



MERTON COLLEGE  
OXFORD



# MERTON COLLEGE CHOIR CHORAL AWARDS



A **Choral Scholar at Merton** is a talented singer who receives a scholarship in return for singing in the College Choir.

The **auditions take place in September 2025 for entry in October 2026.**

The **Director of Music, Benjamin Nicholas**, is happy to meet prospective candidates over Zoom or Skype, or in person.

Please contact him by emailing [choir@merton.ox.ac.uk](mailto:choir@merton.ox.ac.uk) to arrange an appointment.

Further information about Choral Awards at Oxford and the applications process can be found at:

<http://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/undergraduate/applying-to-oxford/choral-and-organ-awards/choral-awards>

"Merton Chapel is the most perfect place to be – singing in the choir was an absolute thrill."

DAME EMMA KIRKBY, SOPRANO








## WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

Merton College Choir has become one of the country's best known university choirs through its broadcasts, recordings and tours. In 2020 the choir won the 'Choral Award' at the BBC Music Magazine Awards,

During the University term the choir sings services on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday in the 13th century Chapel. Most vacations involve some choir activities including recording, broadcasting and giving concerts all over the world.

There are twenty-five Choral Awards at Merton for soprano, alto, tenor and bass voices. You can find the list of subjects at <https://www.merton.ox.ac.uk/subjects>



A Choral Scholarship at Merton is worth over £1700 per year, and includes a generous honorarium, singing lessons with our inspirational singing teachers, meals after choral services, and annual tours.



"ONE OF THE UK'S  
FINEST CHORAL  
ENSEMBLES"

– GRAMOPHONE –

The choir's repertoire spans over 500 years; recently the choir has commissioned, and worked with, many of today's greatest living composers including Kerry Andrew, Harrison Birtwistle, Bob Chilcott, Ēriks Ešņvalds, Jonathan Dove, Gabriel Jackson, Hannah Kendall, James MacMillan, Cecilia McDowall, Dobrinka Tabakova, Cheryl Frances-Hoad and Judith Weir.



The choir's high profile concert schedule has included concerts at the Barbican, St John's Smith Square and The Cadogan Hall in London, and at the Cheltenham and Three Choirs Festivals. The choir regularly works with orchestras such as the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Florilegium and Instruments of Time & Truth.

Many of our services are webcast and can be heard online on our YouTube Channel.

There is a thriving music scene at Merton. There are 6 Instrumental Awards available to students reading any subject, and a purpose-built suite of practice rooms. The Music Society promotes regular concerts, and students conduct the College Orchestra and the College's non-auditioning choir.



A photograph of the interior of the Washington National Cathedral. The image shows a choir of young women in maroon robes singing from a book on a raised platform. A conductor in a maroon robe stands in the aisle, facing the choir. The cathedral's architecture is highly detailed, featuring Gothic-style pointed arches, a large rose window in the background, and a colorful mosaic floor. The lighting is warm, highlighting the intricate details of the stone and woodwork.

WASHINGTON  
NATIONAL  
CATHEDRAL,  
USA TOUR 2016

# TOURS

Merton College Choir tours internationally most years. Recent tours have included France, Italy, Sweden, Hong Kong, Singapore and the US. Upcoming plans include Japan, Canada & the US.

Highlights have included:

Tallis's *Spem in alium* in the Beaujolais Festival in France □ Mozart's *Requiem* at St Germain-des-Pres, Paris □ Broadcasting Choral Evensong on BBC Radio 3 from St Peter's Basilica, Rome □ A Christmas Concert in the Victoria Hall, Singapore □ Performances at St Thomas Church, Fifth Avenue, New York & Washington National Cathedral



