

MERTON COLLEGE GIRL CHORISTERS



MERTON COLLEGE
OXFORD

In 2016 Merton College became the first College in Oxford University to admit girls into its Choral Foundation. The 24 girl choristers attend many different schools across Oxford and beyond, and rehearse at Merton on Mondays and Wednesdays during school term-time.

Receiving specialist musical training from the College's professional musicians, they sing Vespers each Monday and Evensong each Wednesday during the University term. In addition, the choristers undertake a number of concerts and other activities each year, including performing in the *Passiontide at Merton* festival.

We currently have spaces in our Probationer class for **four** girls entering Year 4 in September 2023.

The **Director of Music, Benjamin Nicholas**, is happy to meet prospective candidates and their families over Zoom or Skype. Please email girl.choristers@merton.ox.ac.uk to arrange an appointment.





Girls are welcomed into the choir as probationers during Year 4, and sing as Choristers up to the end of Year 11. They receive tuition in Music Theory, and have singing lessons with our singing teacher Carys Lane.

The benefits of working alongside Merton College Choir (30 undergraduate and graduate students at the University) have led to the Choristers participating in a number of high profile events including concert performances of Bach's St Matthew Passion with Instruments of Time & Truth, and Elgar's The Apostles with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

The Choristers have performed at The Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford and Durham & Chichester Cathedrals, and have taken part in the world première of new pieces by Neil Cox and Gabriel Jackson, including the first performance of Jackson's Stabat Mater with The Marian Consort



What are the benefits to being a chorister?

Singing music by great composers in one of Oxford's most famous buildings;

Taking part in services and concerts in Oxford and further afield;

Receiving lessons from an experienced singing teacher;

Making friends and getting to know new people with similar interests;

Occasional opportunities to sing with Merton's undergraduate College Choir.

Instrumental bursaries to cover the cost of lessons on one instrument each term for Full Choristers.

What is the time commitment?

Monday: 4:00pm-4:30pm Theory Class; 4:45pm-6:00pm Rehearsal (refreshments available from 4:30pm), 6:00pm - 6.30pm Vespers

Wednesday: 4:45pm-5:55pm Rehearsal; 6:15pm-6:50pm Evensong

These are the core duties during school term. The choir will have occasional extra commitments during the Christmas and Easter holidays, for which advance notice will always be given.

Do I have to be religious?

There is no requirement to have experience of Anglican worship or traditions but families need to be comfortable with the Chapel's Christian ethos and that the choir will lead both the said and sung parts of the service.

This is an entirely free opportunity: robes, singing lessons, refreshments and choir tours are all provided.

AUDITIONING

Each year, our **Be a Chorister for a Day** event is held in the spring, with girls able to experience chorister tea, a group singing lesson and see what a chorister rehearsal is like.

There is the option to attend Evensong with parents/guardians from 6.15pm-7pm.

Auditions take place yearly and by appointment. The 2023 date will be confirmed soon. Please email [**girl.choristers@merton.ox.ac.uk**](mailto:girl.choristers@merton.ox.ac.uk) for more information about this year's auditions.

The audition will include:

- The performance of a short piece of your choice (for example, a hymn or song is fine). Please bring the piano accompaniment along.
- Some simple aural tests.
- Some vocal exercises to explore your range.
- A short conversation with the Director of Music and Chaplain.



RESIDENTIAL TRIPS



The Girl Choristers began making annual residential trips in 2017 with a trip to Cheltenham and Cirencester. In 2018 the Choristers enjoyed a four-day trip to the North East, singing Evensong in Durham Cathedral, and concerts at the churches of Holy Trinity, Embleton and St Mary the Virgin, Ponteland. In August 2019, the Girl Choristers travelled to Chichester, for three days in residence at Chichester Cathedral. They sang Evensong at the Cathedral at 5:30pm each evening. Residential trips also include plenty of fun and games, and provide an opportunity for the Choristers to forge lifelong bonds with one another.

All residential and day trips are funded by the College.



In the summer of 2020, the Choristers recorded their debut Christmas album, *In the Stillness*, which will have its highly-anticipated commercial release in time for Christmas 2022.

In 2019, the Choristers recorded alongside the Merton College Choir for the Choir's disc 'Sleeper's Prayer'. MusicWeb International noted that "The pure young voices of the Choristers add an extra degree of freshness to the choral sound..." The Choristers can be heard on the track 'A Song of Ephraim the Syrian'. Listen on Spotify or Apple Music!



