



When Dr Litman invited me to write a few words about the benefits to be gained from being a cathedral chorister I was unsure where to begin. Then, by chance, I heard Purcell's 'Rejoice in the Lord Alway' (also known as 'The Bell Anthem') on Radio three.

I was immediately transported back to my time as a chorister at Lincoln Cathedral where we performed this piece once or twice a year.

It also reminded me of the daily contact we had with a musical tradition stretching back not just to Purcell's time but even earlier.

I was 10 when I joined Lincoln Cathedral Choir and for the next five years I sang in 10 choral services a week. The repertoire comprised wonderful, inspiring music encompassing almost the entire lifespan of the Anglican choral tradition, from composers such as William Byrd (1543-1623), organist and choirmaster at Lincoln, to Dr Gordon Slater, who held these offices some 400 years later.

When I first joined the choir, most of the repertoire was already known by the existing choir members. Although little theoretical instruction was given to us newcomers, we seemed to 'absorb' the ability to read music because of the simple correlation between what was written on the page and what we heard.

Gradually developing the ability to sing at sight facilitated the learning of new pieces very quickly.

Sight-singing itself is an undervalued skill, especially amongst instrumentalists, where often notes on a page produce a finger or hand reaction without the sense of 'singing' through the instrument. In his autobiography *The Imp and the Thistle*, (2000), former Lincoln chorister, Dennis Townhill OBE, founder of the music school at St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, Edinburgh quoted the school's patron, the celebrated violinist Yehudi Menuhin as saying that 'singing was so important that all musicians should sing'.

Even more pertinent to this article, Dr Townhill wrote:

‘It is undisputed that a chorister’s training creates a sense of teamwork and is one of the few activities in which children work alongside adults to the highest professional standards. Added to this the experience of the contact with beautiful music and beautiful language, in inspiring, awesome buildings. This creates a recipe for confidence, reliability and integrity: former choristers often achieve excellence, not only in music but only in other professions’.

In summary, I can do no better than to paraphrase William Byrd’s *‘Reasons briefly set down by th’auctor, to perswade every one to learn to sing’*:

*\* It is easily taught and quickly learned where there is a good master and an apt scholar*

*\* The exercise of singing is delightful to Nature and good to preserve the health*

*\* It doth strengthen all parts of the breast and doth open the pipes*

*\* It is a singular good remedy for stuttering and stammering*

*\* It is the best means to procure a perfect pronunciation to make a good orator*

*‘.....Since singing is so good a thing*

*I wish all [men] would learn to sing’*

Frank Woolley LTCL. Ramsey, August, 2020