

The Choir of Royal Holloway Biography (revised 2020)



Long version

The Choir of Royal Holloway is considered to be one of the finest university choirs in Britain. The choir was created at the time of the foundation of Royal Holloway College in 1886, and was originally only for women's voices. The group, comprised of 24 choral scholars and 2 organ scholars, is directed by Rupert Gough and undertakes a busy schedule of weekly services and concerts, international tours, recordings and live broadcasts. Royal Holloway is the only university that maintains a tradition of singing daily morning services, and is home to the only choir in the country performing weekly live streamed concerts.

As part of the choir's 50+ concerts a year, they regularly collaborate with and perform alongside many famous ensembles. These have included the King's Singers, the BBC Singers, Britten Sinfonia, London Mozart Players, Onyx Brass, Fretwork and the jazz-trio Acoustic Triangle, with whom they broadcast live on BBC radio. The group also celebrates the work of living composers, and have commissioned works from Sir James MacMillan, Gabriel Jackson, Richard Rodney Bennett, Cecilia McDowall and Paul Mealar. The choir's diverse repertoire also includes larger-scale works including Vespers by Monteverdi, Rachmaninov and Rautavaara, Requiems by Mozart and Howells, and Gabriel Jackson's Ave regina coelorum for choir and electric guitar which they also broadcast live on BBC Radio 3. Festival engagements have included the Spitalfields Festival, the Three Choirs Festival, the Windsor and Swaledale festivals, the Cheltenham Festival (with alumna Dame Felicity Lott and the City of London Sinfonia), and numerous residencies at the Presteigne Festival.

International performances are also an integral part of the choir's work. They have toured most European countries, and have been broadcast on national television and radio all over the world. A tour of all three Baltic states saw the choir performing in the Latvian Song Festival with the Tallinn Chamber Orchestra, in a concert (sung in Estonian) broadcast nationally on the Estonian Day of Independence. Further afield, the group has visited Beijing and had a number of successful tours to the US and Canada. The choir regularly sing at high-profile events which have included the Annual Festival of Remembrance at the Albert Hall (live on BBC television), an awards ceremony at Buckingham Palace, and for the Magna Carta 800 celebrations, in which they performed a new work by John Rutter in the presence of HM the Queen and the Archbishop of Canterbury. More recently they sang at the wedding of Ellie Goulding and Caspar Jopling at York Minster.

The choir has an extensive and highly acclaimed discography with Hyperion, Decca, Signum and Naxos amongst others. Recordings include music by 16th-century composer Peter Philips with the English Cornett & Sackbut ensemble, contemporary American choral music by René Clausen and Stephen Paulus and madrigals from Victorian England. The choir is renowned for their performances of Nordic and Baltic music, and has recorded works by Vytautas Miškinis, Rihards Dubra, Bo Hansson, Tõnu Kõrvits (with the Britten Sinfonia) and Ola Gjeilo to great acclaim. The 2018 release Winter Songs with Gjeilo was No. 1 in the UK and US classical charts. Upcoming releases feature the music of Ben Parry and Joanna Marsh, a live-concert recording of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with Thomas Adès and the Britten Sinfonia, and a recently rediscovered work by Pierre Villette with alumna Sarah Fox. Future projects include works by George Arthur, Dan Locklair and Malcolm Archer, as well as a second cantata by Carson Cooman, following on from the success of Revelations of Divine Love, commissioned and recorded by the choir in 2009 and premiered in Cadogan Hall.

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International performances are also an integral part of the choir's work. They have toured most European countries, visited Beijing, and have had a number of successful tours to North America, as well as having been broadcast on national television and radio all over the world. The choir regularly sing at high-profile events which have included the Annual Festival of Remembrance at the Albert Hall (live on BBC television), and for an awards ceremony at Buckingham Palace.

The choir has an extensive and highly acclaimed discography with Hyperion, Decca, Signum and Naxos amongst others. Many of these feature works by northern European composers, Vytautas Miškinis, Rihards Dubra, Bo Hansson, Tõnu Kõrvits (with the Britten Sinfonia) and Ola Gjeilo (which was No. 1 in the UK and US classical charts). Upcoming releases feature the music of Ben Parry and Joanna Marsh, a live-concert recording of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with Thomas Adès and the Britten Sinfonia, and a recently rediscovered work by Pierre Villette with alumna Sarah Fox. Future projects include works by George Arthur, Dan Locklair and Malcolm Archer.