

Choir Notes – June 2022



The choir would probably agree that this has been a strange month. We started it looking forward to Good Friday and Easter services at Holy Trinity.

The choir strongly supports Ukrainian refugees, and wants to help. So on 14th March we practice our Ukrainian folk song, *Phyve Katcha*. It is not difficult, but it needs work to reach a presentable standard. Then we rehearse Stainer's '*Crucifixion*', after the performance of which there will be a retiring collection for Ukrainian refugees.

Jeff has us print a version of *O Rejoice that the Lord has Arisen*, also known as *The Easter Hymn*, from the opera *Cavalleria Rusticana* by Pietro Mascagni (1863-1945) for Easter Sunday, which he says is easy. Has he done a risk assessment? He doesn't say. Most times when religious music is sung in an opera (at least later than Handel), something awful happens soon after. In *Cavalleria*, the hero dies in a duel with his love rival, and in *Tosca*, Baron Scarpia plots *Tosca*'s downfall while the chorus sings the '*Te Deum*'. We do not practice it much, as we run out of time. The short practice does not reach a good standard. Jeff says we will rehearse it after the '*Crucifixion*' next week.

But next week we work hard on the '*Crucifixion*' for Good Friday, and there is no time left for *O Rejoice*, so this has to be abandoned and replaced by '*This Joyful Eastertide*', arranged by Charles Wood. We have sung this before, so we will need only to rehearse on Easter Sunday itself. Jeff has often said that '*Crucifixion*' is not good musically, and that you need to squeeze the emotion out of it strenuously to make it interesting. I do not think I would choose it if shipwrecked on a desert island with only eight downloads available. Why would you choose Stainer in preference to Haydn, Tallis or Purcell, to name but three? They are all more exciting musically. But Stainer tells the story well, and people like it, so we go for it, and with William and Jeff singing the solos *doloroso e drammatico*, I think that this is the most gripping performance that we have ever done.

And we get it - Covid, that is! Nearly all the choir gets it within three days of the Good Friday performance. Jeff cancels the choir rehearsal for 21st. April to allow rest after the hard work of Easter before the news about Covid breaks, so the silver lining is that we may not miss any choir practice if we recover in time for 28th. April. Our next service in Bledlow is Matins on 15th May, and then we have Evensong at Lichfield Cathedral on 28th May, so it looks as though we will need to work hard to prepare for those services on time.

But I then go away on holiday for two weeks! Horror! I miss my rehearsals! Are you worried for me? No need, because in the second week I go to the Choral Holidays course at Bolton Abbey in Yorkshire (see picture), a beautiful spot on the southern edge of the Dales, with two cafés and a pub close by for physical comfort, while learning and singing four evensongs in four days, led by Jeff, our Bledlow Choirmaster with his holiday hat on. You might say, "How can you write about that in Bledlow Choir Notes - what's it got to do with Bledlow?" Fair point, but there are four Bledlow choir members there, including Jeff, so we don't get enough singing in Bledlow, but have to drive 200 miles for more Jeff magic in Yorkshire. It amazes me that he has the guts to put on a public performance four days in a row with a choir whose members don't know each other, and that he judges it right so that we just about manage it, if not perfectly, at least loudly, with some feeling, and more than making up in enthusiasm for any lack of skills. It is all so lovely.

Rob Hill