

Choir Notes - April 2024



We start the month with communion at Holy Trinity, featuring the new Communion Service by Richard Shephard (1949-2021, Director of Music at York Minster), and the lovely *'The Lord Hath Been Mindful of Us'* by Samuel Sebastian Wesley (1810-1876, who moved around, working at Hereford Cathedral, Exeter Cathedral, Leeds Parish Church, Winchester Cathedral, Winchester College, Gloucester Cathedral, then as Professor of Organ at the Royal Academy of Music). Jeff says that he made up a tune and then repeated and embellished it, starting a tradition for Anglican church music which ran and ran down the years.

Our Durham trip on 2nd November has been cancelled. The cathedral invited us to cover Saturday Evensong and all its Sunday services; but they have now realised that they have a special annual service - always sung by their indigenous choir - on the Saturday and they have decided not to have an Evensong as well.

We are singing *'The Cross of Christ'* on Good Friday, a set of Passiontide music, which we have sung before, but as last year, the music is varied by the substitution of *'O Vos Omnes'* by Tomas Luis de Victoria (1548-1611) for *'Is It Nothing to You'* by F A Gore Ouseley, Bart (1825-1889) - same words, different language, and very different music. Jeff thinks that the Victoria is perhaps the best piece of music ever written. It is wonderful, but what about Purcell's *'Thou Knowest Lord'*? But I can see what Jeff means.

'Ave Verum Corpus' by Mozart (1756-1791) is also substituted by *'Ave Verum Corpus'* by Camille Saint-Saens (1835-1921), moving the average birth dates of all composers closer to the original line up.

We work through the music in a workmanlike manner: the choir is reduced by illness and other causes. On 29th February, we have no tenors at all. Even though we have sung everything except the Saint-Saens before, the music still needs bringing up to scratch, and we also have Mothering Sunday to cover. 7th March is our only rehearsal for Mothering Sunday on the 10th.

Jeff planned as our anthem *'Drop, Drop Slow Tears'* by Margaret Woodley, a contemporary composer, but he has realised since his first thoughts that this piece is a bit gloomy, as it is about Mary Magdalene praying for forgiveness for moral lapses, so he substitutes an *'Ave Maria'* by Caccini (1551-1618), although it isn't absolutely certain who composed it, which is much more appropriate. Jeff tells us that the piece as written just repeated the words "Ave Maria" over and over: the rest of the words were added later. We sing it. It is easy. Jeff asks if Cynthia can replace the major last chord with a minor one. She is horrified. They never did that in renaissance Italy. Having said that, whilst it purports to be renaissance and, as with the Vivaldi *'Gloria'*, re-discovered in about the 1950s, it's actually now known to be the work of a Russian called Vladimir Vavilov, who died in 1973 and who liked to attribute his works to much better-known composers of long ago. It sounds as Baroque as your elbow, but lovely, I expect, whether ending on a major or minor chord.

And so, to Holy Trinity to sing on Mothering Sunday. Arrangements of daffodils and Spring flowers are distributed to mothers by children. The *'Ave Maria'* goes well. A lovely service altogether.

Rob Hill