

The Cathedral Choir at Christmas

Cathedral Photographer, Colin Dickson, captures the Choir on film.

Text extracts are from an article in *The Herald* 'The Thirst for Noel'
by Kate Molleson, 21st December 2011.

“These are Scotland's best and busiest choristers, unique north of the Border for the quality of their voices and the extent of their work schedule. “



On weekdays they rehearse before school, after school and sing a service of choral evensong; on Sundays they have rehearsals and services morning and afternoon. It's a heavy commitment, enough to rival that of many adult working musicians. "It's hardest on Sundays," says Emily, a senior chorister who knows the routine well. "My brother's still in pyjamas watching Match of the Day, my mum's usually still in bed and there I am tiptoeing past to get to rehearsal."

Master of Music, Duncan Ferguson, is keen to emphasise the open-to-all **ethos of the choir.** “I want this choir to welcome anyone with ability and enthusiasm. The recruitment process doesn't require prior training – when kids audition at the age of eight we're not looking for polished performers, just someone with a clear voice and musical intelligence. All the training happens once they get here.”





In 1978, St Mary's became the first cathedral in Britain to admit girl choristers into the choir. With a newly opened co-ed music school adjacent to the cathedral, Ferguson explains that "there was already a culture of girls and boys being musicians together in the same space." He maintains that there's little audible difference between male and female voices at chorister age. "I'm a firm believer that the way the choir is trained and the way they listen is what makes them produce a uniform sound."

The great excitement when I visit is the prospect of music for Christmas. "So much of what we sing is serious," says Aidan, "but at Christmas we can lighten up a bit. We love this time of year." Enough to compensate for being on active duty on Christmas Eve and Christmas morning? "Christmas is harder," says Emily, "and it's colder. And Midnight Mass is really tiring. By January we're dead. But it's worth it." George has a tip for the others: "The best way to get through Midnight Mass is to eat a ton of sweets beforehand. The massive sugar rush makes you hyper but at least you stay awake."



Being a chorister is undoubtedly hard work, but the rewards are immeasurable. The skills learnt extend well beyond the musical: as well as developing music theory, sight reading, singing technique, and aural awareness, choristers develop skills such as teamwork, confidence, language, and working to deadlines, as well as enjoying wonderful opportunities, from meeting leading composers to broadcasting live on radio and television to performing in some of the **world's greatest concert venues**. For more details about the chorister programme, please email music@cathedral.net, or for a prospectus and application form for St Mary's Music School, please visit www.st-marys-music-school.co.uk or telephone +44 (0)131 538 7766.