

## Chorister Rock

### **1<sup>st</sup> December**

Snowchester was not a very big city but it had a very old and very beautiful cathedral. Its tall, elegant spire soared over the streets and houses, and on most days, beautiful music could be heard from inside. The cathedral had a large old organ that made a surprisingly loud sound. The people of Snowchester loved music and gathered regularly to sing along in the cathedral. There were two choirs. One was made up of the people of Snowchester. The other was a choir of children, all chosen for their beautiful voices. It was a very great honour to be selected as a Snowchester chorister and they were famous throughout the whole country for their beautiful singing. Children came from all over the country to sing in this choir, so during the week, they boarded at a special school provided by the cathedral.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> December**

All the girls and boys who sang with Snowchester Choristers loved singing. During the week, along with the usual lessons in maths and English, they had special tuition in music and singing. They had to learn all the hymns that the cathedral wanted sung each week. They all had to be able to read music, and all of them were learning to play different musical instruments. But most important of all was training their voices. The Snowchester choristers had to learn to control their breathing and hold notes as long as needed. And they needed to be able to reach the high notes with a pure and exquisite sound. That was something that Snowchester Choristers were famous for.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> December**

The star of Snowchester Choristers was a boy called Cuthbert. He was incredibly talented at all things musical; he could already play the violin, the double bass, the clarinet, the piano and the church organ, and he was also teaching himself the harp and the guitar. And his voice was the best of all. He could reach the highest notes, could sustain the longest sound, and had a voice so sweet that he made old ladies cry when he sang. He was frequently described as having the voice of an angel, and with his blond curly hair, he even looked like one. It was no surprise to the other choristers that Cuthbert got all the best solos. They knew he was the best. They knew that when Cuthbert sang a solo, their choir sounded better than any other choir in the country, and made them even more famous. The only trouble was, Cuthbert could be quite big-headed about his success.

### **4<sup>th</sup> December**

Cuthbert didn't mean to be unpleasant. It was just that he took his gifts for granted and didn't really appreciate how lucky he was to be so talented. He liked to make people happy with his singing and he wanted to do it as often as he could. He worked very hard to perfect his voice, practising much longer hours than the other choristers. The choir leader, Father Michael, trusted him so much that he let Cuthbert help him run the choir and choose the music. Cuthbert always picked the songs that he knew he could sing the best. But he did like to sing with the other children, and he had a group of friends who he thought were the best singers, even if they weren't as good as he was. They were all his biggest fans, telling him day by day how good he was, and how lucky the choir was to have him. They called themselves Cuthbert's Comrades, or the CCs for short.

### **5<sup>th</sup> December**

The rest of the choir was divided between those who desperately wanted to be a member of the CCs, and those who thought it would be rather boring to be Cuthbert's friend. One of those who thought that way was a boy called Nigel. He was one of the oldest boys in the choir, and had been singing with them the longest. Even so, Nigel never got picked for solos. He knew that he had a pretty good voice, and he appreciated the honour of being able to sing in the cathedral each week, but he was quite happy to stand at the back and sing the harmonies. Father Michael had once encouraged him to try harder, saying that Nigel was almost good enough for solos if only he would apply himself a bit more. But Nigel always said he wasn't interested, and Father Michael had come to the conclusion that Nigel must be too shy for solos.

### **6<sup>th</sup> December**

However, Father Michael was wrong about that. Nigel was not shy at all, it was just that he had very different ambitions than Cuthbert. For as much as he liked the cathedral music, what Nigel wanted most of all was to be a rock star! While Cuthbert was practising the high notes, Nigel was secretly listening to rock music, learning all he could about the best bands. He was taking lessons in classical guitar, but what he really wanted to play was electric guitar. He kept one hidden under his bed and only played it when there was no-one around to hear. He was worried that if Father Michael found out, he wouldn't approve and might ask Nigel to leave the Snowchester Choristers. Nigel thought it was too difficult to explain that he could love the cathedral music and rock music equally, and so he kept it a secret.

