

Choristerships

Prospective Cathedral Choristers:

Parent/Guardian Information Guide





in association with

Chetham's School of Music

Information for
prospective Cathedral Choristers

*Chetham's School of Music
Long Millgate
Manchester
M3 1SB
0161 834 9644*

*Manchester Cathedral
Victoria Street
Manchester
M3 1SX
0161 833 2220*

Dear parent/guardian,

We are glad to know that you are interested in the possibility of a Choristership for your son or daughter and hope that you will find this information helpful.

A strong musical and educational partnership exists between Chetham's School of Music and Manchester Cathedral. The Cathedral Choir is one of the first to be open to both boys and girls and all applications will be treated on the basis of equality. This is an exciting co-educational development which both School and Cathedral actively foster. The school only accepts day-Choristers.

We hope that you will consider completing an application form and look forward to meeting you should you take matters forward to a voice trial and interview.

*Claire Moreland
Head of Chetham's*

*Very Revd Rogers Govender
Dean of Manchester*

From the Organist & Master of the Choristers

THE LIFE OF A CHORISTER is both demanding and exacting. Choristers sing with adults who are professional musicians and this requires a high standard of performance; therefore, regular and concentrated practice is essential. However, hard work does bring great satisfaction and pride in a job well done, creating a foundation for a lifetime's enjoyment of music.

Since January 1995, Manchester Cathedral Choir has had a top line of boys and girls - the first Cathedral in England to make this move. There are normally sixteen full choristers and four probationary choristers in the choir.

The heart of a Chorister's work is the regular worship of the Cathedral. Choristers sing the Eucharist on Sunday morning and Evensong on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday afternoons. The sung services include the Christmas and Easter festivals, but holidays and half-term breaks are generous. In addition to this routine, there are concert and recital engagements, regular recordings and broadcasts, both on radio and television, as well as various civic and ecclesiastical occasions in the Cathedral. The Choir has away trips most years and has visited Dublin, Paris, Rheims, Harrisburg, Washington DC and New York in recent years.

During term, the normal weekday pattern at Chetham's School is an 8.15am to 4.30pm day. This is a long day but it includes daily Chorister rehearsals at the Cathedral, instrumental lessons, practice times and some periods of prep. — yet Choristers still find time and energy for boisterous games on the playground! On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday the day extends to, approximately, 6.10pm to include sung Evensong at the Cathedral. All this, together with homework, for the older children, and instrumental practice makes for a busy week.

It would be wrong to suggest that the Choristers do not sometimes get tired — at Christmas time or late recording sessions for example — but my experience is that happy, healthy youngsters enjoy being busy and that parents wish to see their children making full and productive use of their time and talents. Both the school and the Cathedral are very aware of the pressures upon the Choristers and take every care to see that their life-style maintains a sensible balance.

After an initial assessment, new Choristers are selected by audition, or voice trial. These are held throughout the year for the four or five vacancies which normally occur. The audition is not a high-powered competition but merely a time when I, and others at the School and Cathedral, meet the boys and girls and their parents. There are opportunities for informal discussion and questioning, a tour of the school and Cathedral and singing sessions during the day.

We endeavour to make the voice trial as pleasant and relaxed an experience as we can, so that the children can give of their best. Of course, it is a help if a boy or girl has had some previous musical experience, instrumental or vocal, but this is by no means essential. The least of our priorities is musical accomplishment: we are looking for potential.

Perhaps it would be helpful to sum up the qualities that we look for in a young Chorister:

- a quick mind, able to respond to instructions
- an efficient reader of English
- a good musical ear (a sense of pitch and rhythm)
- a clear voice and an obvious enjoyment of singing
- if possible, previous musical experience
- above all, a bright-eyed enthusiasm!

Once in the choir, new recruits (called Probationers) will spend some time, whilst they find their feet and their voice, singing in all rehearsals but standing and listening to the performances in services. Thereafter the process of gaining experience and

confidence is such that by the final year in the choir all Choristers are quite familiar with singing solos in the Cathedral; all will have a vast working repertoire of music in a wide variety of styles and languages; all will be efficient readers of new music, and some will find themselves taking on day to day responsibilities within the choir.

Speaking to Manchester Cathedral Old Choristers, one quickly learns how much they valued their time spent in the choir stalls. The experience of achieving the highest standards of consistency and performance, and the dedication and responsibility that this demands of children in their formative years, must always be a source of great pleasure and satisfaction.

We place great value on fostering good working relationships with the parents of our Choristers and to this end a Parents' Association has been established as a forum for discussion, and the organisation of activities for the children.

Chetham's School of Music is a full member of the Choir Schools' Association.

What are the advantages of a choristership?

— none at all, of course, for those who cannot sing or are behind in their school work. The voice trial is a test of vocal potential and a general assessment of a child's educational abilities. If your son or daughter passes the initial entry requirement, the advantages are enormous.

He or she will enjoy working in a team of sixteen Choristers, who will make friends easily and be in a group which will encourage many qualities of personal commitment, team leadership and a great sense of common purpose and fulfilment.