PARIS 2015



USA 2022



ASIA 2018

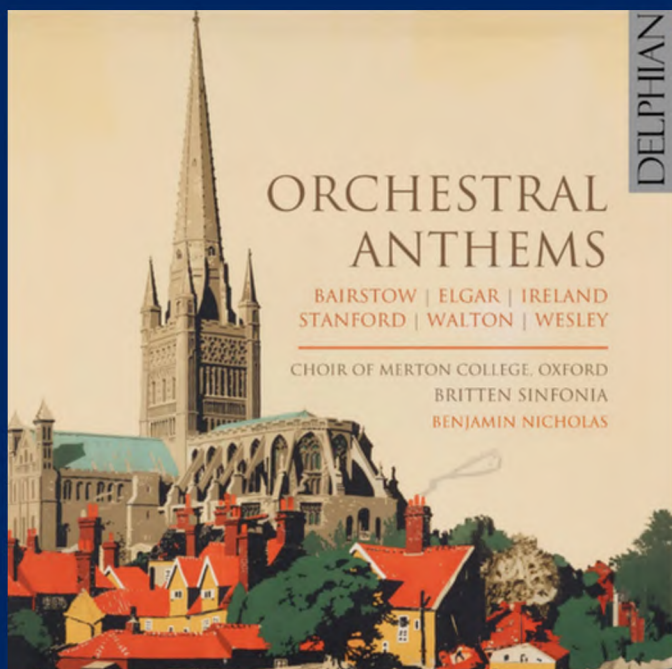
"Going on tour to Hong Kong & Singapore during my third year was certainly an extremely memorable experience! It was amazing to be able to explore the cities with friends during our free time as well as getting to sing in some unusual and exciting venues"

- Frannie Millar, Soprano





# RECENT RELEASES



The Choir of Merton College reunites with Britten Sinfonia to explore some much-loved Anglican repertoire in its full orchestral splendour.

“English Choral music, but not as you expect to hear it”

**theguardian**



“[If you] are searching for a truly new, sincere musical interpretation of the season, then Gabriel Jackson: The Christmas Story is for you ... it is excitingly modern and deeply sincere. And it's rooted in the college. The new Dean of Lincoln, the Very Rev Dr Simon Jones, was chaplain at Merton and compiled the libretto, using the King James Version of the Bible, part of which was translated at Merton, and he includes specially commissioned poems by two contemporary Merton poets, Penny Boxall and Mary Anne Clark. Don't peel the sprouts to this one, but sit down and absorb its many moments of beauty”





"Chilcott's substantial telling of the New Testament narrative, Christmas Oratorio, is expertly performed by the choir of Merton College, Oxford, with top soloists Sarah Connolly, Neal Davies and Nick Pritchard and the Oxford Contemporary Sinfonia..."

