

READING BACH CHOIR

Prospectus

for the position of

Music Director

Vacancy

Reading Bach Choir (“RBC” or “The Choir”) is recruiting a new Music Director to start in September 2017. After seven years with RBC, the current Director, Matthew Hamilton, is leaving the Choir at the end of the current season. His time is increasingly taken up with his new role as Choral Director of the Hallé Choir in Manchester, and with guest conducting work in the UK and abroad. The Choir is naturally disappointed to lose such a talented musician. However, when he was appointed, it was recognised he was at the start of what many anticipated would be an exciting career as a choral director. RBC is proud to have had Matthew’s fantastic musical leadership and direction over the last seven years and to have been able to give him this opportunity in the early part of his career.

Personal Specification

We are seeking someone who:

- Is an accomplished choral conductor - effective through both personality and technique - with proven success in directing other choirs of a similar standard.
- Is a singer and vocal coach and can demonstrate vocal technique across the voice range in an accessible and approachable way.
- Has the ability to plan challenging, varied and stimulating programmes beyond the English choral tradition and standard repertoire.
- Uses their high expectations of members to inspire continuous improvement.
- Has contacts with other professional singers and instrumentalists and is confident in orchestral conducting and able to work effectively with orchestral players and soloists.
- Is able to work creatively within financial constraints.

Reading Bach Choir

The Choir was formed in 1966 to perform a wide repertoire of choral music from early music to contemporary compositions to the highest standard.

For many years, RBC has had the reputation for being one of the leading chamber choirs in the Thames Valley. In the last seven years Matthew has chosen varied, challenging and musically demanding programmes that are also attractive and accessible to both choir and audience. He has directed outstanding concerts for enthusiastic audiences who have welcomed the sometimes unfamiliar and new repertoire. His attention to the vocal blend within and between sections and an insistence on accurate tuning which, combined with the challenging programmes, has improved the overall musicality of the choir. It is a key requirement that candidates are able to continue this development.

RBC is a mixed choir of around 60 singers. Current part representation is: 20 Sopranos, 18 Altos, 9 Tenors and 13 Basses. It is not anticipated that the choir will grow beyond the current membership. Potential members are required to pass an entry audition with the Music Director, and existing members are re-auditioned periodically. They are expected to be competent sight-readers, to learn the music individually, and to take steps to maintain and develop their own vocal competence, including through lessons with professional vocal coaches.

The Choir is a registered charity and is managed by a strong and dedicated committee. A significant number of members take active roles that help to ensure its smooth running. Finances have been carefully controlled over many years such that there is now a very solid base of reserves to underwrite each season's activities. Members demonstrate a high level of dedication and commitment by raising significant sums of additional funding each year. This allows performances of larger scale works with professional soloists and instrumentalists periodically. Copies of the Annual Report and Accounts, Constitution and Rules are available on the web site.

The Choir is celebrating its 50th Anniversary season, the centrepiece of which is a repeat of the Choir's first concert: JS Bach's Mass in B Minor. This will be performed in early February both at the same venue and within a few days of the actual anniversary of the first performance.

Concerts & Repertoire

The Choir currently performs four main concerts a season, spaced so that there are approximately ten rehearsals for each project. These are typically performed a cappella or accompanied by a single instrument or chamber ensemble. Concerts with larger forces are undertaken every two to three years.

Performances take place in venues principally in and around Reading, in appropriately sized churches. The Choir has a long-standing tradition of performing one concert a year in the sumptuous acoustic of Douai Abbey (between Reading and Newbury) and in more recent years has taken concerts to a small and intimate church in Goring-on-Thames. It has also performed

occasionally in the refurbished Reading Concert Hall, which has an excellent acoustic, and the Great Hall at the University of Reading, although financial constraints limit the frequency of using these venues.

The choir performs an eclectic and adventurous repertoire of sacred and secular music covering more than 500 years of composition. Among contemporary composers featured in recent concerts are Sven-David Sandström, Arvo Pärt, Einojuhani Rautavaara, Per Nørgård, Tarik O'Regan and Elliott Carter. This is considered a unique feature of the choir compared to others in the Thames Valley and it is required that the exploration of unfamiliar repertoire continues alongside the better-known choral masterpieces including those by JS Bach. The Choir's repertoire over the last 50 years is available for download from the web site (www.readingbachchoir.org.uk).

RBC commissioned a new work in 2014 from Gabriel Jackson. This was a new venture for the choir and working directly with the composer was a special experience. It is hoped that further commissions will be possible in future, subject to funding. Earlier this year the Choir performed a motet by Richard Meehan, a member of the bass section, in Reading and on the visit to Riga, where it was warmly received by the audience including the composer Ēriks Ešēvalds.

Rehearsals

RBC rehearses on Tuesday evenings between 7:30 pm and 10:00 pm in Tyndale Baptist Church, from the start of September to the end of June, with a short break at Christmas and Easter. This is about three miles north of junction 11 of the M4 and under ten minutes by car from Reading Railway Station. Choir members are willing to provide transport between the venue and station if required.

Additional rehearsals may be scheduled on a Saturday, usually part way through a project, together with a further rehearsal the evening before the concert. These have proved to be helpful when the programme is particularly challenging. Additional rehearsals are at the Music Director's discretion.

Members are expected to take responsibility for learning the music for each project. Independently managed and run sectionals are encouraged. These are very successful in re-enforcing the progress made in weekly rehearsals.

