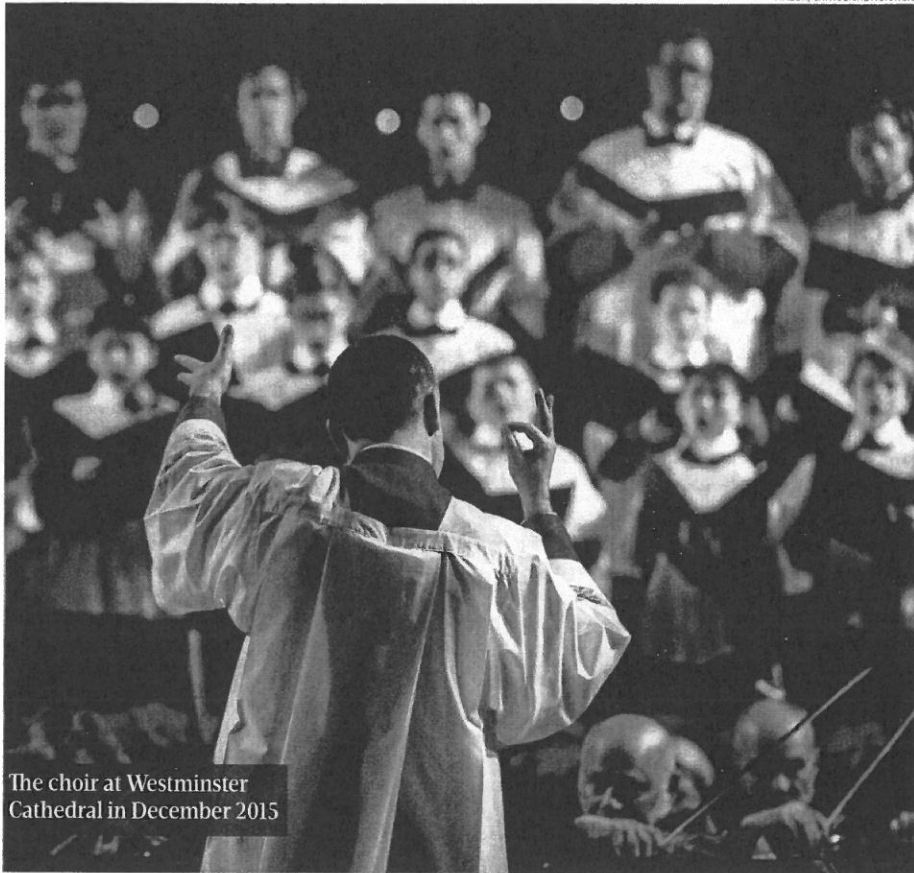


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The choir at Westminster Cathedral in December 2015

PHOTO CREDIT

Depending on how a cathedral choir is structured, it can be expensive to maintain. The ecumenical group, the Friends of Cathedral Music (which gives grants and campaigns on behalf of music in all UK cathedrals), estimates that the average cathedral choir costs about £250,000 a year. At the higher end, Winchester spends about half a million pounds and Durham is in the midst of an appeal to pay for some of its almost £400,000 bill.

Much of these costs are to pay for music and training and fees for choristers attending choir schools attached to cathedrals. Many of the 44 choir schools across Britain are fee-paying independent schools who take in boys on average between the ages of 7 and 10; a growing number accept girls, with some (such as Canterbury) operating girls' choirs as well as the traditional set-up of men and boys. Traditionally, choristers have had to board (accounting for some of the cost), but fewer than half do today. Some cathedral choirs, such as Portsmouth, York Minster and St Albans, don't have boarders at all.

**MANY CATHEDRAL** choirs employ "lay clerks", professional, full-time singers paid to sing at Sunday and weekday services. The three principal professional choral foundations in London (Westminster Abbey, Westminster Cathedral and St Paul's Cathedral) maintain around 10-12 each, at an average remuneration of about £22,000. For example, according to Martin Baker, master of music at Westminster Cathedral, they have a "great back row [of adult lay clerks] of longer serving and younger singers, some former choristers" and flexibility with a pool of approved deputies to replace the regulars when they have to be absent.

