

'The tremendous privilege of choristership is the single greatest leg-up a child can be given in life.'

– Alexander Armstrong, former chorister of St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral in Edinburgh, comedian, and host of the BBC TV show *Pointless*



Prestigious Churchie half scholarships available

Would your son benefit by becoming a Chorister at St John's Cathedral?

A little bit of history

When William the Conqueror took the English throne in 1066 he began a program of building bigger and better cathedrals throughout his realm, and this continued until the end of the Middle Ages, by which time most of England's great cathedrals had been built. The cathedrals established choirs in which boys sang and also schools for their education. Almost a thousand years later – and at the other end of the world – this tradition continues to thrive at St John's Cathedral.

Being a chorister offers unique opportunities

Singing in a cathedral choir is one of the few places where children are able – indeed expected – to perform to the same high standard as adults. Becoming a chorister is an excellent opportunity for boys aged 7-10, offering the opportunity to receive a unique, first-class musical education, learning not only singing and musical theory but also developing verbal and reasoning skills, numeracy, languages and history. It's very special to be able to sing regularly in a building as beautiful as St John's beneath our soaring vaulted ceilings, accompanied by the spine-tingling soundscape of cathedral's fine pipe organ, one of the best in the country. The boys become a part of a choral family, where lots of support and encouragement is given to help them realise their potential as singers and individuals. They also get the opportunity to work with orchestral musicians and to perform in concerts around Queensland. Coming from all walks of life, the opportunity to train as a chorister breaks down barriers, builds life skills, and offers children a firm foundation for life: there's nothing quite like it.



What kind of skills does my son need to have before a voice trial?

Sometimes parents think we are looking for some kind of musical genius to audition for the choir, but that's not the case. We are looking for boys who show potential rather than polished performance at the outset, who have enthusiasm and want to succeed, who have the strength of character to take on commitment; who are able to

work as part of a team, and who have a supportive family. The best choristers are boys with a lot of character and energy, plus an enquiring mind and willingness to learn. In short, cathedral choristers are ordinary boys who are able to achieve outstanding results.

What happens at a voice trial?

Despite perhaps sounding a bit stressful, in reality we try to ensure that a voice trial is a relaxed affair because we want your son to be able to do his best. Here's what to expect:

- A short prepared song (sacred or secular) of the boy's choosing
- Some simple ear tests, including clapping back rhythms, singing back a simple melody, and distinguishing between two notes
- Reading both a prepared text, and an unprepared biblical passage
- There will also be an opportunity for the parents to discuss details of the choristership with the Director of Music

By the end of a boy's time in the choir he is likely to be able to say that he is a bit of a musical expert, organised, creative, committed, professional, fun-loving, confident, inquisitive, responsible and a friend to all his peers. At the voice trial we are looking for sparks of those kinds of traits in your son, not for the 'final product'.

What happens if my son is successful?

He will be admitted as a probationer at the cathedral and he will take up his half scholarship at Churchie. As a probationer he will be given his cassock to wear in the choir stalls. After about a year he will be awarded his surplice (in a short ceremony sometimes called the 'clothing of a chorister') and become a full member of the Cathedral Choir.



During the probationary year the boys become accustomed to the rhythm and customs of chorister life. They are given intensive training to give them a solid foundation in musical theory and vocal technique.

Frequently Asked Questions

When do voice trials happen? In 2021 applications close on **Friday 16 July**, but an informal trial can happen at any time. For more information, or to arrange an informal audition, please contact Graeme Morton, Director of Music at St John's Cathedral: gmorton@stjohnscathedral.com.au

Does it matter if we're not a Christian family? No. Although St John's Cathedral and Churchie maintain a Christian ethos, we welcome singers from all backgrounds here.

Will my child be safe? Yes. The protection of children is taken seriously at the cathedral. The Director of Music, the Assistant Director of Music and all the Lay Clerks (the adult members of the choir) are required to hold a current Blue Card – Queensland's Working with Children Check.

Is it all serious? We make sure that the boys have a fun and enjoyable time. Choristers are friends with younger and older boys within the choir and these friendships often endure for life. Current and former cathedral choristers find themselves welcomed warmly whenever they visit other cathedrals in Australia or overseas. It is like being a part of a big international family.

Does the cathedral have opportunities for girls to sing? Yes. The Girl Choristers at St John's Cathedral (aged aged 9–18) are provided with an exemplary musical education and are supported by trained musicians who have a passion for excellence in choral music. Girl Choristers perform as a standalone choir within liturgical and concert contexts but also join with the Boy Choristers and the Lay Clerks (the adult singers) on occasion. For more information, please see the Cathedral website.

What do Choristers and Former Choristers say?

“Being a chorister is such a **special gift** that has helped me develop my **love of music**; choral and classical, but also other genres. I can't believe that from clapping along to songs as a nervous, wobbly-voiced probationer, **I now get selected for solos.**” – A current cathedral chorister

“I'm so grateful to my parents for taking me along for an audition at the cathedral. My time as a cathedral chorister has left me with **life-long friends** as well as an **appreciation of music and art**. My memories of choir life are **deeply happy** ones. I can't imagine how impoverished my life would be nowadays if I hadn't been a choirboy.” – A former cathedral chorister

“From a very young age, being asked to **perform under pressure** in various situations meant that I became used to it. **That benefitted me enormously**, distinguishing me from others in the firm who lacked the **confidence** and **concentration** that I had built up as a child.” – A former cathedral chorister, now partner in a law firm

“Hanging in my studio in Los Angeles is a picture of Wells Cathedral. It reminds me where my musical journey began and where I first fell in love with music. **Without those wonderful years as a chorister** I am certain I would not be where I am today.” – David Buckley, Emmy-nominated film score composer

Former Captain of the English Cricket Team, Alistair Cook frequently cites his training as a chorister at St Paul's Cathedral, London, for his astonishing **composure** and **focus under pressure**.

For more information, or to arrange a 2021 audition, please email (by Friday 16 July) Graeme Morton, Director of Music at St John's Cathedral: gmorton@stjohnscathedral.com.au