



THE CHAPEL CHOIR OF UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, DURHAM



Choral & Organ Awards 2026/27

About the Choir

The Chapel Choir of University College, or more commonly, Castle Chapel Choir, is one of the finest collegiate choirs in Durham. We rehearse on Tuesday evenings for Choral Evensong on Thursdays and occasionally additional Eucharist or Compline services, sung in the College's 11th- and 16th-Century chapels. We sing a vast range of choral repertoire, from renaissance polyphony to 21st Century compositions.



The college offers 16 choral scholarships (4 per voice part) of £200pa each and 2 organ scholarships totalling £800pa. Auditions for choral and organ scholarships take place during Freshers' Week, with services commencing in the first week of term. The choir is fully student-led, which provides scope for further leadership roles within in the executive committee.

Tours



Sicily, 2026

The choir goes on an annual international summer tour; this past summer to Sicily and in previous years to Scandinavia, Rome and the Vatican, and Prague, amongst others.



Scandinavia, 2025

Visiting Services

Alongside frequent services at Durham Cathedral, the choir regularly sings visiting evensongs at cathedrals and churches across the country; this past year the choir sang Mattins, Eucharist, and Choral Evensong at York Minster.



York Minster, October 2025



Durham Cathedral, February 2026

The choir also holds an annual summer residency in London, singing at St Paul's Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, and St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle.



Westminster Abbey, July 2025

Performances & Outreach

Outreach and scope for musical development are vital to Castle. Throughout the year, Castle performs frequently, often in an outreach capacity. In the past year, this included performances in HMP Durham, St. Edmund's Church Sedgefield, and St. Cecilia's Lodge for our annual engagement with the Durham Freemasons.



HMP Durham, February
2026



St. Edmund's Church Sedgefield,
June 2026

Over the past two years, the choir has collaborated closely with the mental health charity RTMinds. This has included a performance at Crook Hall Gardens in 2024 and joint chapel choir concerts organised by Durham Student Music (DSM).

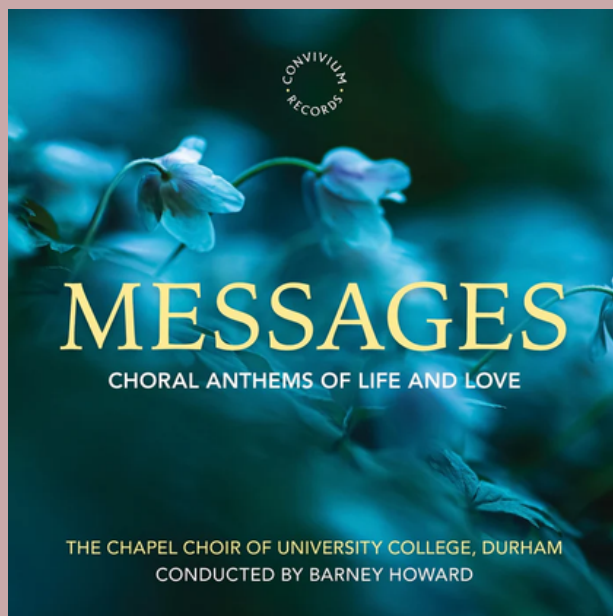
Castle holds an annual scholars' recital in the college, where scholars are given the chance to perform solo repertoire, providing an opportunity for solo singing development and to integrate further into college life.

Recordings

Over the years, Castle has recorded several albums of choral music, with our latest album with Convivium Records, *Messages*, being released in April 2026, featuring music by Castle alumni Sir Edward Bairstow and Francis Jackson, as well as a new commission from choir alumnus Ben Rowarth.

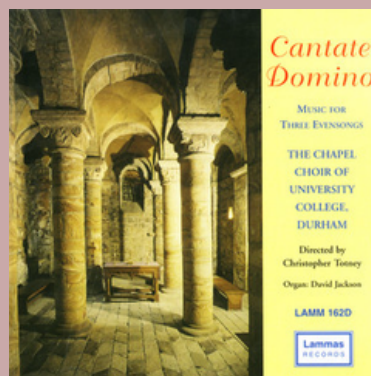
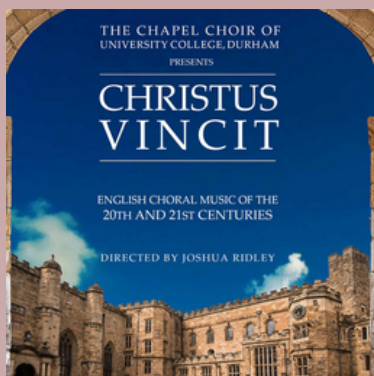
The choir has also undertaken various other media performances, such as recordings for Japanese broadcasting made in October 2025.

“The undergraduate voices of the 24-strong choir produce a nicely focused sound, well blended and tuned under Howard’s direction”
Philip Reed, Choir & Organ 2026



CHOIR &
ORGAN

More albums by Castle Chapel Choir:



Available on most streaming platforms!

