Such poise and technical control from a college choir, with its constant turnover of undergraduate voices, is remarkable.

BBC Music Magazine

www.gonvilleandcaiuschoir.com
Gonville & Caius (‘Keys’) is one of the oldest and largest colleges of the University of Cambridge. Founded in 1348, the College combines the best of Cambridge tradition with 21st century teaching and research.

Caius Chapel has a claim to being the oldest purpose-built College Chapel in Cambridge still in use.

The College’s musical tradition began at the end of the nineteenth century with a choir of men and boys, founded by the celebrated composer of Anglican church music Charles Wood, and later became an exclusively undergraduate male choir under Wood’s successor, the composer Patrick Hadley. Hadley was succeeded by Peter Tranchell, under whose direction the choir became mixed in 1979. Geoffrey Webber directed the choir from 1989 until 2019.

The director of the choir at Caius is known as ‘The Precentor’. The current Precentor is Matthew Martin. Matthew read Music at Magdalen College, Oxford where he was organ scholar. As a postgraduate, he studied at the Royal Academy of Music and with Marie-Claire Alain in Paris. From 2015-2020 he was Director of Music at Keble College, Oxford and Artistic Director of the Keble Early Music Festival. Although more recently better known as a composer, he worked for some time in cathedral music as Assistant Master of Music at Westminster Cathedral, Assistant Organist at Canterbury Cathedral and also as Organist of the Brompton Oratory.

Caius Choir consists of up to 24 singers (8 Sopranos, 5 Altos, 5 Tenors, 6 Basses) and 2 Organ Scholars and has an international reputation as one of the finest mixed University choirs in the UK. It sings three services each week during term and other activities include radio broadcasts, concerts, tours and recordings.

### Normal weekly schedule

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<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>5.00pm rehearsal</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6.00pm Choral Evensong</td>
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<td>Monday</td>
<td>6.00-7.00pm rehearsal</td>
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<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>5.30pm rehearsal</td>
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<td>6.30pm Choral Evensong</td>
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<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>6.00-7.00pm rehearsal</td>
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<td>Thursday</td>
<td>5.30pm rehearsal</td>
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<td>6.30pm Choral Eucharist</td>
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Tours, Concerts and Broadcasts

The Choir travels abroad at least once each year, singing in concert halls, universities, cathedrals, and churches across Europe and beyond, including South Africa, China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, South America and the USA. The Choir also performs extensively in the UK and at festivals such as the Spitalfields Festival in London.

In 2018 the choir took part in a UK tour ‘Supersize Polyphony 360’ with the Armonico Consort culminating in a recording of Striggio’s Mass in forty and sixty parts and Tallis’ Spem in Alium.

Broadcasts of Choral Evensong on BBC Radio 3 have been notably adventurous in content, including a service of music composed specially for the occasion by students at Caius and a service of South African music broadcast from Pietermaritzburg in South Africa.

‘The Choir of Gonville & Caius show themselves once again as one of Cambridge’s most accomplished’

Gramophone
Recordings

The Choir’s recordings have often specialised in the re-discovery of forgotten choral repertories, including previously unpublished music from within the English choral tradition and beyond, as well as championing new music such as choral works by British composers Judith Weir and Julian Anderson. ‘Romaria: Choral Music from Brazil’ features sacred and secular music from the 1950s through to the present day in a programme developed in conjunction with experts from the University of São Paulo’s music department. Early English music features on ‘Chorus vel Organa: Music for the Lost Palace of Westminster’ which includes music from the Caius Choirbook, a manuscript held in the College containing music sung at the Royal Palace of St Stephen’s, Westminster, in c. 1520. ‘Set upon the Rood’ includes seven newly composed pieces for voices with ancient instruments such as the carnyx, lyre and aulos.

‘Sung with vivid assurance... the results are rich and engaging.’

The Guardian

‘The freshness and precision of Weir’s writing is perfectly matched by the well tuned, clearly articulated singing.’

BBC Music Magazine
The chief qualities that are looked for in applicants are vocal potential and commitment. Some applicants will have had vocal training and taken grade exams in singing, yet others may have had relatively little vocal training and experience; this factor is taken into account during the auditions and no one should feel excluded from applying on the grounds of their experience at school.

In addition to the University Choral Award (£100 per year), weekly singing lessons are provided in Caius free of charge with one of the three College singing teachers: David Lowe, Kate Symonds-Joy and Elaine Pearce. Fees are normally paid for concerts and broadcasts to supplement the standard choral award. Choir members stay in College free of charge during vacations when undertaking Choir activities, and one or more foreign tours are provided free of charge each year. In addition, a special fund exists to help singers wishing to take part in occasional master-classes or other vocal opportunities at any time of the year.

