

Musical Musings May

“Now is the month of maying,
When merry lads are playing,
Fa la la.....”

So goes the famous madrigal that we probably all sang at school. May always feels like an exciting time, summer just around the corner, and lots of energy in the air. That lively rhythmic madrigal with its numerous “Fa la las” always puts me in a good mood and reflects the feeling of summer jollity.

The celebrated close harmony group, The King’s Singers, very often included that madrigal in their concerts. This month sees the 50th anniversary of their founding, which I find very hard to believe. By complete co-incidence, we are going to be singing two anthems this month written by ex-King’s Singers. At Pentecost we shall be singing Bill Ives’ stunning setting of the words “Listen, Sweet Dove”. Bill, who writes under the name of Grayston Ives, was the tenor of the group for eight years before re-inventing himself as the Informator Choristarum – choirmaster - at Magdalen College, Oxford, where they have an annual tradition of the choir singing at the top of the tower on May Day. I am not sure how some of St Mary’s Choir would feel if we introduced that custom!

On the first Sunday of this month when we trial our “Open” Choral Evensong to include local singers, we shall be singing a new anthem (for us) by Bob Chilcott, who was also a tenor in the King’s Singers. It is a setting of the words “Just as I am, without one plea” and is a real favourite of mine. We probably all know the famous hymn tune, but I always find it refreshing when I hear old words set in a new way – it gives them a fresh energy and meaning – just as the month of May does to our lives. Do try and come along on Sunday 6th and hear it.

Simon Lole