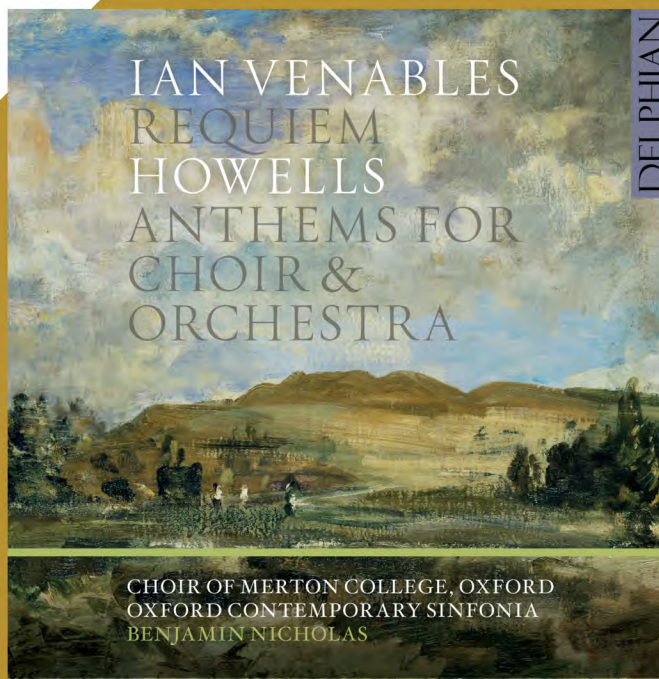
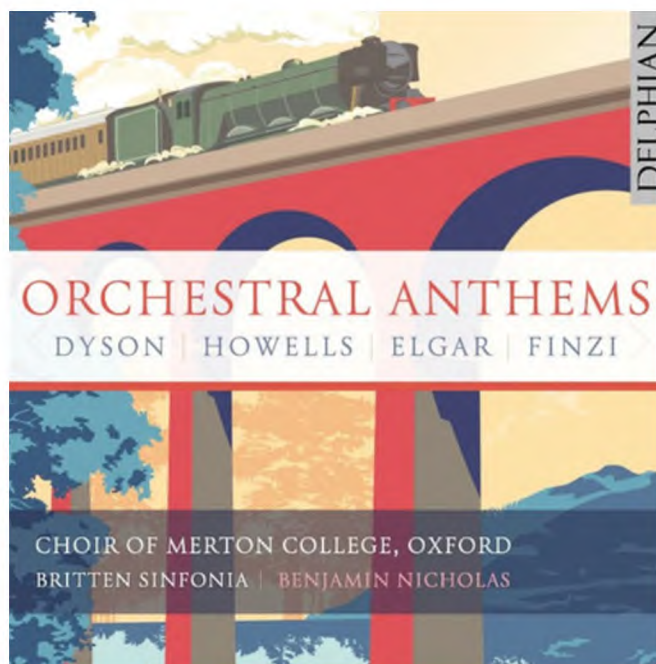
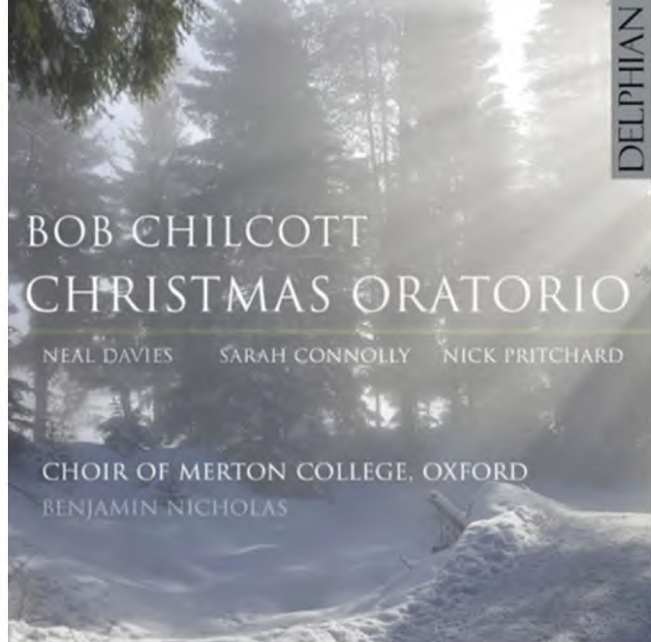
**theguardian**

