



ELY CATHEDRAL GIRLS' CHOIR



Ely Cathedral Girls' Choir

About the Girls' Choir

The King's School, Ely, has educated the boy choristers of Ely Cathedral for over 1000 years. Early in the new millennium, a girls' choir was founded to complement the boys' choir, and to enable the cathedral to hold choral services every day of the week in term time. Ely Cathedral Girls' Choir (ECGC) sang its first cathedral service in November 2006, and has since become firmly established as a central part of the cathedral community. As well as singing their share of cathedral services, ECGC released their first commercial CD to critical acclaim in 2008, have broadcast live to troops in Iraq, and have performed in prestigious venues including Westminster Abbey and the Guards' Chapel in London, and la Cathédrale Notre Dame and l'Église St Eustache in Paris.

About the School

All members of ECGC are boarders in the senior section of the King's School (Years 9 to 13). Ely is the only UK cathedral to offer this intensive chorister experience to girls in this age group. The musical and educational facilities at King's are wide-ranging and comprehensive. The school is committed to making learning accessible, stimulating, challenging, and inspiring, and in turn, it encourages all pupils to engage with the opportunities around them. Choristers receive a specialist musical education, and are treated as skilled musicians from the beginning, interacting and performing with professional singers, organists, and

conductors on a daily basis. By the time they leave the school, they will have gained the expertise and experience needed to carry on to university choral scholarships, professional musical careers, or any other path they might wish to follow. They will have acquired an in-depth and knowledgeable appreciation of the architectural, musical, and liturgical heritage of our country, and will have developed the invaluable transferrable skills of discipline, dedication, and diligence which will provide them with significant rewards and advantages for the rest of their lives.

Bursaries & Boarding

All choristers receive a scholarship of 33% off the boarding fees applicable at the time. Further assistance may be available, according to the means of parents. The Girls' Choir boarding house stands in the shadow of the cathedral, and is named Etheldreda House, in honour of the cathedral's patron saint. Two pianos are available in the house for practice, and the girls have a designated rehearsal room (the 'Undercroft'), as well as a kitchen, laundry, and a common room for their own use. Girls in Years 9 to 12 share rooms in groups of three or four; those in the Upper Sixth normally have a room to themselves. The house staff includes a resident Housemistress (Melody Day, Assistant Director of Music at the school), a Matron who is a trained nurse and helps with practicalities such as laundry and first aid. There is also

another resident academic Tutor, as well as the Director of the Girls' Choir (Sarah MacDonald, also Director of Music at Selwyn College, Cambridge), and an Assistant Organist.

Rehearsal schedule & performances

The girls rehearse five mornings a week before school (Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays). Choristers in Years 12 and 13 are not usually required to attend Saturday morning rehearsals. ECGC sings Evensong in the cathedral on their own every Wednesday, and with the lay-clerks (professional singing men) every alternate Monday. Weekend duties occur about once a month, and, at the beginning or ending of term and half term, the girls have a "stayover", with intensive rehearsals and four or five services. As well, there are concerts and other opportunities such as recordings and broadcasts, joint services with other choirs (for example other local girls' choirs, and Cambridge college chapel choirs). All choristers receive individual singing lessons (the cost for which is covered by the choristership), and many also study another instrument (for which additional fees are levied). Music Theory is taught to all girls, free of charge to at least grade 5 level, and they also are able to participate in the school's Chapel Choir and the many orchestras and chamber ensembles in the school music department.



AUDITIONS

Auditions are held in the school on a Saturday in February each year. Previous choral singing experience (in a school, church, or cathedral choir) is an advantage, but is not essential. Normally three or four girls will receive an offer each year. Most appointments are made for entry in Year 9 (i.e., girls in Year 8 at the time of the audition), although occasionally, exceptional girls are appointed into other years, when vacancies arise in the choir. All candidates must meet the Senior School's academic entry requirements. The audition itself takes about 20 minutes, and candidates are asked to sing a solo piece of their own choice, in a classical style. An accompanist will be provided. For a good idea of the kind of repertoire that is appropriate, girls and their teachers are advised to look at the pieces in ABRSM lists A and B for about grades 3 to 5 singing (these syllabuses can be found online). Although it is certainly not necessary for the audition piece to come from one of these lists, they provide a good example of the kind of repertoire that helps us to make the best assessment of a girl's potential as a chorister. During the auditions, candidates will also be asked to do some vocal exercises to test range, and some simple aural and sight-reading tests. The aural tests will include tasks such as singing back

melodies, singing the middle note of a chord, and recognising intervals. The sight-reading will be straight-forward, and the text will be in English. We are well aware that girls may not have had much experience of sight-reading, so our aim will be to find out how quickly they can learn something new.

More information

For further information about admission to Ely Cathedral Girls' Choir, please contact the school admissions office (details can be found on the back of this leaflet). You can download a chorister application form from the school web site as well, or request to have one sent to you. Parents are also invited to contact Sarah MacDonald to discuss musical requirements, and Melody Day for the pastoral side of choristerships (their contact details are available through the school admissions office). Taster boarding sessions can be arranged for girls who are interested in applying: potential choristers spend 24 to 48 hours in the House, attending rehearsals and services, meeting the current choristers, and getting a sense of the routine, the community, and the opportunities available.

The Director of the Girls' Choir

Sarah MacDonald came to the UK from her native Canada in 1992 as Organ Scholar of Robinson College,

Cambridge, after studying piano, organ, conducting, and singing at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto with Leon Fleisher, Marek Jablonski, and John Tuttle. At Cambridge she studied the organ with David Sanger. In 1999 Sarah was appointed Director of Music at Selwyn College, Cambridge, where she was the first woman to hold such a post in an Oxbridge Chapel. Sarah has played numerous recitals and made over 25 recordings, variously in the guises of pianist, organist, conductor, and producer; she is a winner of the Royal College of Organists' (RCO) coveted Limpus Prize. Sarah has taught organ and conducting for Eton Choral Courses, Oundle for Organists, the Jennifer Bate Organ Academy, and courses run by the RCO, and she is a regular Director of the annual Girls' Chorister Course at St Thomas' Church Fifth Avenue, in New York City. Sarah is a Fellow, Examiner, and Trustee of the RCO, and is a member of the Academic Board. She took on the additional post of Director of Ely Cathedral Girls' Choir temporarily in 2008, covering maternity leave for the founding Director, Louise Reid. When twins were announced in the Reid household in 2010, Sarah was appointed Director of ECGC permanently, and she now divides her time equally between Ely and Cambridge.



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