A Chorister's singing and musical potential will be developed within a professional context working alongside adult musicians. All Choristers will be stretched as participators rather than, as is so often the case these days, spectators. You and they will be amazed at how much more can be taken on.

There is nothing like music to provide 'job satisfaction'. Not only through singing in the Cathedral, but also through instrumental tuition and music periods at school, the Chorister will develop a pride in achieving high standards that will spill over into other things your child will attempt.

If demands are high, so is excitement. Special services, concerts, broadcasts on both radio and television form a regular part of a Chorister's experience.

The link with Chetham's School of Music is, with the exception of one other English cathedral, unique and of immense value. The Choristers work alongside other boys and girls of quite outstanding musical abilities. We believe that this experience stretches our Choristers' capacities and raises their sights. Choristers have the best of both worlds: a happy team within which they work at the Cathedral and the benefit of a co-educational experience at school — with smaller than average classes!

Where possible, Choristers can be prepared for various entrance requirements at maintained or independent schools. Important links have been formed over the years with particular schools and Local Education Authorities, and the staff at Chetham's has acquired considerable expertise in advising parents about the various possibilities for their children.

The daily contact with great music and beautiful language is a joy for life. The gentle contact with religious truths through words and music is a wonderful step along on that pilgrimage of faith which many parents would desire for their children. There is no pressure on Choristers with regard to their religious

development, but opportunities exist for preparation towards Confirmation and for discussion of any religious issues.

The Cathedral and Chetham's School of Music are well aware that all work and no play makes Jack, (and Jill), dull! There are plenty of opportunities for games and fun but it has to be said that a potential Chorister will not be dull anyway!

The Organist & Master of the Choristers also teaches in the school and this ensures that the general arrangements for Choristers are well co-ordinated. The Dean of Manchester is a member of the Chetham's governing body.

Are there disadvantages?

— no, for neither the Cathedral nor Chetham's School of Music would wish to canvass an arrangement that was in any way disadvantageous. There are, however, extra responsibilities that need to be faced...

Having a Chorister in the family will add a new dimension to parental commitment and there will be times when your child must be in the Cathedral — weekends, for example, — which may disrupt your present family routine. Though the Organist & Master of the Choristers keeps closely in touch with parents over times and dates of events, you should be prepared for the nuisance-value of new routines at awkward times.

Choristers are required at the major Christian festivals, many of which inevitably coincide with holidays — Christmas and Easter in particular. This means that you may have to fit in holidays at different times than your neighbours and friends. These extra demands, after Chetham's School term has finished, relies heavily on parental goodwill and commitment.

Every effort is made to enable each Chorister to progress in all school subjects according to his/her potential. However, you will have to face the fact that the musical demands are considerable

and take up large amounts of time. Both the Cathedral and Chetham's are convinced that, for those boys and girls who have potential as Choristers, the musical and general aspects of education complement one another in stretching a child's capacities. Certainly there is no lack of old Manchester Choristers doing well in all walks of life.

It is most important to remember that entrance to a Choristership at Chetham's School of Music does not guarantee a place at the school beyond the age of thirteen. Competition for musical places at Chetham's is very fierce – but we are very pleased that, over the last many years, a large percentage of Choristers have gained entry into the school to complete their secondary education.

The cost of a Chorister's education

Fees are just short of £10,000pa. Manchester Cathedral commits to offering £5,000 for each chorister and then helps with bursaries from charitable trusts to help fill the existing gaps if needed. In short, this means that choristers get a world class musical education at one of the top music schools for a very small amount of money. The Cathedral is committed to ensuring that no child is denied the possibility to be a chorister because of a lack of money or financial worries.

Audition procedure for Cathedral Choristers

Potential Choristers for the Cathedral Choir are first given an assessment audition in the Cathedral with the Organist & Master of the Choristers and his assistant, the Sub-Organist of the Cathedral.

If the candidate is successful, parents/guardians will be invited to contact Chetham's School of Music, the Cathedral's Choir School, for a school prospectus and application form.

When the school has received the completed application forms, the Head's Secretary will co-ordinate a main audition date with the parents/guardians, the Head, the school's Director of Music, the Organist & Master of the Choristers, the Precentor (re interview about finances) and the Head of Victoria House, who is Housemaster to the junior and lower school.

As has been mentioned before, the voice trials are quite searching, they are deliberately quite informal so as place the child as much as possible at ease. Candidates for audition should prepare two vocal pieces and, if possible, an instrumental piece. Aural tests will also be given.

Following a successful main audition, prospective Choristers will attend a day in school prior to a firm offer of a place being made by the Head in writing. This offer is then subject to a discussion regarding parental finances with the Cathedral Administrator.

Normal entry is in September. If, however, entry is felt to be appropriate at another time during the academic year, then a joint decision between parents/guardians, the Cathedral and the school is made.

Christopher Stokes
Organist & Master of the Choristers

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christopher.stokes@manchestercathedral.org
+44(0)161 833 2220

Visit our website manchestercathedral.org for more information on our music programme and about the Cathedral in general.

