

Choir Notes - October 2023



Summer has intervened and delayed my recording that a long time ago, on Saturday 10th June, we sang Evensong at Guildford Cathedral (left). One approaches the cathedral along the A3 trunk road, and it never looks promising from below - just a huge



pile of bricks: but inside (right) what a delight of cool, minimalist, clean, white, soaring verticals - lovely on a boiling summer's day. It suited our music down to the ground.

We sang Palestrina's *Sicut Cervus*, Bernabei's *Magnificat* and de Morales' *Nunc Dimittis*, all ancient pieces for a modern place. They rarely have Sung Evensong at Guildford on a Saturday, so we were made to feel very welcome.

Matins at Holy Trinity on 18th June was a peaceful service: we sang William Cowper's *O for a closer walk with God* from the Scottish psalter - an easy piece for quick learning after Guildford.

On Friday 7th July we sang again at Holy Trinity, at a soirée to celebrate Norbert's ministry: We performed Bob Chilcott's *Irish Blessing* and *Londonderry Air (O Danny Boy)*, plus an arrangement of *I do like to be beside the seaside*, because Norbert was about to leave for his home by the sea in Kenya. Then as a finale, the choir in Swahili sang *Kwaheri*, a traditional Kenyan farewell song and the congregation joined in. It was a very emotional evening.

Back to work after its summer hols, the choir rehearses on 7th September. This is tense: I might have forgotten how to sing since July. Last year, my first September rehearsal was bad, but this year OK. So, what caused failure last year? Just feeling off that evening? I think how puzzling illnesses must be for doctors, when so many things can cause so many different symptoms. I haven't been to the doctor yet about choral failure, as I doubt there is any tonic available to cure it, but I may ask my GP one day about this strange malady. But, back to the point, there is a good turn-out for our first rehearsal, apart from one or two still absent on holiday. We have a new recruit alto, Anne, who is welcomed by Jeff. He comments that, unusually, there are more altos than sops, and how nice that is, an alto victory, but then one or two sops turn up late, so no real alto supremacy after all.

And we have new music, as well as a new member! Jeff has been to sing at Canterbury Cathedral with many of his old mates whom he hasn't seen for years and they all have a whale of a time, one purpose being to remember Martin How MBE, (1931-2022), a most distinguished musician, a mainstay of the Royal School of Church Music, and composer of several pieces that we have sung. Jeff brings Martin's setting of Psalm 23 to us. We practise it for the Matins Service at Bledlow on 17th September, which saddens me a little (oh dear!), as I will be away at a wedding in Cornwall that weekend, but I am sure that we will sing it again (Hurrah!), so I cheer up again. It is a good piece when we have only one more rehearsal, as it is not difficult, but a new take on a favourite psalm. We also practise Herbert Howells' (1892-1983) *Canticles* in G. We do not often tackle pieces by Howells. I remember singing his *Sicut Cervus* many years ago in Winchester. I feel sure that we have sung other settings of *Canticles* by him, but I may be wrong as not 100% certain. Singing different composers can be tricky until you get used to their sound world, but we seem to do well with these pieces. We may sing these canticles at an Evensong at Saunderton Church on

29th October (as October has five Sundays, and we sing Evensongs on such fifth Sundays). We may also sing it at Evensong at St Paul's Cathedral on Monday 4th December. Do come if you can, please.

The choir sang an old style Matins at Holy Trinity on 17th September, including the traditional Ferial setting of the preces and responses to enable the congregation to sing along too. Plenty of chanting, as the Venite and Psalm 103 were to chants from the parish psalter and the anthem was the How Psalm 23, a modern version of a plainsong chant, a little jazzier than the parish psalter, but still a chant.

Rob Hill