BEST CLASSICAL CHRISTMAS ALBUMS OF 2023

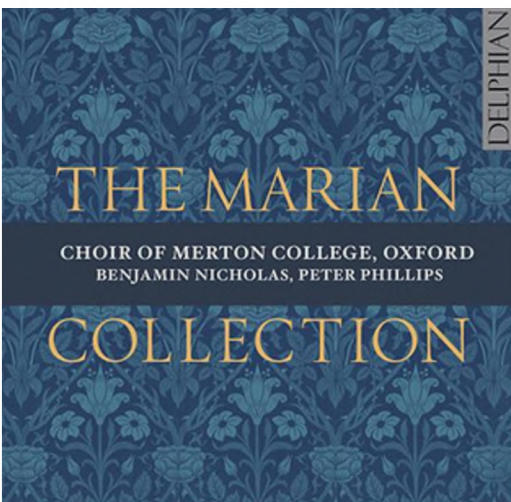
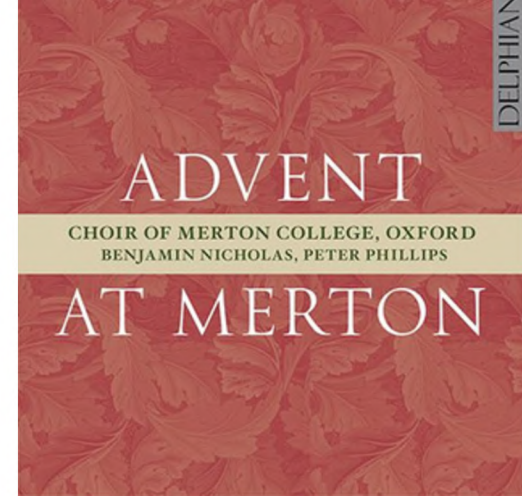
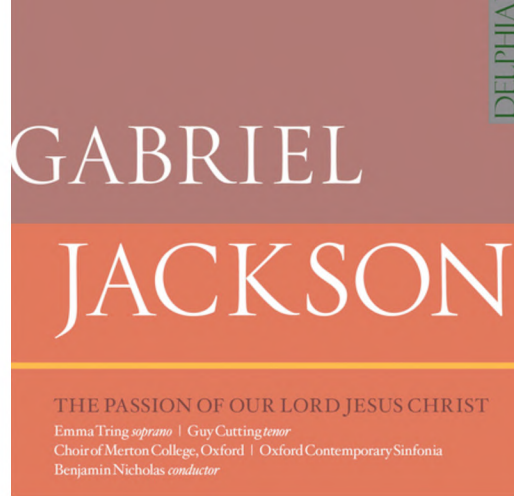
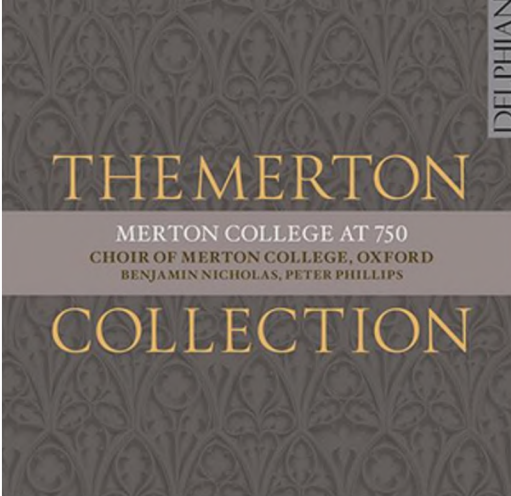
"You can't deny the fervour of the Choir of Merton College, Oxford and their director Benjamin Nichols, or the extra splendour radiating from the musicians of Britten Sinfonia. As long as the recording lasted, all was right with the world"



