

Music at
Buckfast Abbey



Becoming a
**CHORISTER AT
BUCKFAST ABBEY**



Buckfast Abbey

In 2018 Buckfast Abbey celebrated 1000 years since its foundation. As a lasting legacy, the Abbey offers the opportunity for boys and girls aged between 7 and 14 to enhance the glorious surroundings of the Abbey through their singing at regular services, as well as to perform in concerts and an annual overnight tour.

This is a unique, life-changing, opportunity for children who are interested in participating in a professional choir, where they gain benefits and skills that will last a lifetime. Among these are self-confidence, the appreciation of good time-keeping and the rewards that result from hard work.

Typically choristers start as Junior Choristers in Year 3 as pupils of St Mary's Catholic Primary School in Buckfast. However, the Abbey is also keen to widen access to this opportunity as broadly as possible, and it also offers spaces for a small number of children from any school to become a chorister from Year 7 as Senior Choristers.

Junior Choristers (Years 3–6): up to four choristerships are offered each year in partnership with St Mary's Catholic Primary School. This is an opportunity for a young child, usually in Year 2, with musical inclinations but with no expectation of musical experience. All we look for is some innate musicality and an enthusiasm to learn! Choristers will receive intensive tuition in singing, piano,



End of term concert, July 2022

and music theory, and be expected to attend two weekly morning rehearsals before school, and sing at one weekly Mass at the Abbey after school. The first year (Year 3) is treated as probationary. After successful completion of this year we expect children to complete their choristership through to the end of Year 9, as senior choristers. In the last year as a junior chorister, children in Year 6 also attend the senior chorister rehearsal after school, in preparation for becoming senior choristers.

Senior Choristers (Years 7–9): these choristerships are open to any child, irrespective of their school. We are looking for any boy or girl who already has some musical experience (including some ability to read music) and would like to have the opportunity to be a chorister. We expect senior choristers to commit to two rehearsals after school. After the second of these, choristers sing for Mass. Like junior choristers, senior choristers receive free tuition in singing and piano, arranged at a mutually convenient time for both parties. Additionally, they also receive training in musical theory, which is invaluable for children going on to study GCSE and A-level music. The number of available choristerships fluctuates each year, but typically there are 2 or 3 spaces.

TIMETABLE

In order to train children to sing at a high standard, a good amount of rehearsal time is necessary. A detailed schedule of all times/dates of rehearsals and services is issued to parents in advance of the forthcoming term, but a typical week during term-time looks like this:

Junior Choristers	Wednesday	12:15–12:45 Chorister Club (School)
	Thursday	08:00–08:50 Rehearsal (School)
		15:45–17:45 Rehearsal/Mass (Abbey)
	Friday	08:00–08:50 Rehearsal (School)
	Additionally, Year 3 choristers receive tuition for music theory on Wednesday mornings from 08:20–08:50.	
Senior Choristers	Wednesday	15:45–16:55 Rehearsal (Abbey)
	Thursday	15:45–17:45 Rehearsal/Mass (Abbey)

In addition to these times, Abbey Choristers sing at special events and concerts and take part in an annual overnight tour, usually in the summer. These dates are outlined in a schedule issued to parents in advance of each term. As the choir develops, there may be opportunities to sing live radio and TV broadcasts, and make recordings.



Christmas Concert, December 2022



PERSONAL COMMITMENT & DEVELOPMENT

The award of a choristership requires a significant, long-term commitment from all parties concerned: the chorister and their family, the Abbey and, for junior choristers, the school. It is important to understand that choir takes precedence over other events or clubs, and that the chorister’s family should be supportive. After passing a probationary period, it is expected that choristers will continue through to the end of Year 9.

We make a long-term commitment to our choristers through a scholarship for individual singing tuition and piano tuition. The Abbey also enters choristers and covers expenses for exams with the Associated Board of the Royal School of Music, and provides all the relevant books. In the last session, the choristers achieved a 100% success rate in the exams, and several were awarded a distinction.

We also commit to the rounded development of our choristers, who have plenty of opportunity to have fun and enjoy themselves. We organise varied activities, including trips to the cinema, pizza nights, bowling, and an annual climb to the top of the Abbey tower. In free time between rehearsals and services, choristers can play and relax, with refreshments provided.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

If you feel that it might be something that you and your child(ren) are interested in taking further, parents of Year 2 pupils at St Mary’s, or parents of prospective senior choristers (normally currently in Years 6 or 7) are encouraged to contact Robert Pecksmith (Assistant Master of the Music) rpecksmith@buckfast.org.uk.

WHAT HAPPENS AT THE AUDITION?

At Junior Chorister auditions we are looking for children with a love of singing, who can show enthusiasm, energy and humour. Although some preparation can prove helpful, formal voice training is definitely not a pre-requisite. Children will be asked to sing a song of their choice (this could be something as simple as 'Happy Birthday'), complete some short aural tests (such as singing back some notes played on the piano and repeating a clapped rhythm). They will be asked to read a short piece of text and describe why they want to be a chorister.

At Senior Chorister auditions there will be an opportunity to spend the afternoon at the Abbey, to give parents and children a sense of the place, a chance to mingle socially, and for informal conversation with the music staff. At audition we would expect children to sing a short, prepared piece, attempt some simple sight-singing, and talk a little about their previous music experience and why they think they would benefit from becoming an Abbey Chorister.



Residential trip to Liverpool, September 2022, during which the choristers visited a number of local sights, rehearsed at Liverpool Anglican Cathedral and sang jointly with the Choir of Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral for Solemn Mass.





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