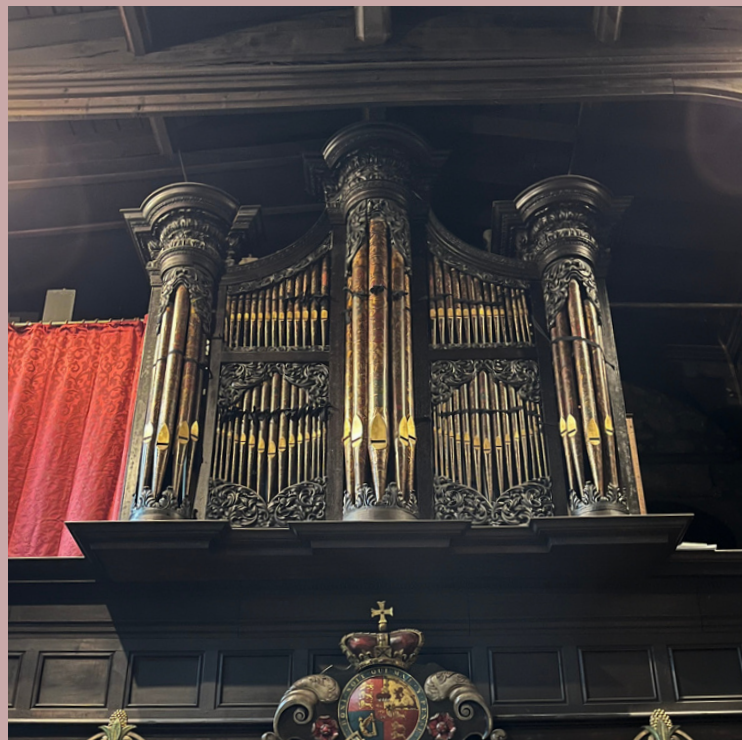


Organ Scholarships at Castle

Organ scholars play a key role at Castle, accompanying the choir's weekly pattern of services, as well as concerts, tours, visiting services, and recordings.

Organ scholars have significant opportunities for development of accompaniment and solo skills through weekly turnover of accompaniments and voluntaries. Alongside development as organists, organ scholars are free to sing with the choir when not accompanying, and there is also scope for gaining experience as a conductor.

Organ Scholars are encouraged to seek lessons within Durham, potentially from the organists at the cathedral, and are also provided guidance from the Director of Music.



Tunstall Chapel

As well as access to the college's Harrison and Harrison instrument housed in its 16th-Century Tunstall Chapel, scholars regularly play on world-class instruments such as those in in Durham Cathedral as well as cathedrals across the country such as York Minster, St. Paul's Cathedral, St. George's Chapel, Windsor Castle. Organ scholars also play for tours further afield, and can experience organs of vastly different styles, from Danish Baroque to French Romantic instruments depending on the destination, gaining valuable experience with a range of sounds and spaces.

The college offers two organ scholarships with a stipend of £800 divided between them, and is split according to playing duties across the year. Typically this split has been 3:1 between the Senior and Junior respectively.

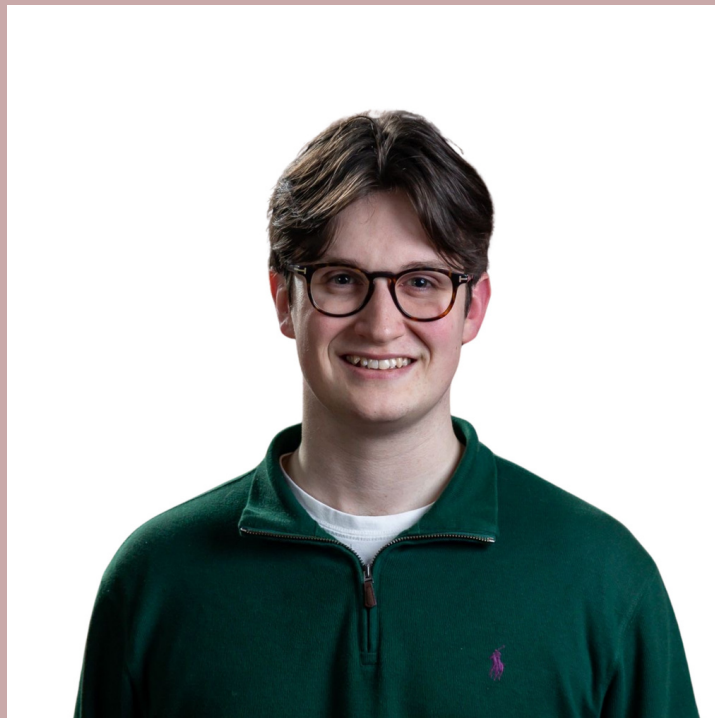


St. Paul's Cathedral

Castle Alumni

Castle Chapel Choir alumni have gone on to layclerkships at Durham, Canterbury, and St. Mary's Edinburgh Cathedrals, Magdalen College Oxford, Trinity and St. John's Colleges Cambridge, and various other careers as professional musicians, as well as joining ensembles such as Genesis Sixteen and continuing their studies in conservatoires across the nation.

