

We meet on 12th June. We are singing Evensong at the end of the month, but there is no urgency to practise for that, so Jeff produces canticle music from his attic to try out - part of a trove of sheet music given to him by his church in Ashted where he sang as a lad.

The first one that we try is by someone called Holman, which Jeff takes back when we have had a go at it. I think we may not see that one again.

Then he hands out canticles by Sir Henry Walford Davies KCVO OBE (1869 –1941). The music says on the cover that it is copyright 1901, and the paper is showing its age. Repaired once with sellotape, the sellotape has lost its stick, and the pages are battered and worn from repeated handling. Sir Henry is well known. He was Master of the King's Music from 1934 until 1941. He served with the RAF in the First World War, and he composed the Royal Air Force March Past. We sing his Magnificat. Jeff does not collect in the music, so we may sing it again.

Then Jeff hands out canticles by Basil Harwood (1859 –1949), which are mainstream church music. We whizz through this once, as we are nearing our normal stop time, but there remains a surprise in store. Jeff asks Joy to leave. She pretends to be alarmed that we need to discuss her “singing”, but after she has gone, Jeff produces words (that he has written to mark her re-location to South Africa), to sing to the tune of Beethoven's ‘*Ode to Joy*’. Joy is having a village farewell party at The Lions, and the choir will embarrass her with it there! What joy to sing the ‘*Ode to Joy*’ to Joy in the pub!

On 19th June, the rehearsal is given over to practising pieces for Joy. Jeff hands out the South African National Anthem. Debbie (alto) has lived in South Africa and knows it to symbolise unity. It is formed of all the main South African languages - Zulu, Bantu, Xhosa, Afrikaans, and one or two others. The only word that I recognise is “Africa”, which comes up several times. This adds to the tally of languages in which we have sung (Latin, German, French, Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, Kikuyu, Swahili...).

Then we sing Jeff's Joy song to Beethoven's ‘*Ode to Joy*’. I think that it is incredibly good, and Jeff is a genius, until he lets on that it has been mostly composed by AI, not by him. The party went well on 22nd June, with music, speeches and tears.

At the next rehearsal, we practise hymns for Evensong on 29th June. Jeff announces that we have a date at Southwell Minster on 5-6th June 2026(!). We have been there before. Then we sing the psalm to a chant by the remarkably named Kellow John Pye.

Then it is on to the canticles by Thomas Atwood Walmisley (1814-1856), and the anthem ‘*Achieved is the Glorious Work*’, part of ‘*The Creation*’, by Haydn (1732- 1809), both of which we sang recently at St Albans. Jeff works hard on the Haydn, which is a cheerful piece which tempts “*con belto*” rendition, so Jeff asks us to remember that in the 18th century the men wore frock coats, frilly lace cuffs and the watchword was “elegant”. He says think “Dignity, Dignity, Dignity”. We repeat the piece less raucously, but it is such fun to sing that dignity can fly out the window, if we are not careful.

On 28th June, we have the Aylesbury Consort of Singers at the Coffee-Time Concert. Now, I would say that this is dangerous, as people might compare us. But we are us, doing our thing, and they are them doing something different. There is room for everyone in the singing world!

Then it is Evensong on 29th June at Saunderton, as it is the fifth Sunday of the month. We gather at 5pm to rehearse before the service begins at 6pm. As always, this last rehearsal is

important to remind us what Jeff wants. All goes smoothly, until we practise '*Achieved is the Glorious Work*', which calls to mind the line-up before the Grand National. The horses can't wait to fly, and then they run like crazy. Jeff reins us in with his watchword - "Dignity"! This works and we sing it more quietly: we can now hear each other and sing as a team. The service is lovely and the church not too hot despite the heat wave. The choir does not wear robes, to avoid heat-stroke, as the fabric of our robes is heavy.

On 3rd July, we start to practise for Choral Eucharist at Holy Trinity on 13th July. We have sung the Wiltshire Service by Richard Shephard (1949 –2021) several times, but not recently, and it takes some learning, particularly the '*Agnus Dei*', which has few notes, but lasts a long time as the notes are sung veeerrryyy sloooowly. Jeff says that he finds it difficult to beat time slowly enough, and one choir member complains that she reached the end 20 seconds before everyone else.

And then we get new music from Jeff, '*O Sacrum Convivium*' by Philip Stopford (born 1977 and who is taking over from Jeff as the DM of Aylesbury Choral Society in September). This also is slow. Someone asks Jeff how to pronounce Sacrum: is the first "a" short as in apple, or is it like say(crum)? Jeff says as in apple, the saycrum being a body part, so a different thing altogether.

On 9th July, we continue with the same pieces. Unusually, Jeff does not know one of the hymns set for Sunday. This leads somehow to an anecdote that Ralph Vaughan-Williams edited the New English Hymnal, and put many old favourites of questionable merit or sentiments into an appendix. He called this his "Chamber of Horrors". It also leads to a discussion of where all the hymn books are going, as there were plenty a while ago, but now some of us have to share. They have been re-stocked from time to time by choir members at their own expense and donation from the PCC. Various theories are put forward, and searches proposed, so forgotten caches may be found. Sharing is hard, and affects the quality of the singing.

To encourage us in '*O Sacrum Convivium*', Jeff tells us about an Indian woman, whose mother-in-law accused her of gluttony. She went to a guru, who trained her to live without eating or drinking, so she did neither for 50 years. Jeff asks us to imagine that we eat the '*Sacrum Convivium*' as our first meal in 50 years as we sing it. Yum yum!

Then on to the Eucharist service on 13th July. The singing goes well and Jeff congratulates us. Afterwards we go out of the north door of the church to have a last of photo (*please see on the next page*) of the choir with Joy, who now has a date to emigrate to South Africa in August. Sad for us, but a new life in the sun for Joy and Colin with Jo!

Rob Hill