### **7<sup>th</sup> December**

Only Nigel's two best friends knew about his secret love. They were Tom and Tabitha, twin brother and sister who both sang in the choir. Tom played the violin and Tabitha played the piano and both had lovely singing voices. Like Nigel, they had no time for Cuthbert and the CCs. They would much rather listen to Nigel play his electric guitar and they used to plead with him to play it for them sometime. They said it was better than listening to Cuthbert all the time, and they felt sure that the rest of the choir would feel the same. But every time they tried to convince Nigel to play his guitar for Father Michael, Nigel would just say that it wasn't worth it because the electric guitar wouldn't fit with the music the choir sang. And so Tom and Tabitha thought that was the end of that.

### **8<sup>th</sup> December**

And that might have been the end of the story, until the choir began rehearsing carols for Christmas. They were singing *In Dulce Jubilo*, which happened to be one of Nigel's favourites. He loved the harmonies and the mixture of Latin and English. The only thing he didn't like was Cuthbert's solo in the middle. Most of the time, he didn't mind Cuthbert's solos, but he did think that maybe, just maybe, he would actually quite like a solo in this carol. During rehearsal, he began to imagine singing the solo, even though he knew it was impossible. But the more he thought about it, the more he liked the idea. And while he thought about it, an even more exciting idea came to him. It was so exciting that he was very distracted during rehearsal and kept losing his place and singing the wrong notes. Every time he went wrong, Father Michael would make them start again, and Cuthbert got quite fed up with him.

### **9<sup>th</sup> December**

"You need to wake up, Nigel," he said. "I don't want to tire my voice just because you can't concentrate."

"Sorry, Cuthbert," said Nigel. And after that he tried harder for the rest of the rehearsal. But when it was over, Tom and Tabitha could tell that he still had something on his mind.

"Not that I mind you making life difficult for Cuthbert, but what was going on?" asked Tabitha. "It's not like you to be so distracted in rehearsal."

"I've had an idea, that's all," said Nigel.

"Tell us," said Tom.

But Nigel shook his head. "I can't tell you yet," he said, "not until I've tried something out. But I promise you will be the first to know." And he hurried off to his room, carefully shutting the door behind him. Then he got his electric guitar out from under the bed and began to play *In Dulce Jubilo* on it.

### **10<sup>th</sup> December**

Nigel was really pleased with the way *In Dulce Jubilo* sounded on the electric guitar. He played it again and again, adding a few riffs and building the chords. He experimented with the rhythm, giving it a more rocking beat. Then he began to put the words in, trying them out in a rock style. To his delight, it sounded as good in real life as it had in his head. In fact, it sounded so good that for the first time ever, he wanted to share it with the rest of the choir. He decided that he would try it out on Tom and Tabitha first and find out what they thought; after all, if they didn't like it, they would be sure to tell him in a kind way. So he put his guitar down and set off to find them. But when he left his room, he got the shock of his life to find Tom and Tabitha already there, falling over themselves as he opened the door. They had obviously been listening!

### **11<sup>th</sup> December**

"We knew you were up to something," said Tabitha, "so we decided to find out. We've heard everything. And we love it."

"Do you really?" asked Nigel shyly.

"Of course we do," said Tom. "It's a brilliant idea to turn *In Dulce Jubilo* into a rock classic. It's about time this choir tried something different."

"But it can't be for the choir," said Nigel. "It doesn't fit with the way we sing it. Especially not the way Cuthbert sings it."

"That's why you have to sing it," said Tabitha, "with a choir rock band to support you."

### **12<sup>th</sup> December**

"A choir rock band?" said Nigel. "That would be amazing. But who else would be in it? I don't know anyone else who likes rock music."

"Well we do," said Tom. "I would love to be in a rock band."

"But you play the violin," said Nigel. "You can't have a violin in a rock band."

"But I've always wanted to play the drums," said Tom. And to prove it, he burst into Nigel's room and started drumming. He grabbed two pens and beat them rhythmically against all the hard surfaces in Nigel's room. At first it was just noisy, but when Nigel sang the tune, he picked up the beat and soon they were making music together.

"That's great," said Nigel. "You can definitely be the drummer."

### **13<sup>th</sup> December**

"What about Tabitha?" asked Tom.

