

THE CHOIR OF ST GEORGE'S CHAPEL, WINDSOR CASTLE



BEING A CHORISTER  
AT ST GEORGE'S CHAPEL

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**The choristers of St George's Chapel choir all attend St George's School. There is provision for 23 choristers who are each awarded a generous scholarship by the Dean and Canons of Windsor towards their education at the school.**

### **What kind of music does a chorister sing?**

During his time as a chorister, a boy will sing a whole range of music from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries and will develop an increasing sense of style as he gets older – it is amazing to see the different styles of music that each boy enjoys: it is not always what one might expect! This country's choral tradition has the highest respect amongst musicians from other countries, for the range and standard of choral singing achieved; there have been boy choristers singing in the chapel since 1348.

### **When does a chorister usually join the choir?**

The majority of boys will usually join the choir at age 8-9, when they begin Year 4. Depending on vacancies, we have sometimes taken boys in Year 5 or 6. Boys then remain in the choir until they leave St George's School for senior school in Year 8.

### **What is the difference between a probationer and a chorister?**

A probationer is a training chorister, and in choir they wear a red cassock. When a boy first joins the choir, he observes a couple of services a week and attends the weekday morning rehearsals when, for a period, the probationers will usually work separately from the choristers, building up their musical and vocal skills. As their skills and confidence develop, they will start joining the choristers in singing parts of a service per week and will gradually add in more services during the week, before finally adding in some Sundays, usually towards the end of Year 4. By the beginning of Year 5, they will be singing all weekday services and most, if not all, Sundays, adopting the full chorister schedule in advance of becoming full choristers and being presented with his white surplice which he wears over the red cassock (usually in the spring/early summer of Year 5).

### **How many places are there?**

We have provision for 23 choristers, who are all on a generous scholarship which is paid for by the Dean and Canons of Windsor (for more information please visit <http://www.stgwindsor.org/Fees> - additional limited means-tested bursaries may also be available). There are usually 4 or 5 choristers in each year group.

### **How is the Choir made up?**

The choristers form the top or treble line of the Choir. The altos, tenors and basses, called 'Lay Clerks', are professional auditioned singers. The Choir is conducted by the Director of Music and accompanied by the Assistant Director of Music, and the Organ Scholar (a student).

### **Does a chorister have to board?**

Yes, our choir does board and the reason for this is that the choristers' duties often require them to be in Chapel early (e.g. midweek morning rehearsals). However, unlike most other cathedral choristers, our boys do go home on Friday nights (and sometimes on Wednesday nights too) and are back in School on Sunday mornings ready to enjoy breakfast at 0830. Boarding does actually make life easier for chorister parents, rather than more difficult, and a happy and healthy chorister enjoys the family atmosphere of the boarding house. As a probationer, they will begin boarding on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays initially, though some probationers do board fully during the week from the start.

### **Who looks after the choristers?**

There is a full team around each child, which involves our Houseparents, Ally and Jonny Onions, the Chorister Chaperone, who accompanies the choristers in all their choir duties, our boarding team, the Head Master and his wife who live on site, the Director of Chapel Music, Director of School Music, the form tutors and our Assistant Head (Pastoral). Creating a family atmosphere is central to our commitment to every child's happiness and wellbeing, and the wider team involved in the choristers work very closely together to monitor the child's development and pastoral needs. Communication and our partnership with parents is also essential to this.

### **Don't they have to sing rather a lot of services?**

One of the reasons a chorister's training is so valuable is that he learns, essentially, to be a professional musician; and it is the act of performing so regularly which provides this. Apart from a few occasions in the year, the choristers do not sing on a Saturday or on a Wednesday evening.

### **What happens at Christmas and Easter?**

Although school will have broken up for the holidays, the liturgical calendar means that there is still a call on the choir to provide sung services during for Christmas and Easter. For both times, we have what is called a 'stay-on' when the boys return to school to board, rehearse, sing services and also have fun at various parties and other social activities. The Year 4 probationers do not usually take part in the stay-on, but by Year 5 it is likely that they would participate, in preparation for becoming full choristers later that year.