Choral awards

Choral awards are open to all voices (including both male and female altos) and are compatible with reading any subject. The choral awards scheme is inter-collegiate. Auditions (known as ‘Choral Trials’) take place in March each year and the deadline for applications is mid-February.

For more information on how to apply, please visit:

www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/finance/music-awards/choral-awards
Organ Awards

Organ Scholars play a vital role in the flourishing activities of Caius choir, accompanying and playing solo pieces for the regular services and for Radio 3 broadcasts, concerts at home and abroad, and CD recordings.

To apply for an Organ Scholarship you enter the Cambridge University Organ Awards competition held in September. Details of the Organ Awards process can be found here: www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/finance/music-awards/organ-scholarships

The principal planning and organisational work of the Chapel Choir is carried out by the Precentor and the Choir Administrator, so Organ Scholars have time for the development of solo and accompanying skills to the highest standards. The Organ Scholars also have opportunities to work on their conducting skills with the choir and take a leading role in the musical life of the College in general, often conducting a large-scale choral and orchestral work in the termly College Concert.

The Chapel organ was built in 1981 by Johannes Klais of Bonn. It is a versatile three-manual instrument, containing a few ranks from the previous Walker organ.

In addition to the £450 per year scholarship, Organ Scholars receive a large reduction in room rent; organ lessons are provided free by the College; and a financial subsidy is available for the purchase of organ music. Tutorial grants are available to those wishing to undertake organ courses both in the UK and abroad.
Music at Caius

In addition to the choir, there are plenty of other musical activities with which to get involved. There is an active music society (GCMS), close harmony groups (Caius Men and Gonville Girls), an instrumental awards scheme and jazz nights.

GCMS (Gonville & Caius Music Society) organises a Saturday lunchtime recital series and a College Concert each term. The College Concert in the Michaelmas and Lent terms is usually a large-scale choral and orchestral concert. The summer term concert, known as the May Week Concert, is normally a more light-hearted programme or takes the form of a show, such as The Threepenny Opera, or Guys and Dolls. There are also informal concerts arranged from time to time, known as the Scales Club Concerts (founded in the late 19th century) where everyone is welcome to take part.

Caius Men and Gonville Girls sing a wide range of music including everything from madrigals and part songs to pop, show and jazz arrangements. They perform in college and at functions such as May Balls, and other University and private events.
Sophie Rogan  
Soprano  
studying Music  

Did you have a lot of singing experience when you auditioned?  
I did, although some of my friends didn’t – it’s definitely not essential. I was a girl chorister at Liverpool Cathedral for ten years until the age of 16, and after this I sang in various other local choirs, as well as being involved in bigger organisations such as the Rodolfus Choir. I also did some summer courses – I can recommend the Rodolfus Choral Courses as they are super fun and you can learn so much in just a week.

Why did you want to be a choral scholar?  
Having been a chorister from a young age, I couldn’t really remember a time when I wasn’t involved in choral singing, and it is just something I love doing a lot – so I knew I really wanted to keep singing at university.

What attracted you to Caius?  
Caius Choir was my main reason for choosing to apply to Caius! I knew I really wanted to be a choral scholar, so I picked Caius as it has a reputation for being one of the leading mixed-voice choirs in Cambridge. If you’re lucky enough to visit before applying, the ‘feeling’ you get as you walk into a College can often help make up your mind – Caius is so warm, welcoming, and really pretty so certainly convinced me that I wanted to apply there.

How easy has it been to adapt to the demands of being a choir member?  
Surprisingly easy! Choir really can lift your mood and help switch off from the pressures of academic work.

What’s it like being a member of Caius choir?  
It’s like being part of a big musical family. Being in Caius choir is very rewarding, both musically and socially: despite working hard as a choir to achieve high standards, we always have so much fun both making music together and socialising.

What has been your most memorable experience in the choir?  
My most memorable experience in the choir has to be singing Bach’s Christmas Oratorio in concerts on our tour to Romania.
Inigo Jones  
Bass  
*studying Classics*

**Did you have a lot of singing experience when you auditioned?**
I was a chorister at New College, Oxford: I certainly had a decent amount of background experience. I know this isn’t the case for everyone in choir though. Caius does a great job at bringing together people of all different levels of experience to produce music of an excellent standard.

**Why did you want to be a choral scholar?**
I wanted something to do outside of my academic work: I knew that being a choral scholar meant that I would have commitments to choir most days of the weeks during term. It’s no bad thing, as you discipline yourself to get your work done so you can fit in choir! Singing is a welcome distraction from what can be a stressful academic process as a Cambridge undergraduate.

