

Trinity College Choir and its director, Stephen Layton, are poised for an ambitious year of recordings, concerts and tours

# Hitting the right notes



CAMBRIDGE IS ONE of the greatest musical centres in the world, says Stephen Layton, Director of Music and Fellow of Trinity College. “If you were to walk down Trinity Street and King’s Parade between four and seven on a Tuesday in the middle of the wettest winter day, you would probably hear music from 1350 to 2007 being sung by choirs,” he says. “There is no other place in the world like that.”

As the Christmas music season approaches, Trinity College is set to continue a choral music tradition that can be traced back to the college’s earliest roots as King’s Hall – established by Edward II in 1317 – where Chapel Royal choristers continued their education after court. Over the course of its history, Trinity has supported medieval chapel choirs, a Tudor choral foundation, a boys’ choir school, and, since 1982, a mixed choir of undergraduate students.

The chance to lead that choir, which features 30 talented Choral Scholars, was a huge part of the appeal behind Layton’s decision to come to work at Trinity in September 2006. “It was appealing to have the opportunity to nurture young people who sing,” he says.

The son of a church organist, Layton was selected at age nine to

The Trinity College Choir, shown here with Director Stephen Layton, is planning a tour to Canada in July 2008, as well as trips to Poland and Australia.

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become a choir boy at Winchester Cathedral. “The system of education gave me scholarships to carry on down that path – I went to Eton as a music scholar and then to King’s College as an organ scholar,” he says. “Singing and music have been my passport into life and I’m keen to give as many students as possible that same passport.”

Previously, he was Director of Music at the Temple Church in London, but his work as a freelance conductor has taken him around the globe to work with some of the world’s finest orchestras and choirs, including the Philadelphia Orchestra and the London Philharmonic. He regularly collaborates with leading classical composers and has a discography that has garnered many awards, including a Gramophone Award in Britain and US Grammy nominations in 2006 and 2007.

Under Layton’s direction, Trinity Choir has already made three recordings, due to be released by Hyperion in 2008. The albums feature the Choir performing Handel’s *Dettingen Te Deum* with the Academy of Ancient Music, Poulenc’s *Gloria* with Britten Sinfonia and a cappella works by Polish composer Pawel Lukaszewski. In September, the Choir sang Vierne’s *Messe Solennelle*

in the Cathedral of Notre Dame.

Closer to home, the Choir sings Evensong services during term time at 6:15pm every Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday and Choral Eucharist services at 10am on Sundays. Layton has a special fondness for the services. “It’s like going into a peaceful oasis, a calm place to think about your life,” he says.

Trinity is home to one of the University’s largest music societies. In addition to the Trinity Choir, the society supports the Trinity Singers, a non-auditioned choral group who perform a concert of a major work every term. (This autumn, they will present Brahms’s *Requiem* on 26 November.) Staff and students who are orchestral musicians can also join the non-audition orchestra Trinity Players, who perform a concert each term. In addition, the society stages up to 60 concerts a year.

Whether catching strains of college music while passing on the street, or sitting in a pew for a concert, Layton thinks choral music at Cambridge should be enjoyed and celebrated. “Much of the music of the Renaissance was written for our architecture, for our cathedrals and our college chapels,” he says. “It is very exciting to be able to keep that tradition alive.”