But although recruiting and retaining lay clerks may not be problematic for larger foundations, pay is still an issue. Across the board it has remained relatively low – according to the Royal School of Church Music at between £5,000 and £10,000 a year. This has required some creative approaches.

For instance, Rochester Cathedral in Kent now recruits each year three choral scholars – non-professional students or recent graduates – who sing alongside a rotation of "deputy lay clerks". They are far cheaper as they are paid a freelance fee per service rather than being full-time. Llandaff Cathedral in South Wales hit the headlines two years ago when to reduce its deficit it decided to make all its lay clerks and the assistant organist redundant (although they were to be employed on an occasional basis thereafter).

**LIVERPOOL METROPOLITAN** Cathedral manages to maintain a full "back row", with 14 lay clerks (all former young choristers). But rather than employ singers full-time, it pays them a small stipend to live and work locally. The choir has featured many times on Radio 3's *Choral Evensong* and other BBC broadcasts – meaning, says Liverpool's director of music Chris McElroy, "that quality is just as good and we really are getting our money's worth".

Rising costs and shrinking congregations are threatening the survival of cathedral choirs across Britain, a tradition that goes back more than 1,000 years / **BY MICHAEL ROSSI**

## Finding their voices

**I**T MARKS for tens of millions of viewers and listeners around the world the start of Christmas: a boy treble singing, unaccompanied, the first verse of "Once in Royal David's City", at the start of the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols from King's College, Cambridge. An even larger audience, estimated by some at between 300 and 500 million, watched the wedding in 2011 of Prince William and Catherine Middleton, with the 1937 Harrison & Harrison organ and the glorious voices of the Westminster Abbey Choir singing the words of Psalm 122 in Hubert Parry's anthem "I was Glad".

This for many represents the pinnacle of the cathedral choral tradition that stretches back over 1,000 years to when monks would chant the Divine Office. There are more than 100 Roman Catholic and Anglican cathedrals across the British Isles, and many, if not most,

have choirs that sing at least once a week for Sunday liturgies. Eleven of those with choirs and a high level of music provision are Catholic. This is a thriving, living tradition, and yet there are fears for its future. Earlier this month, a host of composers, conductors and prominent musicians (including Dame Judith Weir, Master of the Queen's Music) expressed this anxiety in a letter to *The Times*, urging "all who cherish this enduringly relevant cultural, historical and educational tradition to support it".

This is not the first time that fears for the future of cathedral music have been expressed, but why are some saying it faces a crisis now? Benjamin Saunders, director of music for the Catholic Diocese of Leeds, reckons there are three, closely connected issues: finance, recruitment and the congregational attendance rate.

Funding and recruitment are fundamentally linked, and that link is usually a personal one. Many of those singing as adults in the choirs of Britain's cathedrals were themselves once choristers as youngsters. Meanwhile, more than 10 million people visited a cathedral in 2014, many citing the quality of music as an attraction. So in what seems a popular tradition, why is there talk of looming crisis?

Planned giving has not risen relative to the expansion in cathedral congregations in the past decade, according to the Church of England. And an increasingly secular society has meant that parents may not be as interested in sending their children to choir schools as previous generations, making the link that has ensured generations of new choristers – and thereafter adult lay clerks – more difficult to maintain.

How cathedral music is paid for is a varied picture. Westminster Abbey, with its endowment, is able to fund its rich musical tradition. Canterbury and Durham represent major heritage destinations, so more than half of their incomes arise from trade in their shops and cafes. Money from dioceses accounts for most of the funding of many cathedral choirs. Sixty years after its foundation, the Friends of Cathedral Music has this year launched a Diamond Fund for Choristers to raise £10 million by 2020. Fund-raising campaigns are a necessity.

**SAUNDERS DOES** not believe you can “sit back and blame society”. Starting in 2003 with three schools in Bradford, he and his team began to offer a music service. The idea was that schools would pay them to provide year-round music education. Now with 45 schools in West Yorkshire, the arrangement provides more than 50 per cent of the income for cathedral music. They have been able “to change the culture in the schools” and attitudes to singing. They also recruit all the cathedral choristers from the schools: “It reflects the congregations more than choir schools would, and we don’t have to run recruitment campaigns,” says Saunders.

