

NOTES



GUILDFORD
CATHEDRAL

Michaelmas
Term 2024

We're back! And now the work of the choir year begins. We welcomed six new boy probationers to join our choir journey, our lay clerks, our changed voices, our incoming organ scholar George Baldwin, Asher Oliver and our girl choristers with four girls auditioning soon. A day which began with thunder and ended in glorious light.
Katherine Dienes-Williams, September 2024



Something Special

A new year brings with it new Head Choristers. We were thrilled to install Alex and Marcus as Head Boy Choristers and Alex and Theo as Deputy Head Choristers on 8 September, and Bella as Head Girl Chorister and Molly as Deputy Head Chorister on 15 September.

The Michaelmas Term also sees several larger services, and opportunities for the choir to sing larger works. Both Duruflé's and Fauré's Requiem were sung superbly for All Souls and Remembrance respectively, adding a grand and sombre note to each occasion.

The Advent Carol Service saw us launch into a new Christian year in style as we looked to Christmas in the season of preparation. It was a joy to see the choir perform Nova Nova complete with clapping and stamping alongside some more traditional Advent carols.

For the third year in a row, we were delighted to welcome Sir John Rutter to lead a concert with our choristers and Lay Clerks. This Christmas Celebration was a wonderful evening of carols under John's direction with Septura Brass, percussion and harp. It was a sell-out memorable evening.



Known for our choral excellence, over the past 10 years we have had 7 finalists in the BBC Chorister of the Year including two winners. This year we were delighted to watch Oscar, one of our Changed Voices, in action. Starting with the group performance of Make me a channel of your peace to his solo of John Rutter's Gaelic Blessing in the heats and Sussex Carol in the final, Oscar's warm tenor voice proved why he deserved a place in the final. Well done, Oscar, you did yourself proud!

This Christmas, Carrot Productions brought The Snowman with Live Orchestra to the Cathedral, for the second year in a row. This year, three of our girl choristers took turns to sing the iconic solo, 'Walking in the air'. Well done Ella, Hannah and Ella - you did an amazing job and performed the song beautifully.

'The orchestra were just wonderful to listen to, perfectly in sync with the screenings and the soloist for walking in the air was AMAZING! I had goosebumps listening to her, what a beautiful voice.'

'It was really lovely, the girls voice was stunning I actually didn't realise she was singing at first! Goose bumps for days.'

'She was amazing, what a total talent she has! Totally blew us away, her family must be so proud.'

Online comments from audience members

Sharing the Music

It feels like this has been a busy term for sharing the music with visitors. It was an honour to welcome the boys from Chapel Royal Hampton Court Palace on 22 September and the girls from St Mary's Wimbledon on 29 September to sing Choral Evensong alongside our choristers.

Welcome

He's been with us for a term, so here's a little introduction to George Baldwin, our Organ Scholar 2024-2025, and a reflection from midway through the term.

George Baldwin is an organist, pianist, chorister and violist. He has just successfully completed four A levels, whilst also studying for five years as a Music Scholar at Eton College. He holds the Royal College of Organists Associateship Diploma (ARCO)

In May 2018, aged twelve, he began studying organ on the Cavallé-Coll with Neil Wright at Saint Michael's, Farnborough Abbey. Ten weeks later he won the junior section of The Northern Ireland International Organ Competition.

He has accompanied Chorus Amicorum on their last three annual tours to Ripon, Beverley Minster and Lincoln Cathedral. For the last three years he has also directed the choir and enjoyed playing regular services at St Luke's Church in Maidenhead.



George will be performing the Coffee Concert on Thursday 6 March at 11.15am, with tea and coffee served from 10.30am. Admission is free, and George is planning a fun programme.

George has now been with us for a whole term. He gave us this quote as a after his first month in post:

Having just completed my first month in the Organ Scholar post, I am very much looking forward to the rest of the year. I feel like I have settled in fully now and I have finally got to grips with the photocopier! Everyone at the Cathedral has been so welcoming, especially the lay clerk team, who have looked after me. Some of them are even teaching me how to cook!

The highlight of my time so far has to be accompanying the choir. I have found it challenging at times but overall, very rewarding. Accompanying the infamous 15th Evening psalm, was one of the trickiest moments, it took great amounts of concentration, but having made it out the other side I found it very enjoyable and as a result I have noticed my organ playing has improved greatly since starting here.

I am looking forward to Christmas at the cathedral and playing in the carol services which are my favourite services of the year. I am also starting preparations for my coffee concert recital in March, which I am very excited for!

