

Music at
Buckfast Abbey



Singing in the CHOIR OF BUCKFAST ABBEY



Thank you for your interest in the Choir of Buckfast Abbey. Following the retirement of several long-standing members of the choir, we are looking to fill vacancies for one alto (contralto, countertenor, or mezzo-soprano), one tenor and one bass.

In 2023–24, alongside the weekly schedule of services, the choir will perform three concerts (including one with Baroque orchestra) and record a commercial CD. In addition to the permanent vacancies, there is an approved list of deputy singers, for which auditions are scheduled on an *ad hoc* basis.

BUCKFAST ABBEY

Located at the centre of a picturesque valley on the edge of Dartmoor National Park, Buckfast Abbey is home to a community of Roman Catholic Benedictine Monks who live their lives of prayer, work, and study according to the ancient rule of St Benedict. At the heart of our site is the Abbey Church and Monastery – the place in which the Monastic Community lives and prays at various times throughout the day. The historic site dates back to 1018AD, when the original Abbey was founded. Today, the Abbey is home to a flourishing complex of buildings which the monks have continually developed to aid them in realising their vision for Buckfast – to be a national centre of witness to God, and the Roman Catholic faith. To that end, the community places a great value upon hospitality, and welcomes hundreds of thousands of visitors each year.





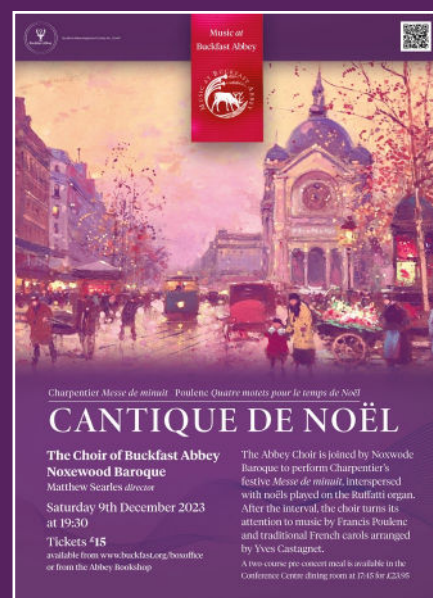
Festival Carol Service, December 2022

WORSHIP & MUSIC

Music plays a fundamental role in the life of the Abbey, whether it be Gregorian Chant sung by the Monastic Community at the Daily Office, or choral music sung by the Abbey Choir at Solemn Mass and Vespers. The Abbey is a vibrant centre of musical activity in Devon that hosts a diverse and popular series of concerts and organ recitals, with a glorious acoustic that lends a particularly vibrant dimension to choral singing. The provision for music at Buckfast Abbey has grown exponentially in scope and vision in a relatively short period of time. Its development mirrors the contemporary visitor experience, much enhanced from that of a just a decade ago. Nonetheless, this musical provision retains, at its core, the same *raison d'être* that was fundamental to those pioneering French monks who re-founded the Abbey Church in 1882. Among the many religious and institutional gifts the brethren brought was their prepossession of over a thousand years' worth of Catholic musical heritage. They reintroduced to this site those songs of the Church that had fallen silent at the Reformation. To this day their legacy continues to provide the very bedrock of Benedictine Community life at Buckfast, and it is upon the shoulders of that legacy that the Abbey seeks to continue to grow. In recent years, a substantial new pipe organ by Fratelli Ruffatti has been installed, and a choir of choristers, drawn from the local state primary school, has been restored. In 2020, Buckfast launched its own record label, Ad Fontes, which disseminates the name of Buckfast Abbey to a worldwide audience whilst also attracting renowned choirs and instrumentalists to record high-quality Catholic music here at Buckfast.

THE ABBEY CHOIR

The present incarnation of the Abbey Choir was founded in 2009. The choir has since established a wide repertoire, ranging from early polyphonic music of the sixteenth century and Masses of the Viennese school, through to music of the French romantic tradition and contemporary Catholic music. The choir developed significantly during Philip Arkwright's tenure as Organist & Master of the Music (2013–2022) and continues to attract singers from across the region. The choir recorded its first commercial disc in 2014 and has subsequently made several recordings on the Abbey's in-house record label, Ad Fontes. In 2018, the choir sang Midnight Mass at the conclusion of Buckfast's millennium year, which was televised live on BBC One. In addition to singing Sunday Solemn Mass & Vespers, and on certain occasions during the week, the choir gives several concert performances each year. The choir comprises eight sopranos, four altos, four tenors and four basses.



Midnight Mass, televised live on BBC One, December 2018



The timetable of choral services is as follows:

Sundays

09:30–10:30	Rehearsal
11:00–12:00	Conventual Mass
13:30–14:30	Rehearsal
15:00–15:45	Solemn Vespers & Benediction

The full choir is reduced to a schola of lower voices during August (excluding the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary on the 15th August) and the Sundays following Christmas and Easter. Sundays either side of the school half term are often reduced to either sopranos only or ATB. On these occasions, Vespers is sung by a cantor. Members of the Abbey Choir benefit from a discount on Sunday lunch in the Grange Restaurant between services.

