

# TOP CHOIR FOR ST JOHN'S

Cambridge Shire Life Magazine  
February, 1989



Gloriae Dei Cantores, one of America's top choirs according to experts, has undertaken the challenge of furthering peace and understanding between the United States and the people of other nations.

This year's tour, the first in a planned series of Gateway Concerts, will include Holland, West Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia.

The Premier performance of the Gateway Concert Series will take place in the Chapel of St John's College, Cambridge, at 8pm on 3 March.

Cambridge is not a "foreign" city to these Americans. They have been coming here to study with some of this country's finest musicians for three years. They have been tutored by Dr George Guest of St John's College; Mr Stephen Cleobury of King's College; Dr Mary Berry, Founder and Director of the Schola Gregoriana, and one of the world's foremost experts on Gregorian Chant; and Dorothy Richardson of Guildhall School of Music in London.

Dr Guest, who will accompany the choir on its tour, serving as their guest conductor for some of the concerts, says: "Gloriae Dei Cantores is a unique representation of American culture at its very best. The choir has a large repertoire and its high standards rival those of the great European choirs. They bring musicianship, enthusiasm and total commitment to all they undertake and, consequently their many concerts have received the highest critical acclaim."

Prior to its Continental tour, the choir will spend six weeks in England and Wales studying and performing Evensong and Eucharist

services as well as concerts in several cathedrals, including: Bristol, Gloucester, Wells and Salisbury cathedrals in England; and Brecon, St David's and Bangor cathedrals in Wales.

Gloriae Dei Cantores, which is translated "singers to the glory of God", comprise 44 Americans from a variety of professions and backgrounds. They perform a repertoire that ranges from Gregorian chant to contemporary classical compositions, and are particularly expert in the performance of Anglican Psalmody.

Cambridge can claim credit for some of the expert training the choir has received, both through the example of the very fine choirs of its colleges - particularly St John's and King's chapel choirs - and by the attention Gloriae Dei Cantores have received from its world-class music masters.

## Another First for Cambridge

The Premier Concert will include music for choir - both accompanied and unaccompanied - as well as music for organ. The pieces performed are from a variety of periods, styles and nationalities - Jean Langlais' Messe Solennelle, Herbert Howells' Requiem, 3 Gregorian Chants from the Lenten season, selections by English composers: Thomas Tallis, Orlando Gibbons, Thomas Morley, and William Byrd; and contemporary American composers: Paul Manz, Gerald Near, Ned Rorem and Gerre Hancock.

Tickets for the concert, costing £5, are available from the Corn Exchange and The Cambridge Music Shop. ■

## The Weekly News

Mar 4, 1989

# Discipline shines through

THE "special relationship" between the UK and the USA took on a musical tinge at St John's Chapel last Friday, with a well-attended concert by the Gloria dei Cantores from Orleans, Massachusetts.

This disciplined and musically intelligent choir are no strangers here, for they have studied with Dr Mary Berry, Dr George Guest and Stephen Cleobury.

The Cantores, 44-strong, may come from across the Atlantic: but their repertoire and their style of singing would fit into any Cambridge chapel without more ado.

And the thorough rehearsal that is clearly one of their hallmarks means that their performance standard ranks with the highest in the city.

On Friday, they sang under three conductors. Their own director, Elizabeth C Patterson, immedi-

### REVIEW

ately proved how good she is as a choir trainer.

The Cantores sang with a splendid sense of style, warmth and an inner glow that was both captivating and welcome, whether in Tudor and Stuart music or their modern American repertoire; and they balanced expression and technique in a truly professional manner.

Their sound is rich and mellow, their balance excellent, their diction impeccable — and very English, a bit of a surprise for those of us who like American vowel sounds!

Dr Berry took charge of the plainsong items, which were sung with an assurance, a homogeneity and a flexibility that made one wish for a slightly boomer and more atmospheric acoustic than St John's chapel can provide.

And Dr Guest directed the Langlais Messe Solennele,

one of his own choir's party pieces, and Herbert Howells' fine Requiem.

The Cantores responded with a fervour and intensity underlying the fact that professional standard singing need not be routine or featureless.

The organ accompaniments and his own solos indicated that James E Jordan junior is not merely a fine player, but that he clearly revelled in the tonal resources of the St John's chapel organ.

