

The Durham Singers

Recruitment of a Music Director 2026

Introduction

As one of the North East's leading amateur classical music ensembles, The Durham Singers brings together about 45 singers from around the region for high-quality performances of music from the 16th to the 21st century. The choir was founded in 1972; our 'charitable object' is 'to promote, improve, develop and maintain public education in and appreciation of the Arts and Sciences of Choral Music in all their aspects, by the presentation of public choral and orchestral concerts, and by other such ways as the society, through its committee, shall from time to time decide'. In order to fulfil this charitable object, we typically perform about seven concerts and events each year in the Durham area: three concerts organised and financed by us, other events arranged by various partners and charitable organisations. The charitable object has also been fulfilled by helping to develop young musicians. We have provided transformational opportunities for young soloists and youth choirs from our region.

Our unaccompanied repertoire forms the core of our activity and requires a high standard of musicianship. We put on concerts in and around Durham City, with choral music that ranges from the great polyphonic works of the Renaissance through to exciting contemporary music, and we have built an enthusiastic audience through imaginative programming and top-quality singing.

The choir has had four music directors since its foundation: Richard Addison (1972 to 1984), Alan Oyston (1984 to 2006), Julian Wright (2007 to 2022) and Tom Edney (April 2022 to December 2026). The choir is seeking to appoint his successor by January 2027.

In recent years, we have achieved many exceptional performances under Tom's leadership but his career is now taking him to another part of the UK. We are therefore looking for a worthy successor.

The Criteria

We are seeking a choral music director who can demonstrate that they meet the following criteria:

- experience in successfully directing choirs of a high standard,
- ability to improve the choir's quality of performance,
- proven ability to plan and deliver programmes within an agreed budget that will enable the choir to develop its audience reach,
- ability to inspire the musical development of the choir and encourage the active listening and musicality of its members,

- experience as a teacher of vocal technique, with the ability to instil healthy singing, diagnose common issues, and keep singers safe and confident,
- experience of successfully engaging and directing professional singers and instrumentalists, and
- having an established network of contacts with professional musicians.

Choir Membership

Our members, many of whom are experienced and highly skilled singers, come from a wide variety of musical backgrounds: some are music teachers; some sing with other choirs in the region; others have a background in church, university and other amateur choirs; but we are united in our love of singing, and we greatly enjoy the rapid turnover of repertoire, the challenge of complex eight-part music (or more) and the breadth of musical styles. New members should have, or be able to develop a reasonably high level of sight reading, supported by home practice.

Concerts

Each year we perform a large-scale concert typically in one of the larger music venues in and around Durham with a professional orchestra. In the last four years, our current music director has led us in learning and performing music by a wide range of composers and in many styles. For example, in Durham Cathedral, in March 2024, ‘Šim 'Alenu Shalom | Dona Nobis Pacem’, a commentary on conflict and peace, comprised Leonard Bernstein’s *Chichester Psalms*, Oliver Tarney’s *Canticle of Elizabeth* (a world première), and Vaughan Williams’s little-known *Dona Nobis Pacem*, which was moving and dramatic.

At Easter 2025, a very special concert, ‘Komm süßer Tod’, with music by J S Bach, Ethel Smyth and others, and finishing with Tom Edney’s astounding piece *The Crucifixion*, took place in St Cuthbert’s Chapel, Ushaw, and was extremely well received. The Durham Singers’ performance of Brahms’ *Requiem* with four-hands piano accompaniment at St Oswald’s Church, Durham, in autumn 2025, was another musical and box office success. And our *St Mark Passion* event, Easter 2026, composer Oliver Tarney with librettist Lucia Quinault, at Ushaw, sought to challenge us as singers and performers and to offer our audience an immersive experience.

Equally engaging yet smaller concerts performed recently have included ‘Fauré and his Pupils’, with songs by Camille Saint-Saëns, Nadia Boulanger and Maurice Ravel at St Brandon’s Church, Brancepeth, in summer 2024; ‘A European Christmas’ at Elvet Methodist Church, Durham, in December 2024, which included music representing thirteen countries and in seven languages; ‘Only in Sleep’, presented a contemporary setting of the compline service by Lucy Walker along with *Songs of Farewell* by Hubert Parry, in summer 2025. We are currently preparing another concert at St Oswald’s, in November 2026, titled ‘Sea Pictures’, showcasing *Ave Maris Stella* by Cecilia McDowall,

Sea Pictures by Edward Elgar, arranged for SATB chorus by Donald Fraser, and *Meg Blane* by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor.