Work Hard, Play Hard

The choirs are like a second family, and it's wonderful to watch them have fun together in between providing us with stunning music. This term the girl choristers together with Katherine produced a 'Gen-Z video', a trend on social media where people from older generations use the language of 'Generation Z' in context. The resulting video is good humoured and you can tell the girls and Katherine enjoyed making it. If you would like to view the whole thing, head over to our Facebook page and look under the videos.



Stills from the Gen Z video



It's the most wonderful time of the year

The Advent and Christmas seasons are full of music here at the Cathedral. The season kicked off on Advent Sunday when we had our Advent Carol Service featuring *Nova, Nova*, a choir anthem that involved the choir clicking their fingers and stamping their feet. The season continued with Choral Evensong during the week, and Sunday Eucharist and Choral Evensong on Sundays, plus Sir John Rutter's Christmas Celebration and The Snowman (more details in 'Something Special') before culminating with Christmas itself.

The Cathedral Service of Lessons and Carols took place on the Sunday before Christmas. This included a selection of congregational and choir carols, traditional and modern, and one very special carol. This year the service included a newly commissioned carol by Ben Ponniah called 'The Pigeon Carol'. This was generously commissioned by Sue Howland. There is more information on this carol later in this news letter.

The choristers then had time to rehearse on Monday 23 December before providing the music for four services over the next two days.

Our annual family service, Journey to Bethlehem, had one of the largest congregations since we first ran it. With choristers and ex-choristers coming together to form the Stag Hill Phil, it was a truly joyful family celebration as we explored the Christmas Story.

Our girl choristers then provided sublime music as we saw Christmas Day arrive with the First Eucharist of Christmas Day, starting at 11pm, while our boy choristers helped us to celebrate on Christmas Morning with a Eucharist service. The day was rounded off with a Service of Lessons and Carols, another chance to hear the readings and carols that had been read and sung on Sunday 22 December.

Alongside all of this, we were delighted to be able to share our popular Digital Advent Calendar, a daily musical offering of our young choristers singing advent and Christmas carols to guide us through the season. These are still available on our Youtube channel if you would like to catch up (or if you are missing the joyful Christmas music!)

Something New

This year, we have been piloting a new scheme to introduce young people to choral music and to encourage them to pursue music. This scheme is called the Schools and Colleges Evensong Project.

In January, we welcomed the Chamber Choir from Farnborough Sixth Form College to sing Choral Evensong with our choristers, and in May we invited George Abbott School's Chamber Choir. Both chamber choirs thoroughly enjoyed the experience and would love to do it again.

With thanks to the Cathedral Music Trust, we have secured funding to help with this project over the next two academic years. We plan on offering this to a variety of state schools and colleges in Surrey and North East Hampshire

The project itself offers more than singing Choral Evensong with the Guildford Cathedral Choir. Each half term, one of the Cathedral musicians will go to the school or college three times to lead rehearsals and build the confidence of the young singers. The choirs will learn new skills and singing techniques as they learn repertoire they are likely not familiar with.

Our Cathedral musicians are internationally renowned and know how to inspire a life-long love of singing. We hope that by teaching in this way, the young choristers will experience the joy of singing and will be signposted to places they can pursue it further.

The school/college will work towards singing Choral Evensong alongside either our Boy or Girl Choristers. This will inspire the visiting students further by seeing other young people enjoying singing, and will give our own choristers the opportunity to sing with other people.

Judging by the pilot we have already run of this scheme, this will be enjoyed by all who take part. Why not come along to one of the Evensongs a experience it for yourself? Dates are in the 'Future Dates' section at the end of this newsletter.



credit Marie Davey

Rising to the Challenge: Keep Calm and Play On!

On Sunday 24 November Choral Evensong at the Cathedral was nothing short of unforgettable!

What began as a beautiful service, complete with the installation of Honorary Canons, took an unexpected turn when a power cut plunged the Cathedral into darkness mid-service. Thanks to the staff team's quick thinking and composure, everything continued seamlessly.

