



Advent Choral Day

Three leading choirs in the City's finest churches

Monday 25th November 2024

(LK 580)

Price: £260 per person

A day-long sequence of performances, talks and refreshments, our London Choral Days showcase top-flight professional choirs in appropriate, attractive and often little-known buildings. For this iteration, the audience moves between the venues by Underground.

The three churches selected are among the most significant in London owing both to their histories and their music. Good buildings architecturally by any standard, they differ from each other markedly, their start dates spread across four centuries. Romanesque, Early Gothic and Late Gothic styles are thus on display in fine form.

An extraordinary and little-trumpeted feature of London is the presence of a remarkable collection of church, chapel and cathedral choirs. No other city on Earth can boast a couple of dozen first-rate ensembles consisting of professional singers and conducted by accomplished music directors who all enjoy a prestigious portfolio of musical employment. The three choirs attached to these churches are among the finest in the capital.

The day is conceived not as three discrete concerts but as an integrated, over-arching musical experience in which the individual parts illuminate and enlarge upon what has gone before. The musical theme of the day is Advent, which is well provided for with choral compositions from throughout the ages, and Christmas is only a month away.

The programme

St Bartholomew the Great

Begin at 11.30am at St Bartholomew the Great in Smithfield. The church is magnificent, a noble example of Romanesque, a style of building which has all but vanished elsewhere in London. The massive piers, round arches, broad side aisles, cavernous galleries and stone vaults create one of the most spiritually compelling spaces in the city.

Built for an Augustinian priory founded in 1123, the church celebrated its 900th anniversary last year. Though capacious, the surviving building comprises only the eastern parts of a once much larger structure, the nave having been demolished after dissolution in 1539.



Illustration: St Bartholomew the Great, engraving from 'Some London Churches', publ. 1911.

The Director of Music, Rupert Gough, has devised a programme around the Great 'O' Antiphons: Joanna Forbes L'Estrange *Advent 'O' Carol* – Margaret Rizza *O Sapientia* – Orlando Gibbons *Great Lord of Lords* – Herbert Howells *A spotless Rose* – Arthur Oldham *Remember, O thou man* – Thomas Tallis *O natalux* – G.F. Handel *Lift up your heads* – Érics Ešenvalds *O Emmanuel* – Franz Biebl *Ave Maria* – James Burton *Tomorrow shall be my dancing day*.

For lunch, the audience is split between several restaurants near this venue in Smithfield and the next one on Tower Hill. Travel between the two locations is by Circle Line – four stops, no changes.

St Peter ad Vincula

The 1900 edition of Baedeker's London baldly states that, historically, the Tower of London is the most interesting spot in England. Nikolaus Pevsner claimed that it remains the most important work of military architecture in the country. To attend a concert in the precincts is a rare privilege.

The current iteration of the Chapel of St Peter ad Vincula dates to 1520 and is like many another parish church of that period such as can be seen throughout England. There is a feature that is far from standard, however, which is that beneath the paving are the earthly remains of many who were beheaded nearby, including two Thomasses (More and Cromwell) and three queens – Anne Boleyn, Catherine Howard and Lady Jane Grey.

Advent Choral Day
continued

Members of the Choir of the Chapels Royal, HM Tower of London, directed by Master of Music Colm Carey, perform: Sebastián de Vivanco *Magnificat octavi toni; Surge propera* – Hildegard von Bingen *Ave Maria, O auctrix vite* – Henryk Górecki *Totus Tuus* – Hildegard von Bingen *O clarissima mater* – Fernando de las Infantas *Dignare me laudare te* – Heinrich Schütz *Deutsches Magnificat*.

Another five stops on the Underground, Tower Hill to Temple – any train, no changes. Tea is served in Temple Church.

Temple Church

The London base of the Knights Templar was established on this site around 1160; their circular chapel was consecrated in 1185 and survives as the nave. A replacement chancel, now much the larger part, was built under the patronage of Henry III and consecrated in 1240 – the king had intended it as his place of burial. This splendid space, a hall church with alarmingly slender columns of Purbeck marble, is a spectacular example of the Early English phase of Gothic architecture.

The choir here operates under two names, The Temple Church Choir, which includes child choristers, and the Temple Singers which is adults only, the line-up for today. The conductor is Thomas Allery, and the programme is interspersed with organ improvisations by Charles Edwards.

The choir performs: Michael Praetorius *Es ist ein Ros entsprungen* – Bob Chilcott *Advent Antiphons* – Herbert Howells *Magnificat* – William Byrd *Laetentur coeli* – Rachmaninoff *Bogoroditse devo* – Adrian Peacock *Veni veni Emmanuel* – Edward Naylor *Vox dicentis*.

Practicalities

Start: 11.30am at St Bartholomew-the-Great in Smithfield, EC1. Nearest stations: Barbican, Farringdon, St Paul's. Doors open at 11.00am.

Finish: by 6.10pm at Temple. Nearest stations: Temple, Blackfriars.

Getting around. The churches are situated on the periphery of the Square Mile. Travel between them is by Underground Railway (two journeys, each of four or five stops, no changes). There are nevertheless walks of about 15 minutes at most (waiting at pedestrian crossings included) between churches, restaurant and stations. You are of course welcome to arrange taxis if you wish.

Price: £260 per person. This includes admission to the three concerts and the precincts of the Tower, lunch and afternoon refreshments, programme booklet, the services of a number of staff. Underground fares are not included because many of you are entitled to free transport. Each of the two journeys costs £2.80, and fares for a day are capped at £8.50.

Lunch and refreshments. Lunch is in a selection of good restaurants near two of the concert venues. Audience members are arbitrarily pre-assigned to a particular one. Tea and biscuits are served in the afternoon before the final concert.

Audience size: between 100 and 150.