Management of the Choir

The choir is a registered charity and is managed by a committee which includes a chair, vice-chair, hon. secretary, hon. treasurer, the music director and others with specific roles. Seven members of the choir are the trustees of the charity. The committee has considerable experience of managing both large-scale concerts with orchestral accompaniment and a wide range of smaller concerts and events. Some two committee meetings per term take place on Monday evenings before a rehearsal at our regular venue. We hold an AGM in November each year at which the committee members stand for re-election.

We are financed by choir subscriptions of £175 pa and ticket sales, patron donations and grant aid from trusts for major concerts. The choir's smaller concerts are funded entirely by ticket sales. Large-scale concerts are funded partly by ticket sales and partly by grants. The choir holds financial reserves which are not restricted and enable us to finance the costs incurred in advance of our concerts and occasionally to cover deficits in more expensive concerts.

We have a sizeable library of music, held at Ushaw House, Chapels and Gardens.

Rehearsals

The Durham Singers usually rehearse on Monday evenings from 7.45 p.m. to 9.45 p.m. in Durham, from the start of September to early July, following the pattern of school terms, with breaks at Christmas and Easter. Additional rehearsals may be scheduled immediately before a concert. When we perform with an orchestra, a full afternoon rehearsal before the concert is required, but we generally have one extra rehearsal in the venue the evening before a concert. Attendance at rehearsals is a high priority for all. The choir has an assistant music director, who is the choir's rehearsal accompanist, and will occasionally deputise for the music director and contribute to conducting the choir for concerts and events.

The Role of Music Director

The choir wishes to continue to develop both its own performance standards and its audience reach, and to continue to discover and learn new and unfamiliar repertoire.

The music director is therefore responsible for leading the choir in this endeavour by:

- proposing annual concert programmes to the committee,
- planning and directing rehearsals and performances,
- proposing to the committee the engagement of any solo vocal and/or instrumental performers, and in collaboration with the hon. treasurer, contracting them to perform, conducting the choir and any guest soloists and/or instrumentalists in rehearsal and performance,

- working with committee members to manage concert projects within budget,
- communicating regularly with the choir about rehearsal and concert expectations,
- contributing to applications for funding and promotional material,
- assessing and selecting potential members, given the needs of each voice part,
- coaching choir members in voice parts to improve their musical skills,
- attending committee meetings.

The successful applicant will contract with The Durham Singers on a self-employed basis and not as an employee. They will initially be engaged on a 6-month probationary period. After this time, with the agreement of both parties, the contract will become a rolling contract subject to notice provisions from either party.

The music director is paid a termly fee, on receipt of an invoice. The level of the fee will be informed by national guidelines and determined on the basis of the appointee's experience and qualifications.

Applications

If you are interested in applying for this post, please send your application to the Durham Singers' committee, email: chair@durham-singers.org by 14 September 2026. Applications should include:

- an up-to-date CV,
- a covering letter giving your reasons for wishing to become music director of The Durham Singers and demonstrating how you would meet the criteria,
- an outline of your vision for the choir,
- the names and contact details of two referees, one of whom must be a professional musician able to comment on your work as a choral conductor.

Selection Procedure

A short-list of applicants will be invited to attend an online interview with the committee's selection panel. Following the interview, the short-listed applicants will be offered an audition in the form of a trial rehearsal with the choir. The audition will provide each candidate with the opportunity to introduce themselves to the choir and demonstrate their skills as a music director. An accompanist will be provided. Following the auditions, the choir will choose its preferred candidate and notify the successful candidate as soon after as possible.

Key dates are:

- Applications close 14 September 2026

- Interviews notified by 23 September 2026
- Interviews 9/10/12 October 2026
- Rehearsal auditions confirmed by 14 October 2026
- Rehearsal auditions 2 November 2026

For further information on the choir, please visit our website: www.durham-singers.org