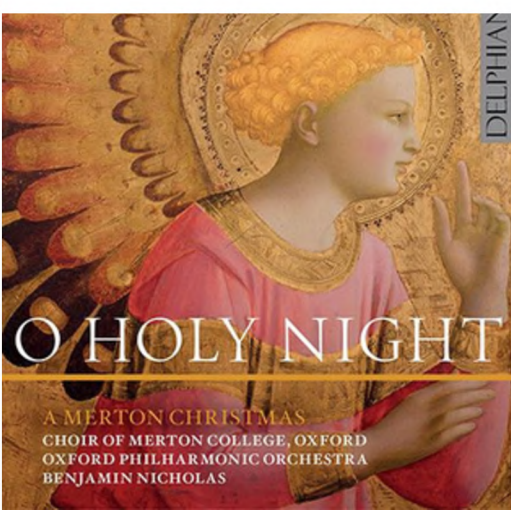
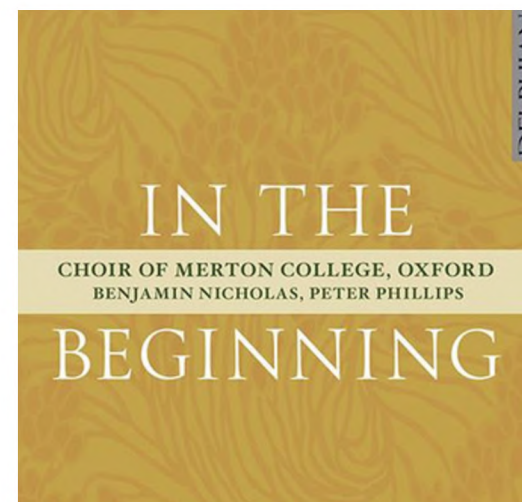
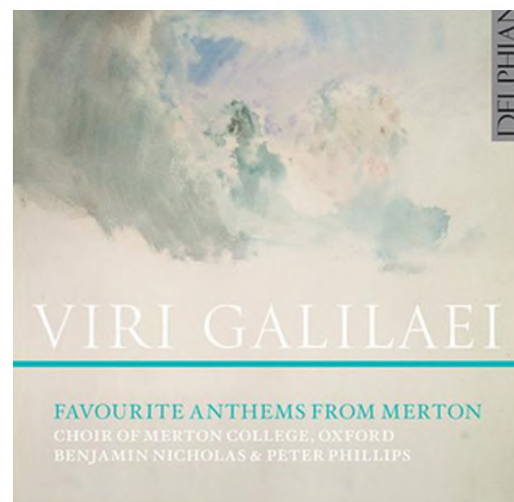
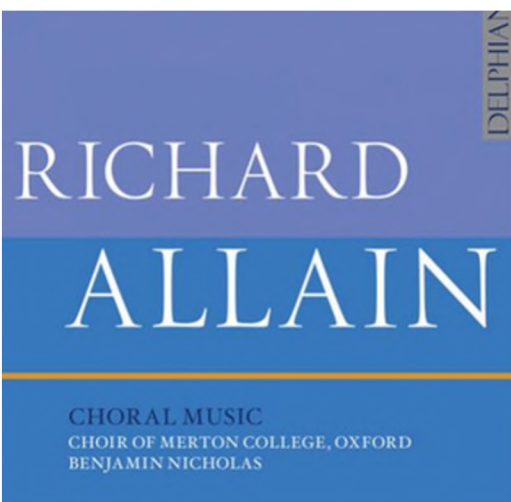
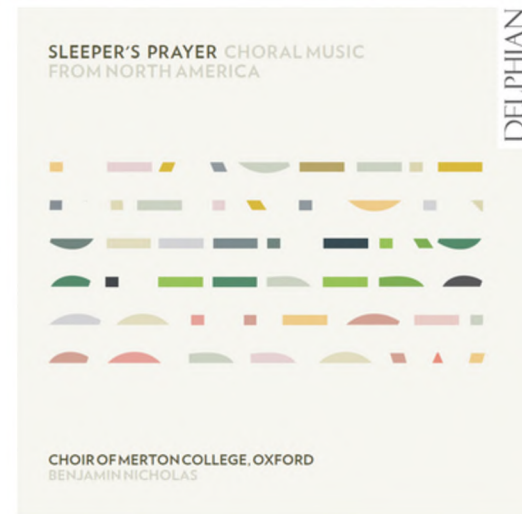
"Originally conceived for choir and organ, the Requiem here is presented in new clothes: an orchestral version tailored specifically for this recording...By turns moving and consoling to the living, Venables' Requiem here receives a superb rendition from Benjamin Nicholas and his Oxford forces, ever responsive to the composer's emotional trajectory through the liturgical text ... A thoroughly admirable release"



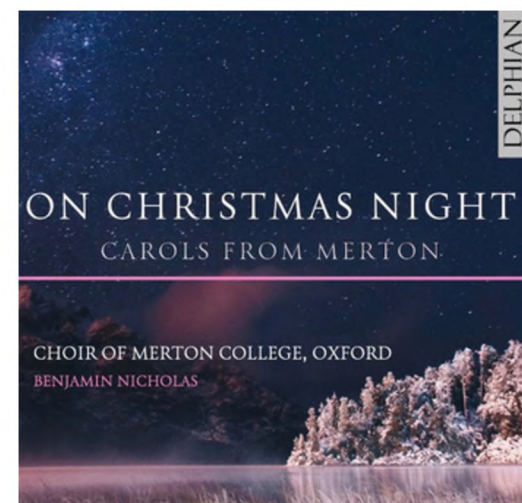




BBC MUSIC MAGAZINE  
**AWARDS 2020**  
WINNER



"the **superb performances** are characterised by a phenomenal sense of control and restraint, with every note carefully crafted and bathed in the **radiant acoustic of the college chapel**"



Church Music Quarterly



Merton College Choir records for Delphian Records and has an acclaimed series of CDs on that label. Our music is available on most streaming platforms!