This model, placing cathedrals firmly in their local communities and in partnership with others, is one that works in Leeds, and has inspired others in Belfast and Bath. Yet in the end, the story of how Britain’s cathedrals ensure the finances to maintain the great choral tradition will remain a mixed economy. For McElroy in Liverpool, that is as it should be. He is a great admirer of the Leeds model (having helped to run it himself) and is considering trying it on a smaller scale. Yet he still sees a place for the choir schools and lay clerks that continue to provide the backbone of many cathedral choirs.

The loss of such church choral traditions in countries such as Italy and Spain – from whence came composers Palestrina and Tomás Luis de Victoria – should serve as a warning that it cannot be taken for granted.

**Michael Rossi** works in radio production at BBC Radio 3 and is a parish organist in west London.

## So far, Corbynism has failed to measure up to its billing as a radical alternative



Why did the revolution never happen? After the catastrophic breakdown in the world free-market financial system in 2008, it was widely predicted that the Left would seize the opportunity this offered. Nothing could have been further from the truth. With a few exceptions, across the Western world left-wing political parties lost ground and their conservative opponents were strengthened. Free-market capitalism remained the predominant system.

One thing that did happen, however, was that confidence in politicians took another hard knock. They did not see the crash coming, nor, so far, have they prevented it happening again. The impression that they were “in it for the money”, and were not averse to cheating, was already widely believed. Along with the impression that no politicians ever say what they sincerely think.

Reaction to all this explains the spectacular rise of Jeremy Corbyn. Labour’s new leader has attracted widespread support by standing outside whatever consensus other politicians represent, including, for instance, the rules by which party politics have normally been conducted.

Part of this consensus applied to economic policy. The premise behind the philosophies of Messrs Blair, Brown, Miliband and Cameron, apparently shared by other candidates for the most recent Labour leadership, was that free-market capitalism ought to be more or less left alone, but subject to redistributionist measures to make its impact fairer. It was capitalism with a slightly less unequal human face.

They all tacitly accepted the proposition that the fundamental purpose of business was the maximisation of shareholder value, by increasing profits distributed as dividends and by bolstering the share price on the stock market. This has become over the past 30 to 40 years the bedrock of our economic system, regarded as an unassailable fact of life. The primacy of the shareholder interest was even enshrined in law, in section 172 of the 2006 Companies Act.

It has a thousand baleful consequences, not least when the principle of “rational self-interest”, fundamental to the theory of a free market, escapes from the boardroom into

the high street and then into ordinary homes. It tells someone that they are justified in doing whatever benefits them personally – though it is best to stay on the right side of the law. In the background is the assumption attributed to Adam Smith that if everybody pursues their own interests, somehow, as if guided by an “invisible hand”, everything will turn out for the best.

Corbynism attracts people’s innate sense that such a philosophy of extreme individualism, in life as in economics, is dehumanising. It has scant respect for the interests of the community, especially the more vulnerable, and ignores the fact that we are all essentially social animals, hard-wired to relate to each other.

So far, however, Corbynism has failed to measure up to its billing as a radical alternative to the way politics is done or to the underlying dynamic of the economy. The Labour Party’s present in-fighting does not suggest a purer, cleaner form of politics will arrive any day soon. On economics, a return to nationalisation, as proposed for the rail and perhaps the energy industries, would leave most of corporate capitalism in Britain unreformed.

Corbynism, so called, seems largely to consist of a blend of Keynesianism and Old Labour statism. Labour’s economic advisers may yet produce some original ideas. But we have seen more convincing glimpses of this search for alternatives to reliance on market forces from the Chancellor, George Osborne, than from his Labour shadow, John McDonnell.

The Government’s northern powerhouse proposal, the policy of forcing up low wages, and the tax squeeze on the buy-to-rent housing sector, are admissions that the market cannot be left to its own devices. Indeed, Osborne is frequently attacked from the Right for abandoning free-market ideology.

What is needed now is to open up a new debate about stakeholding, so that those who run corporations are obliged to place the interests of shareholders equally alongside those of employees, customers and the wider community. Maximisation of shareholder value, as the driving force of the economy, has had its day. Who will say so first, Osborne or McDonnell? Who is the real revolutionary?

