

The Durham Singers Recruitment of a Music Director

Introduction

As one of the North East's leading amateur classical music ensembles, the Durham Singers brings together about 40 singers from around the region for high-quality performances of music from the 16th to the 21st century. 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 7 concerts and events each year in the Durham area: 3 concerts organised and financed by us, other events arranged by other 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 a repertoire 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 three music directors since its foundation: Richard Addison [1972 to 1984], Alan Oyston [1984 to 2006] and Julian Wright [2007 to 2022]. The Choir is seeking to appoint a successor from April 2022.

Next spring, it will therefore be more than fifteen years since our current music director took up his appointment. In recent years, we have achieved some exceptional performances under Julian's directorship, and he will leave us with an extraordinary legacy. Having achieved so much with the choir, Julian feels that it is time to relinquish his leadership and pass the baton to a successor. We are very proud of what we have achieved under Julian and 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 standard like that of the Durham Singers,
- Ability to re-establish the choir's high standards of performance, post pandemic,
- Ability to plan 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 development of its individual members,
- Experience as a teacher of vocal technique,
- Experience of successfully engaging and directing professional singers and instrumentalists and having an established network of contacts with professional musicians.

Choir Membership

Our members 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 and the breadth of musical styles. Potential members are required to pass an entry audition with the Music Director. A reasonably high level of sight reading is expected, supported by home practice.

Concerts

Each year we perform a large-scale concert typically in Durham Cathedral with a professional period instrument orchestra, normally comprising a major work from the Baroque or Classical period. In January 2019, for example, we performed Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*. Our 2019 *a capella* concerts included a performance of Tallis's *Spem in Alium* in Durham Cathedral and a summer programme inspired by the collection of art at the Bowes Museum, performed both in the Bowes Museum and in the more intimate setting of St Brandon's Church at Brancepeth. In November 2019, we performed a concert of baroque and contemporary music accompanied by the English Cornett and Sackbut Ensemble, in the stunning setting of the Augustus Pugin designed St Cuthbert's Chapel at Ushaw College, the programme including challenging music by Purcell, Howells, Schütz, Bach and Francis Pott. It was an exceptional performance experience for the choir, who rose to the challenge with great success. Our events receive good reviews in the regional press, and we were pleased in March 2019 to be invited to perform live on BBC Radio 3 from the Sage Gateshead

Having hosted a choir from Tübingen in Germany, who visited Durham and gave a performance of Mozart's *Requiem* in Durham Cathedral, the Durham Singers made a return visit to Tübingen to open the 2018/19 season of Motette concerts at the Stiftskirche, with a programme that was also performed at the beautiful Schloss Solitude near Stuttgart.

The choir has not been able to perform live during the pandemic, until recently. In October 2021, emerging from the tighter restrictions, we performed a smaller scale concert of four-part music at Ushaw College, and events and concerts are planned through to Easter 2022.

Management of the Choir

The Choir is a registered charity and is managed by a committee which includes a chair, secretary, treasurer, music director and others with specific roles. Four members of the

choir are the trustees of the charity. The committee has considerable experience of supporting both large-scale concerts with orchestral accompaniment and *a capella* concerts. We hold an AGM in November each year at which the committee members stand for re-election.

We are financed by choir subscriptions of £100 pa and ticket sales, as well as sponsorships, patron donations and grant aid from trusts for major concerts. The choir's *a capella* concerts are funded entirely by ticket sales. Large-scale concerts are funded partly by ticket sales and partly by grants and sponsorships. The choir holds financial reserves which are not restricted and enable us to finance the costs occurred in advance of our concerts and occasionally to cover deficits in more expensive concerts.

We hold a sizeable library of music, held at Ushaw College.

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. (Under pandemic restrictions we have varied the location and the length of rehearsals.) 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. The choir engages an accompanist, who may also deputise on occasion for the music director.

The Role of Music Director

After a hiatus during the coronavirus pandemic, the choir is re-establishing its high standards of performance and wishes to continue to develop both its own performance standards and its audience reach, and to discover new and unfamiliar repertoire.

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

- Proposing concert programmes to the committee,
- Planning and directing rehearsals and performances,
- Engaging solo vocal and instrumental performers, as needed,
- Conducting the choir and any guest soloists and/or instrumentalists in rehearsal and performance,
- Working with the committee to manage concert projects within budget,
- Contributing to fund-raising requests and promotional material,
- Auditioning and selecting potential members,
- Coaching choir members to improve their musical skills,

- Attending committee meetings as needed.

The successful applicant will contract with the Durham Singers on a self-employed basis and not as an employee. He/she will initially be engaged for 2 to 3 years, with a 6-month probationary period. After this time, with the agreement of both parties, the contract will become a rolling annual contract subject to notice provisions from either party.

The post is supported by an honorarium, dependent on experience and qualifications.

Applications

If you are interested in applying for this post, please send your application to the Durham Singers' committee, email: committee@durham-singers.org by 17 December 2021.

Applications should include:

- A 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 interview with the choir committee in Durham. 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 17 December 2021
- Interviews notified by 7 January 2022
- Interviews 20 January 2022
- Rehearsal auditions confirmed by 27 January 2022
- Rehearsal auditions 12 February 2022

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