

9.5.23 'Liberation Day, Music and Mother'

The historians among you will know that these islands were the only part of the UK to be occupied during WWII. Only a few are left who lived through those dark years but each year islanders gather by the Pomme D'Or hotel to remember those who endured on all sides, the strangeness of occupation. Today I learnt that one illicit radio was crafted within a walnut.

The Festival Choir are regulars at the event, singing wartime familiars such as 'Tipperary' and 'White Cliffs of Dover'. We'll Meet Again' and 'My Old Man Said Follow the Van' and a version of the Dambusters tune with words. Much of this medley recalled my mother whose ne'er do well relatives hailed from the humbler parts of North Lunnon and who all loved a knees-up. As children we were encouraged not to speak like them as they were undoubtedly 'common', but they did have great parties and in my memory we were always there, dancing and singing. As Liberation Day is Mums birthday, singing songs from her childhood felt just right.

I like to think she was listening, somewhere.

The day dawned foggy and damp and only now does a sheepish sun show his face. After dripping flags and chilled faces this is not helpful, still, the Jerseyites are a staunch lot and take weather in their stride - it was on with the show. The choir sang twice and bookended the morning, and this was quite a feat as we are recovering from Mozart's Coronation Mass on Sunday last, a triumph and lots of studying to do it justice. This was more of a singalong and more fun as less serious, and as I had not been involved in a Liberation Day celebration before it was all new to me. We were sitting directly outside the hotel immortalised in photographs and the Jersey tapestries with the swastika flags hanging hugely over the balcony. Today there were cheers as veterans reenacted the British Flag gathering and then being re-flown as it was by liberating troops in 1943. Islanders were slowly starving and it is notable that the German occupying troops distributed all red cross supplies and kept nothing back for themselves.

The Bailiff gave a speech having lately returned from Westminster Abbey's coronation formalities. He commented on the island's community kindness and recent twinning with a Ukrainian town now being bombed, alas their mayor was unable to accept our invitation to the event. But the German ambassador was present and a Ukrainian prayer was sung. With bunting everywhere and flags waving, people dressed in red, white and blue and a union jack waistcoat (that I truly envied), it was a moving sight and one that bested the sad stands at Buck House in London town. The seating here is free and by lottery only. The musical offerings made the day and I marvelled at the odd fate that brought my little family here to dwell - again.

An emotional weekend all-in-all, we sang our hearts out at the concert and the Mass is now perfect in my mind, perhaps never to be sung by the choir again. Tomorrow we rehearse for another concert on 1 June and then break for the summer. I found myself reassuring another newbie that it is a tough ride but worth it for the sublime experience of singing four-part harmonies that blend and ache and soar for joy. Luckily we did not chat last Wednesday when our guest conductor was bitchy and sneering about our efforts to deliver Mozart's composition - he depressed me and I momentarily wondered at my ambition to deliver complex musical works.

For fun.

Our new king has perhaps little idea how much effort went into the concert but I sang for myself, for my choir and for my island home. Jersey is a curious place but it is beautiful and we are lucky to be safe here in these changing times. x