"That's easy," said Tabitha. "Keyboards, of course."

Nigel agreed. He knew that Tabitha was very good at the piano and so he was sure she would be just as good on the keyboards. But they couldn't try it out without a keyboard to play on.

"We need to use one of the practice rooms," he said. "The big one on the second floor has keyboards and a drum kit. But it's going to be hard to keep it a secret if we're practising in there. How are we going to do that?"

"I think I know a way," said Tabitha. "We only really need to hide it from Cuthbert and the CCs. And they are so busy rehearsing all their solos and duets in the cathedral that we can easily find time to sneak off to the practise room."

"Great idea," said Nigel. "Ha, I'm glad now that I don't have any solos!"

### **14<sup>th</sup> December**

Luckily for the rock-inspired trio, Cuthbert was very organised and had pinned up on the noticeboard a rota of when he and the CCs were due to be rehearsing in the cathedral. The very next day, Nigel saw his chance and sent a message to Tom and Tabitha to meet him in the practise room. It was quite tricky carrying his guitar upstairs without being seen but he managed it. He was the first to arrive, so he plugged his guitar into an amp and began playing. With Cuthbert, the CCs and Father Michael busy in the cathedral, he wasn't worried about being overheard, so he turned up the volume and let his rock riff *In Dulce Jubilo* belt out. But then he got a shock when Tom and Tabitha arrived, because they were not alone. A boy called Ben was with them, and Nigel could tell by the way he was grinning that he had heard.

### **15<sup>th</sup> December**

"It's alright," said Tom quickly. "I told Ben this morning because I thought he might be interested in joining us. Isn't that right, Ben?"

"Absolutely," said Ben. "I think it's a really exciting idea. Please let me join."

"But you play the flute," said Nigel. "There isn't any need for a flute player in a rock band."

"But I can play the guitar too," said Ben. "I don't have lessons but my Dad taught me. Let me show you." And he grabbed Nigel's guitar and began to strum out some chords.

"It sounds great," said Tabitha. "Ben can be rhythm guitar so Nigel can concentrate on playing lead and singing."

"Ok, but you have to promise to keep it a secret," said Nigel. "I don't want everyone to know yet."

"I promise," said Ben with a big grin on his face. "Shall we make a start then?"

### 16<sup>th</sup> December

The band quickly assembled all the instruments they needed for the session. Tom sat at the drum kit and began practising. Luckily, he had a very good sense of rhythm and soon got the hang of it.

Tabitha turned on the keyboard and started experimenting with some cool sounds. Ben found another guitar and started putting some chords together with Nigel's singing. And then came the big moment when they put it all together for the first time. It sounded a bit rough at the edges but they could all tell that it only needed a little work to make it sound really great.

Finally, they had to bring the session to an end because it was nearly time for tea.

"You know what we really need?" said Ben. "A bass player."

"But I don't know any bass players," said Nigel. "Besides, I don't think we should telling anyone else."

"But if I can find a bass player, shall I ask them?" said Ben. "It would be better to have a bass player."

"He's right," said Tabitha. "And do you know what else would sound good? Some backing singers."

"Maybe we should have a bass player, but definitely no backing singers," said Nigel. "I think this is enough."

### 17<sup>th</sup> December

But at the next rehearsal, Nigel was not pleased to see that Tabitha had brought two of her friends, Samantha and Erin. They giggled a lot, but said that they really wanted to be backing singers. Nigel was a bit cross with Tabitha, until Samantha and Erin began to sing, and then he had to admit that he was quite impressed.

"But you have to keep it a secret," he said.

"We promise," giggled the girls.

So with Nigel singing and playing lead guitar, Ben on rhythm guitar, Tabitha on keyboards, Tom on drums and Samantha and Erin oooing harmoniously in the background, *Rockin' Dulce Jubilo* began to sound really good.

"It's a pity I couldn't find a bass player," said Ben. "I don't suppose either of you girls know of one, do you?"

"No," said Samantha. "But I do know that Radzi plays a mean jazz sax."

"This is a rock band, not a jazz band," said Nigel. "We don't need a saxophone player."