There is a choir rule that requires any member who has missed more than three rehearsals for any individual project, to discuss their participation in the concert with the Music Director. Part Reps maintain attendance registers and they are expected to share these with the Music Director when required. The Rules and Constitution are available on the choir's website.

Accompanist

Nicholas Shaw, a distinguished organist, accompanist and choral conductor in his own right, has been the accompanist with Reading Bach Choir since 2006. He trained as an organist and choral

director at Oxford, as Organ Scholar of Magdalen College, and then at the Royal Academy of Music where he was a prizewinning student on the choral conducting course.

He is currently Organist and Choirmaster of the Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn, teaches choral conducting to some of Cambridge University's organ scholars, and elsewhere, organ and general musicianship. He also directs one of the UK's largest and most successful and internationally acclaimed open access youth choir schemes, Cantate.

Other activities

During Matthew's time as Music Director, the choir has made successful tours to Ghent and Riga and will be visiting Amsterdam in June 2017. These tours have allowed the repetition of recently performed repertoire. Approximately two thirds of the choir have toured, which has further enhanced the unity within the choir as well as being immensely enjoyable.

RBC is not a choir that is motivated by participating in competitions. However, it would welcome the opportunity to perform in festivals. In 2005 we participated in the first International Bach Choir Festival in Leipzig and more recently as part of the London Brandenburg Choral Festival.

Matthew has led a number of choral workshops that were open to non-RBC members. These were held primarily as a fund raising activity and covered a variety of repertoire. One is scheduled in January 2017 on the Mass in B Minor.

RBC has had a long tradition of supporting other charities, especially around Christmas. Over the last few years, strong links have been formed with Launchpad (a locally based charity for the homeless in Reading) such that we have now entered into a formal partnership agreement with them whereby the choir receives a fee for performing at specified fund raising events. This includes Launchpad's Christmas Carol Service, which since 2015 has developed to include a school's choir competition.

Whilst grant funding and donations are sought for ambitious projects, available funds are very limited so there is significant reliance on self-help. Regular but varied fund raising activities to support concert finances take place throughout the year. There is an imaginative programme of social and fund raising events, which contributes to and strengthens the choir's solidarity and morale.

Future Direction

The choir is motivated to continue to develop and to embrace the arts world of today, which is increasingly using electronic and other new media avenues to reach out to a wider audience. In particular, RBC wishes to:

- Continue to discover new and unfamiliar repertoire.
- Perform works to an increasingly high standard so that the music speaks to our audiences.

- Develop audiences beyond the family and friends who currently form the backbone of our support.
- Tour periodically whilst ensuring that members are not excluded through cost.
- Develop new media opportunities for publicity and recognition.
- Expand the Choir's presence within the Reading arts scene.
- Consider working in collaboration with other artists and media.

The position of Music Director

The principal responsibilities of the Music Director are to:

- Direct rehearsals and concerts.
- Propose the seasons' programmes to the committee, within the agreed financial constraints.
- Engage solo vocal, instrumental and orchestral performers and agree fees (formal engagement will be completed by the committee).
- Audition potential members and re-audition existing members.
- Provide programme notes for concerts.

The Music Director, though not a member of the committee, is invited to attend committee meetings and is encouraged to join in the Choir's social activities.

The successful applicant will contract with Reading Bach Choir on a self-employed basis and not as an employee. He/she will initially be engaged for a probationary year. After this time, with the agreement of both parties, the contract will become a rolling one year contract subject to notice provisions from either party.

Fees and expenses are negotiable and dependent on experience and qualifications.

Selection Procedure

The Choir will be seeking applications from November 2016, with the closing date of Friday 23rd December. A "long list" of approximately six applicants will be invited to attend an interview in central Reading. The interview will be with the Recruitment Committee, which comprises a representative from each voice part. A "short list" of four candidates will be selected to audition with the choir. This audition will comprise a two hour rehearsal and each candidate will be asked to rehearse one piece with which the Choir is familiar (to be confirmed) and one 20th/21st century composition not previously performed by the Choir to chosen by the candidate. The structure of the rehearsal will be entirely at each candidate's discretion except that it must include a warm up and a brief introduction about themselves. It is anticipated that the auditions will take place over the first weekend in March. An accompanist will be provided. At the end of the weekend the Choir

will vote for its preferred candidate. The successful candidate will be notified as soon after as possible.

Lunch will be available, and this will be an opportunity for the candidates and members to meet each other socially.

Key dates are:

- Applications close 23rd December 2016
- Interviews notified by 15th January 2017
- Interviews 28th/29th January 2017
- Auditions confirmed by 31st January 2017
- Auditions (2 per day) 4th and 5th March 2017

Applications

If you are interested in applying for this post, please send your application to Paul Sutton, Chairman, Reading Bach Choir, Email: mdrecruitment@readingbachchoir.org.uk by 23rd December 2016. Applications should include:

- A CV
- An indicative programme for the first season within a budget for professional musicians of £8000 (excluding any fees for the Music Director and accompanist). Please include a brief explanation of how your programming meets the requirement to maintain the breadth and variety of repertoire.
- A covering letter giving your reasons for wishing to become Music Director of RBC, and demonstrating how you would meet the criteria we are seeking.
- The names of two referees and contact details, one of whom must be a professional musician able to comment on your work as a choral conductor.

For further information on the choir and to read reviews, please visit our website:

www.readingbachchoir.org.uk.