



St Paul's Cathedral Chorister Report

2023-24 Academic Year

Introduction

St Paul's offers talented young people the unprecedented opportunity to become a Chorister at the Cathedral School and to train with one of the most prestigious Choirs in the world today. Candidates need to show a strong musical aptitude and an ability to cope with the demands of the role.

Importantly, the Cathedral is committed to ensuring that the incredible opportunity of becoming a Chorister is open to young people from a wide variety of backgrounds and not dependent on their family's ability to be able to afford to pay the fees.

In 2023-24 it cost over £35K to train a Chorister, so it is with the assistance of generous supporters including the Pattenmakers' Company, who provided a grant of £7,000 that St Paul's is able to realise this commitment. The Company's support is associated with a particular Chorister – Taryn Moffat-Collins, who wears the Pattenmakers' Chorister medal to indicate this special connection.

The following report provides an insight into the life of the Choristers, a review of the highlights over the past year and a review of Taryn's progress through the Choir.



The Choir

Music is central to St Paul's. The daily rhythm of prayer and worship is at the heart of the Cathedral and is enriched through our strong musical tradition. The Cathedral Choir, has a world-famous reputation for excellence. In 2021, it was voted to be one of the top ten choirs in the world. It has an extensive list of recordings and reaches millions through its broadcasts of special national services. The Choir is made up of the Vicars Choral, 12 professional singers, and currently 24 Choristers. In addition we have 6 Probationers in training.

St Paul's Choristers

The Choristers receive a world-class musical training under the baton of renowned Director of Music, Andrew Carwood MBE and are educated at the adjacent Cathedral School. Most join as Probationers in Year 3 or 4 and spend about a year learning the ropes before they are made up to become full Choristers. They remain in the Chorister training programme until the end of Year 8 when they move on to senior school.

Training and Routine

The Choristers take a very active role in the Cathedral's sung worship, singing daily (except on Thursdays) as well as taking part in services and events of national importance and of course many rehearsals!

Each weekday starts with an early morning rehearsal at 7.50 am, followed by a full academic day, including instrumental lessons; the Choristers then return to the Cathedral for a rehearsal at 4.10 pm before Evensong at 5pm. On Sundays there are three services – Mattins at 10am, Eucharist at 11.15 and Evensong at 3pm

Boarding Life

The Choristers' demanding schedule means that it is essential for them to be boarders at the adjacent Cathedral School. Here they receive excellent pastoral care and are part of a special happy, vibrant community, where they learn, live and work together. The Cathedral School has a central focus on pastoral care and earlier this year, was described as 'pastorally superb' by the Good School Guide.



“The boarding programme at St Paul's Cathedral School plays significant role in the personal development of the Choristers. It creates an environment where a world-class musical education can be interwoven with individual growth and character development.”

Joe Gorman, Head of Chorister Boarding

St Paul's Choristers

Recruitment

The focus is on seeking out potential talent and those who might have the ability to cope with the demands of the training. Importantly, St Paul's is committed to ensuring that the opportunity to train as a Chorister is open to all those with a good voice, regardless of their background.

Much effort is made in the recruitment process to reach out to attract a broad pool of applicants and our Artistic Director of Choral Partnerships is involved in helping to identify talent. Care is taken too, to ensure that candidates are not daunted by the process, with online training assistance on hand to guide candidates through the audition stages. This is especially helpful for those who may not have had the opportunity of receiving any formal musical training.

An essential prerequisite in attracting candidates from all backgrounds is our generous scholarship bursary programme, which with the help of supporters, provides 100% of the Chorister tuition costs and ensures that the opportunity to train as a Chorister is not reliant on the families' ability to afford to pay the fees.

Musical Development

During their tenure in the Choir and at the Cathedral School, St Paul's Choristers benefit from an unparalleled musical training and educational experience, which takes them from being children with a good basic ability and turns them into young professional musicians by the age of 13.

When they start with us, the young singer must have a good voice and the ability to pitch notes (that is to sing them back when played on the piano) - these are the basic building blocks of a Chorister. As soon as they enter the Probationer Programme, they are then trained in vocal technique - how to breathe properly as a singer, how to stand, how to access their high notes with ease and how to make the maximum amount of sound with the minimum effort. They also get to grips with reading music and how to do it quickly, how to read the intervals between notes and get to master rhythm.