### 18<sup>th</sup> December

In truth, Nigel was actually a bit suspicious of Radzi, who had once been an ardent follower of the CCs, though that had dropped off a bit lately. So he was not pleased when Radzi turned up at the next rehearsal with his saxophone. However, he knew that Radzi was a good woodwind player, and so he allowed Radzi to stay and play along, on the firm understanding that if the sax didn't fit in the song, he wouldn't stay in the band. He also had to promise not to say anything to the CCs. Radzi agreed to the conditions, then didn't play anything at all for the first few times the band ran through the song. Then he amazed everyone by joining in at just the right moment, fitting perfectly with the rock sound and not one hint of jazz! It sounded so good that everyone, even Nigel, begged him to do it again.

"This is going to sound awesome," said Nigel. "The sax really lifts it to another level. No-one will have heard anything like it before."

"It's a pity you haven't found a bass player," said Radzi.

"You don't know of one, do you?" asked Tom. "We can't think of anyone."

"Well, I might just know someone," said Radzi. "But I don't want to say who it is until I've had a chance to talk to them. They're a bit shy, you see. But I'll see what I can do."

### 19<sup>th</sup> December

Nigel couldn't have been happier. His little daydream was turning into something wonderful. And so far, they had successfully hidden it from Cuthbert. Nigel was preparing himself to tell Father Michael about the band, but he was a bit nervous about what Cuthbert would say when he found out. The lead soloist was still busy rehearsing his own traditional version of *In Dulce Jubilo*, quite oblivious that he had a rival.

At the next band practise, Radzi said nothing about his potential bass player, so they carried on as they were. Nigel was trying to convince himself that they didn't really need a bass player after all. "It's sounding great," he said. "Let's take it from the top again one more time."

But before anyone could play a note, the door to the practise room swung open, to reveal Cuthbert standing there, staring with wide eyes and a very red, surprised face. The band fell silent, staring back in horror as they realised that their secret was over.

### 20<sup>th</sup> December

"So it's true, you have formed a rock band," spluttered Cuthbert.

"How did you find out?" asked Nigel.

"I knew you were up to something," said Cuthbert. "Then Radzi was careless and let it slip that he was rehearsing here today."

Everyone turned to Radzi angrily. "Why did you do that?" demanded Nigel. "You've spoilt everything now."

"No I haven't," said Radzi. "You needed a bass player, and I've found you one."

"What!" said Nigel. "Cuthbert plays the double bass, not bass guitar."

"Actually, I can play the bass guitar too," said Cuthbert.

"And he does it very well, of course," said Radzi. "But I knew if I told you who it was, you wouldn't agree."

Nigel didn't say anything, because he knew that this was probably true.

"I also knew that if I asked Cuthbert, he wouldn't agree either," said Radzi. "But I thought that if I could just get him here, things might work out differently."

Everyone in the band held their breath waiting to see what Cuthbert and Nigel would do next.

### 21<sup>st</sup> December

Nigel turned to Cuthbert. "I didn't mean to steal your solo," he said. "It was just an idea I had. And we all think it sounds really good. We make a pretty good band."

"I know, I heard you through the door," said Cuthbert. "But I'd like to hear it again, if you don't mind."

A little nervously, the band members looked around at each other and nodded. Tom hit his sticks to count them in and they gave Cuthbert their loudest rendition of *Rockin' Dulce Jubilo*. Cuthbert listened without any comment. At the end, they all waited for his verdict. But instead, Cuthbert went to the cupboard and found a bass guitar. Without a word, he plugged it in, then looked up expectantly.

Nigel nodded. "One more time, from the top," he said. "Two, three, four..."

And of course, Radzi was right, Cuthbert was just as good on bass guitar as he was at everything else, and his bass line was the just the thing that the song needed to be brilliant.

## 22<sup>nd</sup> December

At the end of the session, everyone agreed that the song was now complete and the band was well and truly established. It was bigger and better than anything Nigel had ever imagined and he couldn't wait to share it with everyone. Once they put their instruments away, the band sat down for a meeting.

