



Press release: Bath Abbey celebrates 20 years of Girls Choir

Bath Abbey Girls' Choir is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. This milestone is being marked with a celebratory concert on 23 September at Bath Abbey in recognition of all that the choir has achieved since its inception.

The Abbey Girls' Choir was founded in 1997 by Dr Peter King, Bath Abbey's Director of Music from 1986-2016 and was one of the first girl choirs in the country at the time with Salisbury Cathedral having paved the way only six years earlier.

While remarkable in itself, there would have been the sound of female voices on the Abbey site long before 1997, and it could be said that the girl choristers are simply continuing a centuries-old choral tradition, which plays a vital part in the musical life of the Abbey and the city of Bath. In AD 676 there was a community of women worshipping in Bath in a convent run by Abbess Bertana and the site would have been filled with the sound of female voices as the girls and women sang their services.

Therefore, it is only fitting that as well as celebrating 20 years of the Abbey Girls' Choir, the concert will be drawing inspiration from the generations of women in the Christian faith. The Abbey Girls' Choir will sing the hauntingly beautiful music of Hildegard of Bingen from the 11th Century and a special commission by well-known composer Judith Bingham 'The Sleeping Soul' with words by the 13th century female mystic St Mechthild of Magdeburg. There will be texts by women – notably from Mother Julian of Norwich and the Magnificat (the song of Mary). Other music includes Schubert Psalm 23, Brahms' *Ihr habt nun traurigkeit* (written in memory of his mother), Grieg's *Ave Maris Stella*, Bruckner's *Ave Maria* and music by Mathias, Stanford, Britten and Mendelssohn.

Huw Williams, Bath Abbey's Director of Music, said: "Since joining the Abbey earlier this year I have been impressed with the quality of the Abbey Girls Choir and am delighted to be part of the 25th anniversary celebrations. We are immensely proud to have been one of the first churches in the country to introduce a girls' choir. While almost every English Cathedral now has a girls' choir, at the time it was a real innovation and to this day remains a remarkable achievement by my predecessor, Dr Peter King. whose original vision of a girls' choir at Bath Abbey crowned his distinguished career here

"Occasions like this also allow us to celebrate our choristers as well as to thank all those who have helped champion and supported our Girls Choir over the years, benefactors, friends and family all included. As a former choir parent myself, I recognise that there's a lot required of parents and guardians, and that it's greatly appreciated. It will also be an opportunity for a wonderful reunion as we are hoping many of our former girl choristers, family and friends will be joining us for this very special event. We also plan to honour Dr Peter King's contribution in some way."

Since the girls first sang in the Abbey in the autumn of 1997, the Bath Abbey Girls' Choir has flourished year on year, delighting congregations and audiences at services, concerts and through television and radio broadcasts and recordings. They have toured extensively, sung for the Archbishop of Canterbury and members of the Royal Family, and earlier this year performed Handel's *Messiah* to great acclaim with soprano solos performed by members of the choir. One of

the most anticipated events in the city's calendar is the Advent service at the Abbey. The girls also sing an evocative performance in candlelight and accompanied by harp of Benjamin Britten's A Ceremony of Carols annually.

The Abbey has no Choir school, they are from a variety of local schools, both primary and secondary. The Girls' Choir alternates with the Boys' Choir to join the Men singing services on Sundays and important days in the church calendar. Since 1997, over 150 have graduated through the ranks. A significant number have subsequently become choral scholars in the Oxbridge Chapel Choirs, some have sung with the country's top choral groups including the Monteverdi Choir and several are professional musicians.

Tickets for the concert celebrating the Bath Abbey Girls' Choir's 25th anniversary on Saturday 23 September at 7.00pm in the Abbey are available from the Bath Box Office. Tickets are priced at £10, £12 and £15.

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Notes to editors:

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About Bath Abbey

Bath Abbey is a flourishing Church of England parish church which technically serves a small city centre parish (Bath Abbey with St James). This parish has a small residential population and primarily consists of commercial properties; and most of the regular congregation and the 692 people on the electoral roll live in other parishes or come from outside the city of Bath. The Abbey holds daily services of morning or evening prayer or Holy Communion; and the standard pattern of Sunday worship is for five daily services attended on average by 630 people. Special services at Advent, Christmas and Easter are well attended; and many local organisations hold annual services in the Abbey. The Abbey has four choirs: Men's, Boys' and Girls' choirs support worship in services; whilst Melody Makers is a choir for younger children which performs in concerts in the Abbey once a term and at other events in and around Bath. The Abbey runs a successful Schools Singing Programme, an outreach activity which supports singing within local schools and holds regular workshops and concerts in the Abbey. The Abbey welcomes approximately 400,000 visitors annually and is open daily all year round; many of these visitors being families and school parties. Apart from being a place of prayer, worship, weddings and funerals, the Abbey has an important role as a visitor destination, a performance space (for audiences anywhere between 10 and 1,000), a general civic space and an exhibition space. www.bathabbey.org

About Bath Abbey's Footprint

The £19.3 million Footprint project aims to carry out essential repairs to the Abbey's collapsing floor, install a new eco-friendly heating system using Bath's unique hot springs as a source of energy and enlarge capacity by creating 200 sq metres of new facilities to fulfil the Abbey as a place of congregation, equal access and hospitality. A programme is also planned to record and interpret the Abbey's 1,200 years of history and this iconic church for millions of visitors including educational visits. www.bathabbey.org/footprint