

Cambridge University Chamber Choir

Information sheet

Some history

The Cambridge University Chamber Choir (CUCC) has a long and distinguished history. One particularly memorable event from the choir's early years was the first performance of the collection of songs, *A Garland for the Queen*, compiled by the Arts Council in honour of the Queen's Coronation in 1953 and given its first performance in the newly-opened Royal Festival Hall as part of the coronation celebrations. For many years, Richard Marlow, then Director of Music of Trinity College, directed the choir, making a number of distinguished recordings of both Renaissance and contemporary music. In the 1980s, Tim Brown re-founded the choir; he gave a number of notable performances, including the Bach Passions and Handel *Messiah*, as well as making recordings of music by Christopher Tye, Britten *A.M.D.G.* and *Sacred and Profane*, and *A Garland for the Queen*. For a period, the choir was directed by Daniel Hyde and David Lowe, during which time the choir recorded a CD of Elgar partsongs, directed by Christopher Robinson.

The Chamber Choir today

The Chamber Choir, which was brought under the aegis of CUMS (Cambridge University Musical Society) in 2011, is now directed by Martin Ennis, with Nicholas Mulroy and David Lowe as co-directors. The mission of the ensemble is to offer the best student singers the opportunity to perform, to the highest possible standard, repertoire that is not usually undertaken by Cambridge chapel choirs. As a result, CUCC tends to place an emphasis on secular rather than sacred music, and it often focuses on repertoire that gives singers the chance to appear as soloists or in small groups. We also often prioritise unusual or unduly neglected works.

Although the Chamber Choir often appears *a cappella* or accompanied by only keyboard instruments, it also performs on a regular basis with the CUMS orchestras and with the Faculty of Music's Collegium Musicum (the period-instrument ensemble founded by Margaret Faultless). In recent years, the CUCC has also performed alongside the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment under John Butt and The Cardinal's Musick under Andrew Carwood. The Choir tours on an occasional basis; in 2012, for example, CUCC, under the direction of Martin Ennis, represented Europe at a festival of global choral music hosted by Yale University.

Individual members of the Chamber Choir are invited each year to take part in large-scale projects in King's College Chapel or Ely Cathedral. Works performed in recent years include Britten *War Requiem*, Elgar *Dream of Gerontius* and Verdi *Requiem*; conductors include Sir Roger Norrington, Richard Farnes, Howard Shelley, Paul Daniel and Jac van Steen.

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The Chamber Choir offers fantastic opportunities to singers who are looking to work in a friendly but demanding environment. By choosing a complex and diverse range of repertoire, the ensemble takes the university's best choral singers and helps them achieve standards that exceed their expectations. In recent years, Martin Ennis and his co-directors have steered the choir from strength to strength with fantastic performances of works as diverse as Tallis's 40-part motet *Spem in alium*, reconstructions of polychoral Venetian masterpieces (with historic-brass ensembles from several conservatoires around the UK) and Stravinsky *Les Noces*.

Each concert is fixed on a project-by-project basis. This means that, depending on the forces required, singers can choose the concerts in which they perform.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Will I be expected to audition?

If you are a 'known quantity' – e.g. if you do a lot of singing around Cambridge and are known to the directors of the Chamber Choir or the choir administrator – you will probably only be asked to audition for solo roles.

If you do a lot of singing at the University (for example, if you sing in one of the College Choirs) but are not known to us, we may ask for a reference from your Director of Music or singing teacher; the decision whether or not to audition you will depend on individual circumstances.

If you are new to the University or are not known to us, we ask that you sign up with our administrator (Isabelle Freeman; isabelle.freeman@me.com) for an audition, providing a reference from a Director of Music or singing teacher in advance of audition.

When do auditions take place?

Auditions usually take place during the first two weeks of October. For an audition, we ask you to prepare a piece of your choice (between 3 and 5 minutes in length), either accompanied or unaccompanied. We provide an accompanist for the audition. You will also be given exercises to assess your vocal abilities as well as some aural and sight-reading tests.

Can I audition mid-year?

We usually only hold auditions in October. As noted above, if you do a lot of singing at the University but are not known to us, we may ask for a reference from a Director of Music or singing teacher and may be able to offer a place depending on the reference.

When do rehearsals take place?

Rehearsals take place on a project-by project basis, rather than weekly. There are usually three or four evening rehearsals in the two weeks running up to a concert and a rehearsal on the day of the performance. Rehearsals are often organised via a doodle poll, in order to find the most convenient dates. Because the repertoire frequently includes pieces with solos and small ensembles, it is rare for everyone to be needed for all rehearsals.

Do I have to be a confident sight-reader?

Singers admitted to the choir will usually be strong readers, and if sight-reading any of the repertoire causes problems, singers will be expected to look at music outside of rehearsals in order to reach the expected standard.

Is the choir just for undergraduates?

No; any member of the University, including staff and postgraduate students, can sing in the choir.

Do I have to commit to all projects for the year?

As noted above, each concert is fixed on a project-by-project basis, so in theory you can sing for as many or as few concerts as you would like. However, we expect singers to attend all the rehearsals for the projects in which they are involved.

**IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO SING WITH THE CHAMBER CHOIR,
PLEASE FILL OUT AND RETURN THE SEPARATE APPLICATION FORM**