St Paul's Choristers

Once they become Choristers we continue to work on all of the above for the remainder of their time with us. We also introduce them to different languages, principally Latin, French, German and Church Slavonic, and we gradually introduce them to solos. They start with the smaller solos (or verses as they are sometimes called) and move to the bigger ones as their voices develop alongside their braveness.



In their final year in the Choir, we hope and expect that they can do three things: read any music which is in the Choir's repertoire (an enormous number!); have the ability to pick up any piece of music which they do not know and do a good job of reading it at sight; and be able to undertake large-scale solos, not only in our daily services but on high profile events, sometimes as part of a live broadcast and / or in front of two and a half thousand people in the Cathedral.

Personal Development

The Choristers need to balance their musical responsibilities alongside handling a robust academic curriculum. Achieving the highest standards in all their work requires a strong work ethic, good time management and resilience. Teamwork is also an important requirement for being part of the Choir and the Choristers develop strong interpersonal skills, as well as a real sense of mutual respect and community spirit.

“The School aims to promote the holistic development of the Choristers that goes beyond the musical training. So that through collaboration, leadership, public performance, cultural appreciation and emotional engagement, they continue to grow into well-rounded individuals”

Joe Gorman, Head of Chorister Boarding

Highlights of 2023-24

Reflecting back on her first year, Judith Fremont-Barnes, Head of St Paul's Cathedral School, Judith Fremont-Barnes says:

“I've been struck by the busyness and cheerful industry of the place. Day pupils and Choristers work hard with a real sense of purpose and daily joy in their endeavours.”

Each year brings its own special highlights and this academic year the Choristers have sung amazingly well on so many occasions. Particular highlights in the autumn term included an Evensong for the Worshipful Company of Musicians; a requiem for all Souls Day, the annual blessing of the new Lord Mayor on Lord Mayor's Show Day, the Festival of St Cecilia with the Choirs of Westminster Abbey and Westminster Cathedral and a specially arranged Chorister recital for our Friends from America, attended by the HRH Duchess of Gloucester.

Christmas is always an especially busy time at the Cathedral, last December we had with capacity congregations at most of our popular Services, including at the Advent Carol Services, the concert of Handel's Messiah, at the three charity concerts we held for Maggie's, The Royal Osteoporosis and The Prince's Trust; as well as at Britten's Ceremony of Carols, the Celebration of Christmas Orchestral Concert and our two traditional Christmas Carol Services on 23rd and 24th December.



Highlights of 2023-24

In January, the Choir took part in a live broadcast of Choral Evensong on BBC Radio 3. On 15th March, the annual United Guilds Service which brings together all of the Guilds and Livery Companies of the City, marked its 80th anniversary and this was followed a week later, by a concert of Bach's St John's Passion at which the Choristers took on several of the solo performances.

During the summer term several high-profile services took place in close succession. On the 7th May we had the Clergy Support Trust Service, in which the Cathedral Choir joined with Choirs from Durham and Rochester Cathedral to sing under the Dome. The next day was the 10th Anniversary Service for the Invictus Games, attended by the Duke of Sussex and a week later HM King Charles III and Queen Camilla joined 2000 OBE honours holders for a Service of Dedication.

This year for the first time since the Covid pandemic, we were able to return to holding a full series of four Masses with Orchestra over successive Sundays in June and July.

This is a tradition that was started in the early 1970s and was interrupted in 2020 and with the financial problems that resulted from the lockdowns. Now that these services are back, it was wonderful to see so many people come to them. The absolute highlight of the year was the service at which we made our first two girls into Choristers.

The academic year was rounded off in July with the annual Friends Festival and Chorister recital attended by HRH Duchess of Gloucester. This summer we say goodbye to our Year 8 leavers, who move on having won places (many with music scholarships) at a range of competitive senior schools including Westminster, St Paul's Boys, City of London Boys, Harrow, Rugby, St Edward's Oxford and King's Canterbury.

