

# With Song in their hearts...

Invited to write something of my experiences with fundraising required to establish a choir of girls at Salisbury Cathedral, my initial thought was that this is past history and much will have changed and moved on since those exciting days in the Autumn of 1991 when the first girl choristers started to sing services, changing for ever the centuries-old tradition of boys and men leading the music of cathedral worship.

My resolve to go back to Salisbury to research this piece, experiencing for myself the way things are today, became inspirational in giving an account of a quite remarkable choir school in the hands of David Halls, the Cathedral Director of Music. Walking through The Close towards the cathedral in the late afternoon of a mellow October day gave one a spiritual lift even before entering that mighty building, stilled by the expectancy of the service of Evensong that was about to begin.

A choir of 18 girls entered the Choir with four probationers already seated. As I saw them in their pristine robes of jade green tabard edged with blue, worn over a white surplice and topped with traditional treble ruff, I was reminded of the discussion fifteen years ago that eventually produced this impeccable design. Ageless and unostentatiously eye-catching, using the colour that I came to think of as "Salisbury Jade", the designer had taken infinite care to find the exact tone to complement the local Chilmark stone from which the Cathedral is built.

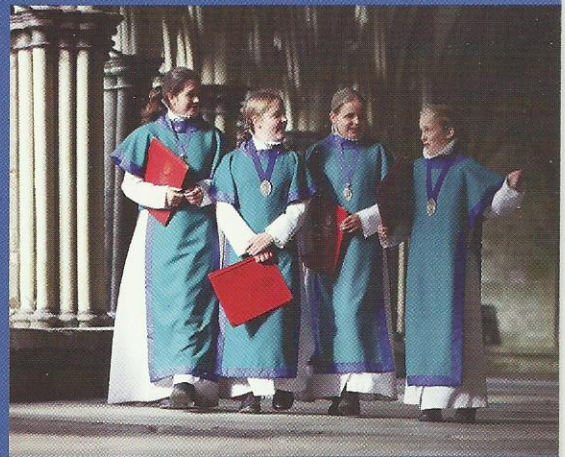
Only four weeks into the start of a new school year, and without the underlying support of the adult male Lay Clerks on this occasion, these girls produced an utterly professional performance with 100% accurate entries and five\* diction all sung with complete conviction, confidence, pride and sheer enjoyment.

Recalling the early days before the girls sang that first evensong in September 1991 with David Halls, I was reminded of the bold decision taken by Dr. Richard Seal, then Director of Music, to "go for it", having the backing of the Dean and Chapter and the support of many others involved with cathedral life. Needless to say, there were some who were appalled by the idea and voiced their opinions loudly

both locally and nationally. I am glad to say that many of these were "converted" once the choir began to sing regularly and indeed supported the fundraising generously. Of those who were not, their absence was conspicuous at "girls" services but thankfully their general allegiance to the Cathedral was not thwarted.

There was an immediate and enthusiastic response to the announcement of the auditions to be held and in those first days the choristers came from all over the country, many of them daughters of distinguished church musicians. These days there is more opportunity closer to home as so many cathedrals have followed the lead of Salisbury in establishing their own girls' choirs, which was another supremely rewarding outcome of that initial brave step.

And how does it work with the boys?



Always the worrying question initially but not even thought about much these days. It was established at the very beginning that the two choirs would sing together only at the great Festivals and one or two other special occasions. Given the huge amount of time that the boys had to devote to singing on their own, having a girls' choir has lightened their load, giving all choristers more time to spend on other musical activities sport, travel, community involvement and all the other activities that "regular" schools take part in. A mutual and genuine love of their music making, combined with a healthy rivalry, has been a major factor in contributing to the excellence of the singing at Salisbury Cathedral. Siblings have encouraged their