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To see the Choristers singing in Chapel, head to our YouTube channel!

<https://music.apple.com/tr/artist/choir-of-merton-college-oxford/458956112>

<https://open.spotify.com/artist/42bglDd9UgT074tu8m90Hs>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4yq0bfBs5Do&ab_channel=MertonCollegeChoir



Merton
College Girl
Choristers are
associate members
of the Choir Schools'
Association, which
represents schools attached to
cathedrals, churches and college
chapels in Great Britain and elsewhere.
The Association supports and promotes
choral music in the Christian tradition, promotes
the values of choir school education, supports choir
schools and their heads, and promotes singing locally,
nationally and internationally.





How long have you been a Chorister?

This is my fifth year in the Choir.

Why did you want to be a Chorister?

I liked singing and wanted to become part of a choir to improve my singing skills. My friend had heard that Merton was starting a girls' choir and told some of us about it. A few days later we all got letters from the music teacher at school giving us details about the audition.

Can you tell us about a highlight of your time as a Chorister?

One of the highlights of my time in chapel was in the 2019 Christmas season when we sang for the OUP Carol service and we got to meet John Rutter in person. He was very approachable and spent time signing our programmes. Our trips are also major highlights of every year. We've been to Cheltenham, Cirencester, Durham and Chichester - singing in the cathedrals and chapels is always an interesting experience. We also manage to fit in some time to look around the new places and a special meal!

What do you think is the greatest benefit of being a Chorister?

Being a Chorister has improved my singing a lot. I have gained more confidence in my singing and I have learned some more music theory as well. I have made many new friends from other schools and other years as well because everyone is friendly.

What is your favourite thing to sing in Chapel?

My favourite piece of music performed in chapel is the Benedicamus that we do in Advent because it is an active piece with four parts and harmonies that sound really good together. I also love the Christmas services because we do some pieces that we already know and we also learn some new pieces every year – the pieces capture the festive feeling of the season.

What's the most beautiful bit of the Chapel?

I think the ceiling in the chapel is my favourite part of the chapel as there are a lot of intricate, colourful pictures painted on it. Every time I look at it, I see something new!



How long have you been a Chorister?

I've been a Chorister since 2016.

Why did you want to be a Chorister?

It was a great opportunity to experience a great choral music training and to also worship with a new community, as well as my own church

Can you tell us about a highlight of your time as a Chorister?

There have been lots – the atmosphere in the candle-lit chapel at Christmas, when we have hosted visiting choirs is fun, Father Simon's prayers are always thought-provoking, the Associate Chaplain's Pizza & Faith group, hearing Mozart's Requiem sung in an evening mass, the experience recording a new piece by Nico Muhly.

What do you think is the greatest benefit of being a Chorister?

Gaining a fantastic experience in chorister life! It also helps me feel more connected with my faith through the music we sing and the friends we have got to know. Taking part in the services is very special - it always makes me feel peaceful.

What is your favourite service or music sung in Chapel?

I have to say the Girls' Choir regular term time Wednesday Choral Evensong but of the special services my favourite is the Advent Carol service. My favourite works we have sung in the choir have been the Mozart Mass in D, Wesley's Blessed be the God and Father -because I love the build-up at the beginning; Pergolesi Stabat Mater because I particularly enjoy baroque choral music and O God the King of Glory (Gibbons). Another favourite I remember was when Alex (the organist) improvised between verses in the hymn sung to Finlandia, it was jaw-dropping amazing!

What's the most beautiful bit of the Chapel?

I love to look up at the angels and saints on the painted ceiling and the stained glass windows, the detail is beautiful.

FIND OUT MORE...

Benjamin Nicholas has been the Director of Music at Merton since 2008

and directs the Girl Choristers. Mr Nicholas is happy to meet digitally during the current situation and a meeting can be arranged by emailing

girl.choristers@merton.ox.ac.uk

Lizzie Casey, the Chapel Administrator, and Leah Collins, the Verger, are both involved in the logistical running of the Choristers and their pastoral care and safety. Lizzie is the Designated Officer for Safeguarding Children (DOSC) and is happy to discuss any aspect of Chorister Life with those interested. She can be contacted by emailing

girl.choristers@merton.ox.ac.uk



@MCGirlsChoir



@mertoncollchoir



@mertoncollegechoir



www.merton.ox.ac.uk/merton-college-girl-choristers