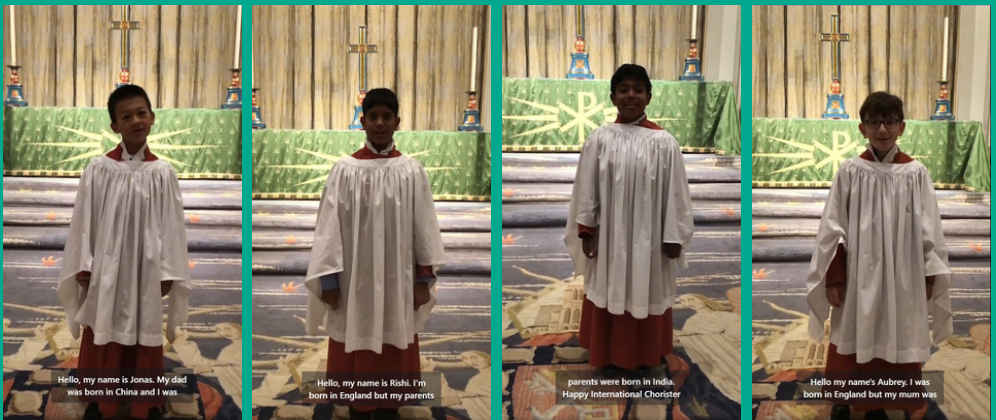
Special recognition goes to our brilliant musicians, who proved their versatility under pressure. When the power returned, the organ decided to add its own drama, ciphering on all manuals (and even the trusty "off and on button" trick couldn't help!). But Asher swiftly set up the grand piano, and with calm professionalism, the music soared once again.

Even the final voluntary had a touch of serendipity. With moments to spare, Katherine sprinted home, cassock blowing in the wind... to retrieve a piece of music for the piano from her piano music box. The beautiful 'Rosemary' by Frank Bridge ended an extraordinary service.

To all involved—staff, clergy, musicians, and the congregation (not forgetting Storm Bert!)—thank you for making it an evening to remember. Sometimes, the unexpected creates the most memorable moments.

Beyond these 4 walls

October saw the return of International Chorister Day. The RSCM International Chorister Day is a celebration of the amazing opportunities that being a chorister provides at all levels. Here at Guildford Cathedral, we celebrated by four of our choristers recording videos to introduce themselves and tell us where they were from, showing music truly is international.



Out and About

Each term, our choristers visit one of the churches in the diocese. This term it was the turn of our girls to visit St Mary's, Shalford for Choral Evensong on 6 October. Judging by the smiles, the girls and Lay Clerks enjoyed themselves, and St Mary's definitely enjoyed having them!

On Tuesday 19 November, our girl choristers enjoyed a trip to Oxford to sing with Richard Moore, a previous Sub Organist. While they were greeted by snow, they were warmly welcomed in Oxford. The day included choral workshops with Dr. Owen Rees at Queens College, Ben Nicholas at Merton College and Richard at Christ Church and ended with the girls joining the boy choristers and clerks of Christ Church to sing Evensong at 6pm 'Oxford' time (which means 6.05pm!) Although wrapped up against the weather, the girls had a wonderful time and the singing was, as always, superb.

Multi-talented

It is always a joy to celebrate the talents of our musicians. In August of this year, while the choir were on holiday, one of our Lay Clerks and Head Chaperone Peter Hicks stepped in at the last minute to provide music for our monthly Coffee Concert. It was a real treat to hear Peter singing solo repertoire accompanied by the organist of Winchester Cathedral.

On 6 October, while our girls choristers and Lay Clerks were visiting Shalford, our boy choristers were holding the fort back at home. They not only sang for the morning eucharist alongside the Lay Clerks and Choral Evensong by themselves, they also put on an informal concert for the congregation over coffee at the back of the nave. Well done to the boys who sang and played so well across the day.

Meet the Lay Clerks - Peter Hicks

You will regularly see Peter Hicks in the back row of our choir supporting our young choristers. Alongside being an Alto Lay Clerk, Peter is also the Lead Chaperone, ensuring our choristers are properly looked after. But Peter also has a professional career outside of the Cathedral.

Since moving to Guildford, Peter has enjoyed building a professional portfolio as a freelance musician, alongside his regular work here at Guildford Cathedral. He has sung with such groups as I Fagiolini, Kantos, and De Profundis, and also has a growing career as a conductor, working as a section leader with Woking Choral Society, and presently as the Conducting Assistant at Farnham & Bourne Choral Society. He has recently been appointed as the new musical director of the Chantry Singers, starting in January 2025, and has founded his own group, the Stag Consort, who regularly engage in projects in the Guildford area.

You can hear Peter's extraordinary voice at the April Coffee Concert on 10 April.