[APPLE MUSIC](https://music.apple.com/tr/artist/choir-of-merton-college-oxford/458956112)



[YOUTUBE](https://www.youtube.com/user/MertonCollegeChoir)



[SPOTIFY](https://open.spotify.com/artist/42bglDd9UgT074tu8m90Hs)

**URLs:**

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# FRANNIE MILLAR

VOICE PART: SOPRANO

SUBJECT: MUSIC; MUSICOLOGY Mst



## **What was your singing experience before you joined the choir?**

Before I joined Merton choir most of my musical experience was as a pianist and violinist - I didn't really class myself as a singer. I enjoyed singing in several school choirs and then during my final few years at school I started having weekly singing lessons and took the Grade 8 singing exam before I came to Oxford.

## **Why did you want to be a Choral Scholar?**

My music teacher at school suggested that I should think about applying for a choral scholarship - I hadn't even heard about them before - and I thought it sounded like a great way to try to develop my singing further, to bring some structure to my weekly schedule, and to meet some new friends!

## **Why did you choose to apply to be a Choral Scholar at Merton?**

I decided that singing in three services per week was probably around the right level of commitment for me, so I chose Merton rather than applying to one of the college choirs which only sing on Sundays. Plus I thought that Merton Chapel looked particularly beautiful.

## **What's the best thing about being a member of the Merton College Choir?**

Aside from the singing, I would say that the best thing about Merton choir is definitely the strong sense of community and the close friendships you build. It is lovely to go to dinner in hall with friends after each service and catch up with each other, plus the shared experiences of tours and trips mean that it is really easy to make friends.

## **What has been your favourite piece of music to sing?**

A piece that will always be memorable for me is Allegri's *Miserere*, which the choir performs every year on Ash Wednesday. I have had the opportunity to sing the soprano solo a few times and whilst it is quite a stressful experience (as it includes very high notes!), it is always such an atmospheric and special service.

## **Do you do any other music activities other than Choir?**

I sing weekly in several other smaller choirs as well as Merton, so singing does definitely take up most of my time! I also enjoy playing the violin in my college orchestra and organising concerts for my college music society where I can perform the solo songs that I work on in my singing lessons.





# JOSEPH RHEE

VOICE PART: BASS  
SUBJECT: CHEMISTRY

## **What was your singing experience before you joined the choir?**

I'd been singing chorally for two years before Merton with my school chapel choir, singing two services a week during term time.

## **Why did you want to be a Choral Scholar?**

I wanted to keep up my singing after school and have something contrasting to my chemistry degree to be occupied with at university.

## **Why did you choose to apply to be a Choral Scholar at Merton?**

Merton was an easy choice for me because of the vast range in repertoire that we sing, the 'medium' amount of commitment (less than everyday, but more than once a week), the extent of the touring and recording all done to a high level and the chapel you get to sing in so often!

## **What's the best thing about being a member of the Merton College Choir?**

I can't choose one thing but a combination of having a community of friends, from Merton and other colleges too, that you see often during the week for choir and formal dinner after services is so great, and also singing regularly in Merton Chapel is a highlight you never forget!

## **What has been your most memorable experience whilst being a member of the Choir?**

Singing MacMillan's *The Seven Last Words from the Cross* at Tewkesbury Abbey in the Three Choirs Festival was just an amazing experience. The setting of Jesus' 7 last words on the cross was just awesome to sing and experience in its fullness with orchestra after only singing it before in rehearsals.

## **Does being part of the choir affect your work?**

Although choir takes up time on 4 days every week, the time that's spent in choir tends to be when not much is going on around Oxford and if you manage your time well during the week, your work isn't affected much. Being a scientist with many contact hours I find that choir doesn't clash with my labs and tutorials generally so it makes for a great way to take a break from all of the work during the week.



# IZZI BLAIN

VOICE PART: ALTO

SUBJECT: ENGLISH LANGUAGE & LITERATURE



## **What was your singing experience before you joined the choir?**

Before I joined Merton I had been a chorister at St Albans Cathedral and sung in my school choirs. I had also interned with an adult chamber choir for a couple of years. I had done an Eton Choral Course and sung with the Rodolfus Choir following that.

