

## Choir Notes: November 2023



A quiet month, but a good one.

Last month's notes covered Matins on 17th September, and then the next rehearsal was cancelled, as Jeff felt that we were on course to meet all our commitments, and he could have a well-deserved night off.

This left one rehearsal for the Harvest Festival service on 1st October. Jeff bewails the scarcity of good Harvest anthems. Harvest has had less attention from composers than Easter and Christmas (understandably).

Jeff had found new anthems for the last two years, but this year we are back to '*Thou Visiteth the Earth*' by Maurice Greene (1696 -1755, above), which Jeff has sung hundreds of times. He says that his target for us for the rehearsal is to get us to like it. It has the virtue of being much sung by us all, so it needs little note-bashing when time is tight.

Now, Greene wrote '*Lord, let me know mine end*' - a profound and moving piece. So, why this earthy village sing-song? It's fine in my view as right for the occasion, and it also has a tenor solo introduction before the whole choir piles in; Derek sings it wonderfully.

Jeff has been singing in *La Traviata* in Oxford for the previous two nights, but he turns up as fresh as a daisy, and brings Sam, another professional tenor singer who was also in *La Traviata*. This is great as Derek is the only indigenous tenor present, so he would have had a solo tenor line throughout, but Sam's presence balanced the choir better. I listen later to the Choir of New College Oxford singing it, and it is really very good.

I like services with hymns that everyone knows, and this Harvest service is a treat. Everyone belts out '*We Plough the Fields and Scatter*', and other favourites. Great! We also sing '*Praise God from whom all blessings flow*' to an easy, well-known tune. We only learn that we are singing this on the day, but it takes two minutes to learn it, and turn it into a round to make it more interesting, and to run it throughout the presentation of harvest gifts from the congregation. Jeff tells us that we did well afterwards - which he only ever says if true.

Our next service is Evensong at Saunderton. We are practising Howell's *Canticles* in G: will we make it on time? It is quite difficult. We haven't reached the end of the *Magnificat* yet, let alone looked at the *Nunc Dimittis*. It seems touch and go, but Jeff usually pulls it out of the hat, so we shall see. He tells us that one of his other choirs sang another Howell *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis* in St Paul's, which has a new lightshow, called '*Aura*', making the dome burst with brilliance when the *Magnificat* reached its climax. We can look forward to that when we go there on 4th December. He tells us that he sang the Howell's *Canticles* when he was nowt but a lad in his village choir, and found them easy!

On 5th October, we spend the whole rehearsal on the Howell's *Canticles* in G. We reach the end of the *Magnificat*, which has taken some time as it is not easy, and we just start on the *Nunc Dimittis*. For the second rehearsal in a row, Derek has been the only tenor. Jeff supports him, and I am sure that he is OK - good job he is great tenor.

On 12th October, we resolve to sing the Howell's *Canticles* at Evensong at Saunderton on 29th October, despite only just starting on the *Nunc Dimittis*, and having no anthem yet. There was the prospect of Jeff going to teach in China (yes, that China, the one thousands of miles away, where Jeff has a loyal audience for his teaching skills) during that weekend. Sadly for Jeff, his trip was postponed to 2024, but good for us, as singing Evensong without a conductor is hazardous, though we have done it successfully before now. Phew!

Rob Hill