"There are two important things to do now," he said. "The first is to come up with a name for the band. Anyone got any ideas?"

There were quite a few suggestions, then Cuthbert said, "What about the Treble Rebels? Because we usually sing treble, but now we're doing something completely different."

"Yes, that's brilliant," said Tom, and everyone agreed.

"Ok, that's decided," said Nigel. "But then we come to the second thing we need to do, and that is tell Father Michael about the band. I don't know what he's going to say when he finds out."

To his surprise, everyone except Cuthbert fell about laughing.

"What's so funny?" asked Nigel.

"Oh Nigel, Father Michael already knows," said Tabitha. "He could hear us practising days ago. It was only you and Cuthbert who didn't know that he knew."

When Nigel heard this, he couldn't help laughing. "Well that will make it easier to explain," he said.

## 23<sup>rd</sup> December

So a message was sent to Father Michael, requesting his presence in the practise room. The choir leader was so intrigued that he hurried there straight away. He had been hearing some exciting sounds coming from the practise room but he didn't really know what to expect. And when he got there, he was surprised to see so many children involved, all looking so organised.

"I had no idea you were so enterprising Nigel," he said.

"Neither did I," said Nigel. "I thought it was just me that liked rock music, but it turns out that we all do."

"Even Cuthbert?" asked Father Michael.

Cuthbert nodded his head enthusiastically. "Especially Nigel's version of the song," he said. "It's really good."

"And Cuthbert came up with the perfect name for us," said Nigel. "The Treble Rebels."

"I never imagined Cuthbert as a rebel," said Father Michael. "Well, it's about time I heard this song properly. Are you going to play it for me?"

So the Treble Rebels got into position and played *Rockin' Dulce Jubilo* for Father Michael. At the end, he clapped his hands exuberantly.

"Well done, all of you," he said. "I'm so proud of you all. Not only do you work really hard in the choir, but you used your talents and initiative to put something together that is truly spectacular. It's so good, I think everyone should have a chance to hear it. I'm going to put it on the programme for the big carol concert next week."

## 24<sup>th</sup> December

The Treble Rebels all cheered. The carol concert was a very important affair, with a huge audience that filled the whole cathedral, so it was a big honour to be asked to perform. In the days that followed, they practised hard, so that they would be at their very best for the concert.

On the night of the concert, as the audience took their seats, they were a little surprised to see the rock band instruments set up alongside the traditional instruments. First the adult choir sang a few carols, then children's choir sang some, with Cuthbert's solos receiving their usual warm round of applause. Then the organist played a solo. And while that was playing, the Treble Rebels set themselves up. Nigel could see the looks of curiosity coming their way. When it was their turn to play, he stepped forward to make the introduction.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I know you have all come to hear our traditional music, but this year, we would like to give you something slightly different," he said. "This started as an experiment but became something very important to all of us. We are the Treble Rebels, and this is *Rockin' Dulce Jubilo*."

Tom banged his sticks and the band began to play. With the volume turned up full, the rock and roll sound filled the cathedral. The audience, who had never heard anything like it in the cathedral before, looked quite startled, but soon began to enjoy it, clapping and swaying along with the beat. Nigel, who had never sung a solo before, sang louder than he had ever sung in his life, loving every second of the performance. Even Father Michael was amazed to see him. At the end, the audience burst into rapturous applause, stamping their feet and cheering loudly. The band looked around at each other with huge smiles on their faces, quite thrilled to have made such an impact. The audience kept on clapping and calling out for an encore. So when Father Michael got up and asked them to play it again, the Treble Rebels were happy to oblige.

From that day on, the Treble Rebels became a permanent fixture in the choir school. They were so popular that they had lots of other children clamouring to join. Nigel let anyone try out, but would only admit new members that really liked rock. He had lots more ideas for songs that the band could perform and so they were always busy. He was even becoming quite good friends with Cuthbert, who turned out to be very helpful at turning hymns into rock numbers. Cuthbert was still the star of the choir, but Nigel didn't mind at all. He had his heart set on becoming a rock star, and he was already well on his way.

\*\*\*\*\*Merry Christmas\*\*\*\*\*