quiet, eh? Not like gathering dead heroes from a battlefield or similar, eh? Jeff smiles, and asks for the same but quieter.

On the Sunday the choir does *Sicut cervus* well, but I have trouble counting and reach the end after everyone else; in fact I don't reach the end, but stop, as weird to insist on singing it alone when everyone else has stopped. We sing the Thorne Mass, which we can sing without practicing, as we sing it often, and some of the congregation join in sometimes, but they might be thrown by the substitution of the Casciolini *Agnus Dei* for the Thorne *Agnus*: I hope the change is welcome. That is the only service sung in the month, which may be a good thing, as the choir is hit by seasonal colds, and some mild Covid. I am off one week to avoid spreading a cold, and then Jeff has a cold and cancels practice the next week. Rehearsals have fewer than full numbers, but we make progress with new repertoire and remember some old

We have sung *The Cross of Christ*, a compilation of Good Friday items before, a long time ago. It was compiled by the Royal School of Church Music in 1956, but most of the music is Victorian or earlier, including *Lord for Thy Tender Mercies' Sake* by John Hilton (1560-1608) - lovely to sing - and well-known hymns like the almost ambiguous one about the hill without a city wall. I love Good Friday music, and particularly the supremely gloomy *Is it Nothing to You* by Victorian F.A.G Ousely, which Jeff replaces this year with the far more beautiful and possibly more gut-wrenchingly moving *O vos omnes* by Tomas Luis de Victoria (1548-1611), based on the same biblical text, but in Latin. Getting emotion into the music continues to be a major choir objective for us. Cynthia says: '... this collection is a well-loved and much-used part of the music library of countless parish choirs, and has played a significant part for over half a century in introducing musicians and congregations to some of the finest but also the most accessible of Passiontide music'.

Also before Easter comes Mothering Sunday, for which we practice *Ave Maria* by Jacques Arcadelt (1507-1568). Arcadelt was born in Namur in modern day Belgium, but his career took him to Paris and also to Rome where he worked as Magister Pueri in the Sistine Chapel, and wrote music to Michelangelo's poems while the latter was painting the ceiling frescoes. He wrote many madrigals, and is credited with being influential in the development of this secular form. The *Ave Maria* is easy (phew!) and delightful.

Sadly, numbers were not achievable to sing at the American Cathedral in Paris on 6th August, but we are going next year instead! Hurrah!

Rob Hill