Guildford Cathedral girl Choristers rehearsing at Christ Church, Oxford



credit Katherine Dienes-Williams



A Tour of Christ Church, Oxford
with Richard Moore
credit Katherine Dienes-Williams



Girl choristers at St Marys , Shalford
credit Katherine Dienes-Williams



Snowy Oxford
credit Katherine Dienes-Williams

Thank you Patrons

As we approach the first anniversary of the launch of Guildford Cathedral Music Patrons Scheme, we want to take a moment to express our deepest gratitude for your invaluable support.

Your commitment over the past year has played a vital role in sustaining and enhancing the Cathedral's rich musical tradition. Thanks to your generosity, we have been able to continue inspiring worship, hosting concerts, and nurturing the next generation of musicians.

It is truly heartening to see the scheme grow, with new patrons joining us in this mission month by month. This expanding community of music lovers is a testament to the importance of music in uplifting hearts and minds, and to the unique role Guildford Cathedral plays in the cultural and spiritual life both in Surrey and beyond.

Your support is vital to everything we do. Whether it's maintaining the excellence of our choirs, supporting our organists, or enabling us to host extraordinary events, we simply couldn't achieve it without you.

Thank you for making a difference and for being an integral part of this journey. We look forward to celebrating our musical excellence, telling the stories of our musicians and choir with you and continuing to share the joy of music together.

With heartfelt gratitude,

The Pigeon Carol

Acclaimed composer Ben Ponniah was approached by the Cathedral to create this special piece, following his call earlier this year for new collaborations. Sue Howland, a dedicated Music Patron and Volunteer of the Cathedral, enthusiastically stepped forward to fund that project. Together with Katherine Dienes-Williams, the team selected an evocative text from Margaret Deland's *The Christmas Silence*, which Ben skilfully set to music.

Reflecting on the new carol, Ben Ponniah shared: 'The poem emphasises quietness and calm, from the 'hushed pigeons' to the 'strange silence' in the air - I haven't sung about pigeons in a carol before, so I named this piece The Pigeon Carol! Nature participates in this most sacred of moments, blending the earthly simplicity of the animals with the celestial light of the star.'

In my music, the tune and harmony reflect the peaceful simplicity at the start of the poem. I use shimmering chords to paint the 'light from one low-hanging star' before a soprano solo captures Mary's tender love for her baby boy. As the silence turns to joy, the music becomes more flowing and expansive.'

Katherine Dienes-Williams praised the carol, saying 'The carol is a lovely, serene setting that beautifully captures the still quiet atmosphere of a stable filled with animals and the newborn baby Jesus.'

This inspiring project highlights the Cathedral's commitment to fostering new music and enriching the Christmas season with unique contributions to the choral tradition.



Dates for your diaries

Saturday 1 March 7.30pm
Girl choristers concert at the Anniversary Hall, St Catherine's School, Bramley

The Girl choristers perform a concert at the conclusion of their weekend of activity.

Wednesday 5 March 7pm
As Wednesday Eucharist with Imposition of Ashes

Thursday 6 March 11.15am
George Baldwin, Organ Scholar Coffee Concert with tea and coffee served from 10.30am

Friday 7 March 5.30pm
Choral Evensong with Changed Voices

Friday 14 March 5.30pm
Schools Evensong Project Choral Evensong sung by the Cathedral girl choristers, Lay Clerks and students from Godalming College Chamber Choir

Sunday 16 March 11am
Girl Chorister informal concert
A free concert during Cathedral refreshments

Thursday 10 April 11.15am
Peter Hicks, Countertenor Coffee Concert with tea and coffee served from 10.30am

Saturday 12 April 7.30pm
Holy Week Concert

The Cathedral Choir performs a concert of the work 'Holy Week' by composer Christopher Wood. More details to follow

Holy Week and Easter
Sunday 13 April Palm Sunday
10.30am Palm Sunday Liturgy
6pm Readings and Music for Passiontide

Thursday 17 April Maundy Thursday
7pm Eucharist of the Last Supper and the Watch

Friday 18 April Good Friday
12noon-3pm The Three Hours and Liturgy of Good Friday
The Good Friday Liturgy begins at 1.30pm
5.30pm Choral Evensong

Saturday 19 April Easter Eve
7pm Easter Eve Service with Baptism and Confirmation

Sunday 20 April Easter Sunday
9.45 Festival Eucharist of Easter Day
6pm Festival Evensong

Monday 28 April 5.30pm
Eucharist Lite for George, Martyr and Patron Saint