“ The key achievement of the Choristers this year has been the turn around after Covid. During lockdown our performance and rehearsal schedule was stopped and this had an enormous impact on the music that the children need to remember and the speed at which they read it. The young singers this year have worked so hard at getting back up to speed again. It has been tricky at times but they are now well on course to being back to their former confidence.

Andrew Carwood MBE, Director of Music



Introducing Girls

This year, for the first time in our 900 year old choral history, we have admitted the first girl Choristers - Lois and Lila, into our choir. This historic development is a first step towards fulfilling our long-held ambition to form a girls choir. We currently have three other girls training as Probationers and more are due to start next term. By the autumn of 2025, we will have a sufficient number of girls to form a separate choir. For now, the girls train alongside the boys and are day pupils at the Cathedral school, until the new boarding accommodation is complete.

The admittance of the first two girls to the choir in June was a very special moment for everyone at St Paul's, as one of the girls remarked 'we know we are making history and that's so exciting. In due course, the formation of the girls choir will double the number of Chorister training opportunities, to provide up to 60 places. This change will lead to an expansion in the number of weekly sung services from 8 to 14 and will create the biggest and busiest Cathedral Music Department in the world.

To realise our plans, we have launched a major Girls' Voices fundraising campaign to provide new boarding accommodation and to cover the full scholarship programme for the girls.

We are now actively seeking new Chorister medal supporters from the Livery community for our new girl recruits. We are very grateful that some of our current Livery supporters have already committed to additionally support a girl chorister and we hope that others may also follow.

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Everyone at St Paul's Cathedral School is enormously proud of Lois and Lila. ...We can't wait to see them growing through their Chorister journey and inspiring the girls and boys who follow them.

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Judith Fremont-Barnes, Head of St Paul's Cathedral school



Choristers and their bursary supporters at Evensong prior to the Dean's Reception in September 2023

The Pattenmakers' Company Chorister

For the 2023-24 academic year, the Pattenmakers' Company has provided a Chorister grant of £7,000 via St Paul's Cathedral Chorister Trust. This support is attached to Taryn Moffat-Collins, who wears the Company's Chorister medal to indicate the connection.

Throughout this academic year, Taryn has displayed outstanding progress, both as a school pupil and a Chorister. He has sung in several high-profile services, including the OBE Ceremonial Service attended by HM King Charles III, and the 10th Anniversary Service for the Invictus Games. This is in addition to his part in the daily services of Choral Evensong, as well as Mattins and Sung Eucharist on Sundays.

All Choristers learn to play two instruments, Taryn is currently learning to play the clarinet and piano and managed to successfully pass his first two ABRSM exams earlier this year, and was awarded a distinction for his piano playing.

Taryn is performing well academically and has received very positive end of year reports from his subject teachers, with particularly good grades in maths and geography. He is also a keen sportsman and has represented the school in football, hockey and cricket.

We are absolutely delighted with the progress that Taryn is making at the school, and he is clearly going to be a real asset to the Cathedral Choir as he gains more experience in his remaining 3 years at the school.

Chorister Funding

St Paul's is committed to ensuring that no candidate of the right talent should miss out on taking up the opportunity of a Choristership on financial grounds. Therefore, Chapter pays for the full cost of the academic education, whilst means-tested bursaries are available for boarding fees, instrumental tuition and associated costs from the St Paul's Cathedral Chorister Trust.

	2023/24	2024/25
Academic Tuition Fees	18,270	19,320
Choral Training	4,459	4,570
Subtotal	22,729	23,890
Boarding Fees	10,264	10,855
Instrumental Tuition	2,544	2,640
Subtotal	12,808	13,495
Grand Total	35,537	37,385

The full cost of sustaining one Chorister in the 2023-24 academic year was just over £35K. The breakdown of this, plus the fees for the forthcoming 2024-25 academic year is shown in the table above. To realise this financial commitment, St Paul's is reliant on the generosity of a number of Livery Companies and organisations who help to offset tuition fee costs or provide boarding bursaries.



Thank you for your support

Our pupils wear their Chorister medals with such pride and they, their families and all of us at St Paul's are most grateful for the kindness of our supporters. This support not only strengthens our Choir and music but importantly, it provides transformational learning for our Choristers, none of whom would access these world-class musical education experiences without the Chorister programme.