

# Choir Notes

In the January *Messenger* I left you in St Paul's Cathedral on 4<sup>th</sup> December. No rest after that, as we need to get on with practice for the Bledlow Carol Service on 17<sup>th</sup> December. We put aside Howells' compositions and take on the anthems Joanna Forbes L'Estrange's '*Carol of the Crib*', Michael Praetorius' '*Es Ist ein Ros Entsprungen*', Morten Lauridsen's '*O Magnum Mysterium*' and Ian Assersohn's '*Make We Joy Now in This Fest*'; they make a good mix of music, with three pieces by contemporary composers and one from the Renaissance - three pieces of Christmas confectionery to make your heart melt and an earthy one.

Joanna Forbes L'Estrange is contemporary (born 1971), and is well known as the composer of the Coronation Anthem '*The Mountains Shall Bring Peace*' for King Charles. Her carol is sweet and straightforwardly beautiful: "...the Angels are singing for Christ is here".

Michael Praetorius (1571-1621) was a German composer from Thuringia with a large output. '*Es Ist ein Ros Entsprungen*' is sweet with lovely harmonies, and in German, so I hope that the effort of learning the words and pronunciation was appreciated by any German-speakers present, though they may not have understood a word if they didn't know it previously. It is usually known in English as '*A Spotless Rose*'.

'*O Magnum Mysterium*' is a choir favourite, but it is a year or two since we last sang it, so it needs work to get our heads and throats around it. Martin Lauridsen, born 1943, says on his website "Composer, performer and educator, Lauridsen has spent his lifetime listening in deep silence to the 'inner song', bringing forth choral works of radiant beauty for the world to hear and sing" - a reasonable summary: we always enjoy singing this, sweet and beautiful, and mystic too, and in Latin.

And then the piece by Ian Assersohn. I like to give dates of composers, but I cannot find his birth date on the internet. His website says "Ian studied at the RCM in London with John Lambert and afterwards at the Koninklijk Conservatorium in Den Haag with Peter Schat and Louis Andriessen. He set up an electronic studio and spent a few years writing music for commercials and documentaries before he ran out of money and became a software developer. He stayed in software for many years before breaking free in 2009 and returning to music. Today he is a full-time conductor, piano teacher and composer, mostly of choral music." From that, I suspect a birth year around 1973, and that seems to fit the latest photo that I can find of him.

'*Make We Joy Now in This Fest*' is earthy. The basses get to shout (tunefully) "*Eya*" many times. It is based on a 15<sup>th</sup> century text, when people were closer and perhaps earthier. I hope that it woke everyone up!

And there were many lovely congregational carols, including '*Hark the Herald Angels Sing*', and '*O Come All Ye Faithful*', which give everyone a chance to sing lustily.

We did not sing the '*Angel Gabriel*' this year. I just love the words: "*The angel Gabriel from heaven came, his wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame...*" but you can't sing the same every year!

And so then on to the Choir Christmas party, kindly hosted by Jeff and Di. This is always a great occasion, at which Greg, who does so much for the choir, makes a speech thanking others. Of course, chief thanks are due to Jeff, without whom we would be far worse singers. He can't transform us all into great singers, but he can stop us from being very bad. We are all committed to the choir and turn up week after week, because we love it (and Jeff too).

Our next date is Portsmouth Cathedral on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> January for Evensong - but that is for the next edition of *The Messenger*.

Rob Hill