Holy Days of Obligation (e.g. Epiphany, Ash Wednesday, Ascension, All Saints)

16:00–16:45	Rehearsal
17:00–18:00	Conventual Mass

Weekday Solemnities, and other weekdays when the choristers sing Mass

16:30	Rehearsal
17:00–17:45	Conventual Mass

The dates for these commitments are offered in advance and singers are selected at the discretion of the Master of the Music.

During Holy Week and at Christmas, a more substantial schedule of liturgical singing requires the full attendance of the choir for the following services, all with a preceding rehearsal:

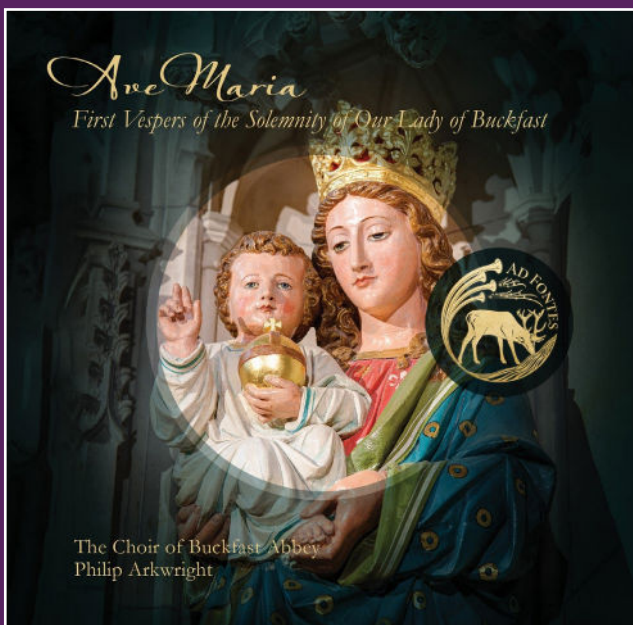
- Festival Carol Service (Saturday preceding Christmas, 15:00)
- Midnight Mass (Christmas Day, 00:00)
- Solemn Mass of Christmas Day (11:00)
- Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper (Maundy Thursday, 18:00)
- Celebration of the Lord's Passion (Good Friday, 15:00)
- Solemn Easter Vigil Mass (Holy Saturday, 21:00)
- Easter Sunday Mass (11:00)

Following the Easter Vigil, and on Christmas Eve following Midnight Mass, overnight accommodation is provided gratis on site.

PERSON SPECIFICATION

It is expected that any prospective singer should:

- have experience of singing in a professional choral ensemble
- demonstrate a trained voice, with a good standard of musicianship and technical proficiency
- demonstrate an excellent sight-reading ability
- demonstrate a purity of tone alongside excellent choral discipline, including the ability to blend with other voices, but without relying on them
- have a familiarity with the canon of sacred music, particularly sixteenth century polyphony
- demonstrate a working fluency in the pronunciation of ecclesiastical Latin
- demonstrate some knowledge and skill in reading Gregorian notation
- be willing to work as a member of a team, whilst also being able to sing solos accurately, confidently and musically
- be willing to undertake adequate personal preparation
- have the ability to respond quickly and positively to direction
- have an understanding of the professional nature and demands of the position, and display appropriate conduct and behaviour at all times, particularly in the presence of the choristers
- positively represent the choir and the Abbey in a positive manner
- have empathy with the Catholic ethos of the organisation
- have a good sense of humour



The choir's latest commercial recordings on the Ad Fontes label



The choir recording a CD of music for Our Lady of Buckfast, September 2019

REMUNERATION

Members of the Abbey Choir are self-employed and are responsible for paying their own income tax and National Insurance contributions. The fees are currently £60 for a single service or £90 for both Sunday services. £45 is paid to lower voices singing with the choristers midweek, or for lower voice chant schola services, both of which have a shorter rehearsal. Concerts and recordings are remunerated separately. Payment is made monthly in arrears via BACS. Music for all services is sent to singers in advance, and is expected to be thoroughly prepared before rehearsal.

HOW TO APPLY

Matthew Searles (Master of the Music) is pleased to receive enquiries and is happy to further discuss the choir with potential applicants. In the first instance, please make contact by email to msearles@buckfast.org.uk. Auditions are usually arranged on Sundays following the 11:00 Mass (at c.12:15). Candidates will be asked to undertake some warm-up exercises exploring the range and quality of the voice, sing a short aria/song of their choice, sing a piece of gregorian chant prepared in advance, and to undertake three sight reading tests: an excerpt from a piece of sixteenth century polyphony, a work in a modern idiom and a piece of gregorian chant.



Buckfast Abbey

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