**What attracted you to Caius, both College and Choir?**
My knowledge of the choir came by hearsay: a fellow New College ex-chorister had been a choral scholar at Caius and had since become a professional singer. It appealed to me because it seemed a good balance of a high standard, but a fun and community-oriented group. I think the choir really influenced my choice of college upon application.

**What sort of music do you enjoy outside of choir and are there other performance opportunities at Caius?**
All kinds! I come from a musical family with a mother who is a professional cellist and founded an orchestra, as well as a brother who is extremely talented at the guitar and writes his own music, so I appreciate classical and non-classical equally. I’ve sung in operas and concerts that are put on at Caius as well as on a more university-wide level.

**What has been your most memorable experience in the choir?**
If I can count a whole tour as a memorable experience, I would say that the tour to the US really stands out. We visited all kinds of amazing places (New York, Princeton, Philadelphia, Atlanta) and produced some fantastic music together.
Vivek Haria
Bass
studying Music

Did you have a lot of singing experience when you auditioned?
I sang in the school choir but it was only when I went to the Royal College of Music Junior Department that I really matured as a singer. Having sung in the main choirs (together with some people who now happen to be in Caius Choir), I fell in love with the repertoire immediately.

What’s the process for applying for a choral award?
I completed an application form which asked me about my singing experience and choral background, shortly after receiving a place to read Music at Caius. I had an informal audition in Caius with the Precentor where he gave some feedback on my prepared pieces. My formal audition then took place at the Faculty of Music. In addition to singing my pieces, I was given some Renaissance polyphony to sight read as well as some aural tests.

What attracted you to Caius Choir?
I knew I wanted to apply to Caius, not only because of its exceptional reputation, but because the Precentor is also the Director of Studies in Music. The international tours, radio broadcasts and CD recordings were also a big attraction.

What sort of music do you enjoy outside of choir and are there other performance opportunities at Caius?
The Music Society at Caius is very active and there are plenty of opportunities to get involved. I have had the pleasure of conducting Handel’s *Zadok the Priest* and singing with the Caius Men in end-of-term concerts and at May Balls.

How has your time as a Caius choral scholar advanced your music?
Because of the significant overlap with studying Music, I have not only become a much more confident singer (and sight-reader) but I have also had the opportunity to perform my own works with the choir – an experience which has persuaded me to consider pursuing composition further.

What has been your most memorable experience in the choir?
My favourite would probably have to be the tour to Romania. The highlights included visiting the British Ambassador’s home, some daring electric scooter riding around the streets of Bucharest and socialising with some monks on a visit to their monastery. Not to mention climbing a mountain before performing a Bass solo aria in Bach’s *Christmas Oratorio* that very evening!
Kyoko Canaway
Organ Scholar
studying Modern Languages

What organ playing experience did you have before you applied?
I had very little experience playing the organ with a choir or playing in the context of a service and had mostly spent my time learning solo repertoire. This wasn’t a problem at all for the trials, but I think it helped that I applied for deferred entry, since I was then able to spend a year as Organ Scholar at Chichester Cathedral where I could gain more experience playing for services and accompanying before starting at Caius.

Why did you want to be an organ scholar?
I have always enjoyed being part of ensembles so I decided to apply for an organ scholarship to make sure that I would still have the opportunity to continue my musical education despite not studying Music.

What were the organ trials like?
I remember being quite nervous, especially before my conducting audition, but you do also get a lot of time during the day where you’re not required for interviews. I enjoyed bumping into other applicants in cafes around town and bonding over the whole experience. The college organ scholars were also really helpful in showing me around and giving me tips on how to prepare.

What attracted you to Caius Choir?
I was looking for a choir that had a high level of commitment but would still allow me pursue other activities and have time for my academic work.

What’s it like being a member of Caius Choir?
I really enjoy it! Everyone in choir is so friendly. Caius Choir is particularly sociable - we usually eat together after rehearsals and services so it’s very easy to spend lots of time with other choir members.

What has been your most memorable experience in the choir?
There have been lots of memorable moments including singing in Christmas markets in Romania and performing the Durufié Requiem at Caius. A particular highlight was our tour to Norfolk. The weather was sunny for the entire week and we spent all our free time outside, either having picnics or playing football on the beach together. The music was also really fun and quite interesting, including extracts from Handel’s Oratorio Samson.
Get in touch...

The Precentor is happy to meet prospective choral and organ awards candidates informally at any time of year, either on a separate visit or whilst attending a subject or Caius Open Day.

You can write to him directly: precentor@cai.cam.ac.uk

www.gonvilleandcaiuschoir.com

@ caiuschoir

@ caiuscollegecho

@ caiuscollegechoir