JAMES DAY

# GLORIAE DEI

## *cantores*

The visit of GLORIAE DIE CANTORES at the beginning of February was received with many acclamations and much appreciation. This American Choir which is part of the Community of Jesus had that almost indefinable quality which conveyed the essential element of 'Church Music'. That, in itself, is hard to analyse. After all, music can be good, bad or indifferent. Such can be said of any music whether in church or concert hall. The music we heard, both at Evensong and in the Concert they gave the same evening, was superb by any standards and was one reason why Gloriae Cantores Dei was praised so highly in word and print. Yet there was something extra.

Perhaps this was that quality of church music which can only be likened to spirituality - maybe this IS the secret ingredient of all Church Music! Having said that, it becomes difficult to explain it. Within it we could include obvious things. The music itself was of very high quality, written and crafted by composers of proven genius. It was further performed in the same spirit of excellence, based on hard work, practice, education, training and ability. But moving on from there, we could detect the care in the choice of the music being performed. It was RIGHT for the occasion, and took seriously the liturgical feel of the season of the year, the day itself, and seemed to reflect the readings and inspire the prayers. At this point one could understand that the nature of Church Music is not only to be the servant of liturgy and the reflector of seasons, fasts, festivals and the celebration of christian mysteries, but it should grow out of prayer, and be part of a community which prays. All this is difficult to articulate, but you know it when it happens! And the rooting of Gloriae Dei Cantores in the community life of prayer brought its own special note of spiritual awareness and, particularly at Evensong, informed and inspired our worship. Before the service began, the organist played 'Apparition de l'Eglise Eternelle' by Olivier Messiaen. It seemed so well to set the tone for Evensong, and easily ran on into the music for the Office itself and, almost without realising it, I found myself starting the prayers after the Anthem with the words "The Spirit of the Eternal Church ..."

So this rather belated appreciation of the visit of this American Choir comes also with the hope that they will visit us again. I know they can't, because of other commitments, come in the busy season which would ensure a very much larger congregation or audience. Although it was advertised widely both here and throughout the area, the numbers were disappointingly poor in early February. I nevertheless hope we will have the privilege of welcoming them again, even in the dark and quiet Winter months. For they, too, found singing here a privilege. They appreciated us as we were honoured to have them. Perhaps that two way thing was another secret ingredient that made it all the more inspiring.

Ian Harrison

*Presenter*

*St David's Cathedral + Parish News Summer 89*

MUSIC / An American choir in Cambridge.

**H**OWEVER much we take our choral traditions for granted, plenty of singers overseas know they can look to England for a lead. An American choir called *Gloriae Dei Cantores* supplied eloquent proof of the point with its concert in St John's College Chapel on Friday, leaving questions over the half-measures that many groups are prepared to go along with.

The choir's own story is far from ordinary. It has just completed a six-week study visit to Cambridge, working with George Guest and Mary Berry as well as its own conductor Elizabeth Patterson, and making several forays to sing services in English cathedrals. Now it is on a month's tour of Europe that includes Hungary and Yugoslavia.

This is the third successive year that the choir, whose members all belong to the same religious community in Cape Cod, has come here. The choir seems to have grown steadily for nearly two decades, making a first public appearance a dozen years ago and later working with Guest on its own home ground. The European tour this year is its first, but next year there are plans for a London concert and a visit to the Soviet Union.

Listening to it is a salutary experience. At first the sound is disconcerting: voice for voice the basic quality is unremarkable and the blend within sections is variable. But in what they deliver — balance and unanimity of phrasing, sense of style and musical understanding — these singers surpass themselves.

## Distant voices

*Gloriae Dei Cantores*  
St John's, Cambridge  
Robert Maycock

In Gregorian chant, with Berry conducting, they showed the kind of single-minded, gentle flexibility of pulse that can only come from long and intensive practice. Their unaccompanied English Renaissance music was less confident, the sopranos wan and flat and lacking the gusto that they brought to a 20th-century American group. But their best was heard in the two bigger works on which the concert centred, both conducted by Guest.

The *Langlais Messe Solennelle* drew a powerful but well controlled performance, enjoying the acidic harmonies and rising with poise to the top Cs that the composer added on a visit to this college five years ago. In the *Howells Requiem* they judged the astonishing harmonies with exactitude and maintained a sense of direction that allowed the music's unique fusion of grief and luminosity to make its proper effect. Their organist, James Jordan, played a splendid fugue by Bach and a dry one by Gerald Near, and in the *Langlais* he enjoyed the trumpets and bells that the St John's instrument offered him.