

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Girls and women to sing as members of The Choir of St John's

St John's College will continue its reputation for musical excellence by featuring male and female voices – both adults and children – in its world-renowned choir for the first time.

Founded in the 1670s, The Choir of St John's has a rich, warm and distinctive sound. Known internationally for its broadcasts, concert tours and more than 100 recordings, the choir is made up of around 20 choristers, who join from the age of eight, and around 16 adult choral scholars who are largely students at St John's College, one of the 31 constituent Colleges of the University of Cambridge.

The choir enhances services of the College Chapel through daily Evensong services and Sung Eucharist on Sundays during university term.

The decision to admit girls and women will mean the choir will be unique in a Cambridge or Oxford College – no other choir of its kind combines the voices of males and females in both adults and children.

Andrew Nethsingha, former organ scholar at St John's, has directed the choir for 14 years and its repertoire spans 500 years of sacred music. Nethsingha has a reputation for encouraging young singers, championing contemporary music, and commissioning new work from established and emerging composers. He has spearheaded the move to admit girls and women to the choir.



Andrew Nethsingha, Director of Music. Credit: James Beddoe.

The Director of Music said: “Providing an opportunity for girls and women to sing as members of The Choir of St John’s is a very exciting development for the choral tradition of the College. Choral singing is a specialised art form, and our choir has played a formative role in the careers of many globally recognised musicians.

“Extending membership to talented female singers creates an exceptional new musical opportunity for women and girls, as our much loved choir continues to make a highly valued contribution to the musical life of St John’s and the wider world.”

The inclusion of girls and women will begin in 2022. Men and women will be largely recruited to the choir from the student body of the College. Choristers typically join in Year 4 of school and sing until the end of Year 8. Boy and girl choristers admitted into the choir are educated at St John’s College School. The choristers come to Cambridge from a wide variety of backgrounds and generous scholarships are provided to support their education – the aim is that no child is prevented from joining the choir on financial grounds.



Credit: B Ealovega

Nethsingha added: “Much of the St John’s style is created by a particular approach to phrasing, to tone-colour, to suppleness of line, by warmth and generosity, by emotional engagement with the text, by a desire to *move* the listener rather than simply *impress* them with technical accomplishment – the choristers create something of extraordinary beauty every day.

“Our choir is a family, with an emphasis on mutual encouragement, enjoyment, kindness, praise and empathetic support. In addition to their musical training, the choristers learn innumerable

skills including teamwork, attention to detail, self-confidence, leadership, professionalism and responsibility. These attributes stay with them for the rest of their lives.

“Each singer is an individual with their own vocal colour, their own personality and their own strengths and weaknesses – we nurture each singer’s voice. New choristers generally join in Year 4 and it will be four or five years before all five year-groups of the choir contain both boys and girls. The total number of choristers will increase from 20 to 25.

“Boys’ voices tend to reach their peak around Year 8, whereas girls’ voices continue to develop for many years after that. Our choir will continue to celebrate and give a platform to those unique moments in boys’ vocal development whilst ensuring girls and women are also given the chance to benefit from a musical education that will transform the rest of their lives.

“I hope this small step will bring the day closer when there is gender equality amongst composers, organists and conductors, as well as among politicians, business leaders and in all other walks of life.”

Heather Hancock, Master of St John’s College, said: “The Choir of St John’s has a stellar reputation for its contribution to the rich choral tradition of the UK. It is a musical treasure of St John’s, the university and, indeed, the world.

“Being a member of the choir provides participants with an outstanding choral education and vocal training. The College is delighted to support our exceptional Director of Music, Andrew Nethsingha, as he recruits women and girls, as well as men and boys, to become members of the choir. This pioneering step will continue the distinctive tradition of choral excellence at St John’s and honours the College’s overarching commitment to equality.”

[Evensong](#) at St John’s College, Cambridge, is sung daily at 6.30pm during university term-time. It is free and open to all.

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Notes for editors

Photographs

A selection of photographs and a copy of this press release are available in [this Google drive](#)

The Choir of St John’s College, Cambridge

[The Choir of St John’s College](#), Cambridge, is one of the finest collegiate choirs in the world – known and loved by millions from its broadcasts, concert tours and over 100 recordings. Founded in the 1670s, the Choir is known for its rich, warm and distinctive sound, its expressive interpretations and its ability to sing in a variety of styles. Alongside this discipline, the Choir is particularly proud of its happy, relaxed and mutually supportive atmosphere.

The Choir is directed by Andrew Nethsingha following in a long line of eminent Directors of Music, recently Dr George Guest, Dr Christopher Robinson and Dr David Hill. Their first release on their imprint with Signum Classics, *DEO*, won the Choral Award at the BBC Music Magazine Awards 2017.

Andrew Nethsingha

Performing in North America, South Africa, the Far East, and throughout Europe, Andrew Nethsingha has been Director of Music at St John's College, Cambridge since 2007. He has helped to set up a new recording label, 'St John's Cambridge', in conjunction with Signum. His first album on the new label, *DEO* (music by Jonathan Harvey), was a 2017 BBC Music Magazine Award winner. Six recent albums have been 'Editor's Choice' in Gramophone Magazine.

Andrew Nethsingha was a chorister at Exeter Cathedral, under his father's direction. He later studied at the Royal College of Music, where he won seven prizes, and at St John's College, Cambridge.

He held Organ Scholarships under Dr Christopher Robinson at St George's Windsor, and Dr George Guest at St John's College, before becoming Assistant Organist at Wells Cathedral. He was subsequently Director of Music at Truro and Gloucester Cathedrals, and Artistic Director of the Gloucester Three Choirs Festival.

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