Castle has a strong alumni network, with alumni frequently returning to join the choir in events such as the London residency.



Matt Holloway-Strong: UCCC Tenor 2022-23, 2024-25, SJCC Choral Graduate 2026

“Castle Chapel Choir was one of the most rewarding experiences of my entire time at university. I came to university with not much knowledge of sacred choral music but a love for singing. I joined the choir in January of my first year and haven't looked back since. Castle Chapel choir has helped me become the singer I am today, leading me to become a Choral Scholar and later a Lay Clerk at Durham Cathedral, and now a Choral Graduate at St. John's College, Cambridge. It is such a fun choir to sing in, both for musical and social reasons. Some of my best friends from university I met through singing in Castle Chapel Choir, I couldn't recommend it more to anyone who is considering it.”

LEO KHAN

Tenor, 1st Year French,
University College



What was your singing experience before joining Castle?

I sung in the Opera North Children's Chorus for three years as well my school chamber choir and boys choir, and, following a Rodolfus Choral Course, I discovered my passion for liturgical choral music and earned a Sixth Form Choral Scholarship at Leeds Minster whilst studying for my Diploma in Singing Performance.

What do you enjoy most about singing in Castle?

Castle has an extremely strong sense of community and camaraderie, and I enjoy the combination of laughter and diligence that runs through every project that we undertake.

Why did you choose Castle?

Castle's rich history with both contrasting chapels and representing my college were both significant reasons for my choice, as well as its reputation as one of the finest collegiate choirs.

Why should someone else choose Castle?

The experience is completely unmatched - I think the balance between social aspects, music-making and opportunities is superb for a collegiate choir, and I have made amazing friends along the way.



JOSEPH HORNSBY

Bass, 3rd Year History, South College
Co-Social Secretary 2025/26

What do you enjoy most about singing in Castle?

The unparalleled commitment to musical excellence, supportive and focussed rehearsal environment, and very busy social calendar.

What has been your most memorable experience singing with Castle?

Singing in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, closely followed by recording an album of music by Castle Alumni Edward Bairstow and Francis Jackson.

Why did you choose Castle?

The opportunity to sing in both of Castle's chapels (including the oldest Norman building in use in Durham), the Choir's nationally renowned reputation, and the financial support of the scholarship all attracted me to audition for a Choral Scholarship at Castle.

Why should someone else choose Castle?

If you are looking to sing in Durham's finest chapel choir, sing consistently to a professional standard, discover new liturgical music, tour abroad, and enjoy a social pint(s) in the Undie, Castle Chapel Choir is for you!



SOFIA GIRONI

Soprano, 1st Year Music &
Philosophy, Grey College

What was your singing experience before joining Castle?

I sang in school musicals and chamber choir, where we sang occasional evensongs. I did a summer course in classical singing at Guildhall in 2023 and I did singing grades up to Grade 8 with distinction.

What do you enjoy most about singing in Castle?

I love that it is something I can look forward to every week. The repertoire is phenomenal and has expanded my knowledge of music and sight singing ability. I have made lifelong friends at Castle. Being part of such a community in a beautiful chapel is so special. The management team have also been amazing at organising opportunities beyond the weekly evensongs which have been eye-opening and so enjoyable.

What has been your most memorable experience singing with Castle?

The scholars concert. Each singer being able to show off their individuality and ability with the support of our friends was such fun.

Why should someone else choose Castle?

The friends you will make, the incredible standard the choir sets and being a part of making beautiful music together.

ALAN ERDELYI

Senior Organ Scholar, 2nd Year
Engineering, St. John's College



What was your organ playing experience before joining Castle?

I had been organ scholar at a church local to my school for a few years before coming to university and enjoyed it so much that I knew I wanted to continue at Durham.

What do you enjoy most about being an organ scholar at Castle?

I love the turnover of repertoire from week to week and that it's a nice mix of music I've done already and new pieces. Some of the new stuff I've done in Castle has become among my all-time favourite pieces.

What has been your most memorable experience playing for Castle?

There are a lot to choose from but playing on a professionally produced album is one of my personal favourite musical memories overall. A special mention also goes to playing in St. Paul's and Windsor Castle during our London residencies which is such a privilege.

What made you audition for Castle?

I chose castle because it looked to me like a choir that did good music well, and went to fun places like the Vatican and Westminster Abbey. The idea of playing the organ in a castle also sounded quite cool!

Find out more...

For enquiries, more information, or to request the organ scholarship application pack, contact:

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