## **Why did you choose to apply to be a Choral Scholar at Merton?**

I chose to apply to Merton because I had heard that it was one of the best Oxford choirs. I mainly wanted to sing somewhere that sung regular services and was a mixed choir.

## **What's the best thing about being a member of the Merton College Choir?**

The best thing about being a member of Merton Choir is definitely the social side of it. Not only are you singing beautiful choral music 3 times a week, but you are doing it with lovely, fun people, who also enjoy singing! The choir is such a great way to meet people outside of college if you do not go to Merton to study and there is such an active social element, with the formals after the service and the college bar. It was definitely the most enriching part of my university experience and I'm so glad I decided to audition.

## **What has been your most memorable experience whilst being a member of the Choir?**

My most memorable experiences whilst being a member of Merton were the experiences that we had during the vacations, especially the tour to Singapore and Hong Kong, which was so exciting. Making the Jackson Passion recording during the summer vac was another really memorable experience, and I will always remember staying in Oxford to sing for the Christmas services, which are amazingly atmospheric.

## **Do you do any other music activities other than Choir?**

I sang in an a cappella group called The Oxford Gargoyles and played violin for Oxford University Sinfonietta and Oxford University Philharmonia. I also helped to supervise the Merton Girl Choristers and sometimes sung for their evensongs.



# LUCY GIBBS

VOICE PART: ALTO  
SUBJECT: MUSIC



## **What was your singing experience before you joined the choir?**

I sang in my local church choir which sang three Sunday eucharists a month, was part of a chamber choir at school, a county youth girls' choir, and had been on a couple of choral courses. I didn't have any experience of singing evensong or much exposure to many of the popular choral works. But this did not prove to be a barrier when I became a Choral Scholar at Merton.

## **What has been your favourite piece of music to sing?**

My favourite pieces of music have come from contemporary composers including Dobrinka Tabakova, James MacMillan, and Ēriks Ešēvalds. One particular favourite of mine was singing MacMillan's *The Seven Last Words from the Cross* at Tewkesbury Abbey for the Three Choirs Festival in 2019. It's a very atmospheric and emotional piece, and such a joy to sing.

## **Why did you choose to apply to be a Choral Scholar at Merton?**

I applied to Merton to be a Choral Scholar primarily because the Chapel is an absolutely beautiful place to sing in; its acoustics are stunning. As a college, Merton has such a friendly and welcoming atmosphere too in and outside the Chapel. The two aspects combined inspired me to apply for a Choral Scholarship at Merton.

## **What's the best thing about being a member of the Merton College Choir?**

The best thing is the huge variety of choral music that the choir gets to sing during termtime at evensong or eucharist. Not only that, but the choir also performs concerts in different venues across the UK throughout the year, does annual CD recordings at the end of the year, and frequently goes on tour abroad.

## **What has been your most memorable experience whilst being a member of the Choir?**

The most memorable experience has to be the tour to Singapore and Hong Kong in my second year. We performed at Singapore's Victoria Hall and appeared on Hong Kong television!

## **Do you do any other music activities other than Choir?**

In Oxford, there is so much music happening, whether it's orchestras, choirs, or on the stage, so there are lots of opportunities to get involved with. I sing with the university chamber choir, Schola Cantorum, and have taken part in a couple of musical theatre and opera productions with the university Gilbert & Sullivan Society. Whatever your taste in music, Oxford is bound to have a society or group to suit; and if not, start one up!



# FIND OUT MORE...

**Benjamin Nicholas has been the Director of Music since 2008.**

He has responsibility for the daily running of the College Choir and is a College Lecturer in Music. Benjamin is happy to meet with potential choral or organ scholars throughout the year, and can be contacted by emailing **[choir@merton.ox.ac.uk](mailto:choir@merton.ox.ac.uk)**

**The Music Department's page on Choral Awards can be found here:**

**[www.music.ox.ac.uk/apply/undergraduate/choral-and-organ-awards/](http://www.music.ox.ac.uk/apply/undergraduate/choral-and-organ-awards/)**



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