At Christmas the boys usually go home after the end of School term, returning to School a few days before Christmas to prepare for and sing at the popular Nine Lessons and Carols services, Midnight Mass, and Mattins and Evensong on Christmas Day. The chorister families join the boys for lunch in school, and following Evensong the choristers resume their holiday until school term begins again. A similar schedule takes place at Easter, though the exact timings in relation to the school holidays depend on when Easter falls in the calendar. Once again, a family lunch is hosted at School, and the boys are then free to go home following Evensong.

### **What is 'Garter Day'?**

St George's Chapel is the spiritual home of the Order of the Garter, an ancient order of chivalry which dates back to 1348. Once a year, the Knights of the Garter meet in Windsor Castle and process down to the Chapel. The ceremony has much pageantry and pomp and is attended by Her Majesty The Queen and other members of the Royal Family. The Choir has a central role in the service, singing a *Te Deum* and an anthem. You can find out more about the Knights of the Garter, on the Chapel website. Today's Knights are appointed to reflect their significant contribution to public life.

### **Apart from services, what else does the Choir do?**

There are a number of Royal and other important occasions in the Chapel for which the Choir sings. It also undertakes a number of concerts or events (in Windsor and beyond), broadcasts on radio, records CDs and travels abroad from time to time.

### **Do choristers have to play an instrument?**

Yes – maybe two! A chorister will usually learn two musical instruments at St George's School. Often this will include the piano and an orchestral instrument. The piano provides an excellent foundation for senior school GCSE music courses, and an orchestral instrument allows choristers to play in a

range of musical ensembles whilst at school. Each morning, choristers have 30-minutes of supervised practice time on their musical instruments, and some go on to accomplish great things at their senior schools. Choristers also receive music theory and singing lessons at school to help their development as all round musicians.

### **How do we apply for a choristership?**

Auditions are usually held annually in the spring. However, Mr Vivian is happy to meet any interested parents and their sons at any time for an informal audition. If you would like your son to be considered for a choristership, please be in touch with Chessy Alden (contact details below).

### **What happens at the audition?**

The audition process is informal. Generally, there is a preliminary audition and then shortlisted candidates are invited back on a different day for a second audition. At these auditions, candidates will be asked to sing a simple song (which needn't be of a sacred nature) or a hymn. We sometimes hear *Twinkle, twinkle, little star!* You will then be given some ear tests (singing back single pitches from the piano as well as notes from two- or three-note chords; clapping a rhythm that is played twice; and singing back a melody that is also played twice). We may also ask a boy to read aloud a passage from a book just as they might at an assembly or in class. The whole process is painless and usually lasts around ten minutes. Listening in the room will be Mr Vivian (Director of Music (Chapel)), Mr Bond (Assistant Director of Music (Chapel)), Mr Wilkinson (the School's Director of Music) and perhaps one of the choir's singing teachers.

In addition, external candidates who are shortlisted for the second round will be assessed by the school on non-musical subjects. This is obviously important to ensure that choristers are able to cope with the chorister commitments on top of their academic studies. For these assessments, the boys will take some tests in literacy and numeracy which are in line with the work that they will currently be doing in their respective schools. Mr Wilkinson may also ask for a candidate to play an instrumental piece that they have been learning (although we appreciate that some candidates may not yet be learning an instrument and this will not count against them).

If you have any questions, please be in touch with Chessy Alden (The Chapel Music Administrator) who will be happy to direct them to the appropriate person. Her contact details are:

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[music@stgeorges-windsor.org](mailto:music@stgeorges-windsor.org)

#### **Useful websites:**

St George's Chapel: [www.stgeorges-windsor.org](http://www.stgeorges-windsor.org)

St George's School: [www.stgwindsor.org](http://www.stgwindsor.org)

#### **Social Media:**

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