

Sistine Chapel Choir to perform first British concert at Westminster Cathedral



Sistine Chapel choir

The Sistine Chapel Choir, the Cappella Musicale Pontificia ‘Sistina’ is to perform its first ever concert in Britain at Westminster Cathedral on Sunday, May 6, 2012.

The Sistine Chapel Choir is the Pope’s personal choir and sings whenever the Pontiff requests its presence. Consisting of twenty men and circa 35 boys (aged 8 to 13), its Director is Monsignor Massimo Palombella.

The concert will include music historically used in the Papal Celebrations, taking the audience on a journey through the Liturgical Year. Gregorian Chant will feature along with Palestrina and Perosi.

Later in the year the choir of Westminster Abbey will sing alongside the Sistine Chapel occasion Choir at the liturgies of the Solemnity of St Peter and St Paul in Rome. This ecumenical visit is the first time in its over-500 year history that the Sistine Chapel Choir has joined forces with another choir.

Commenting on the Westminster Cathedral concert, The Archbishop of Westminster, the Most Reverend Vincent Nichols, said:

“I eagerly look forward to welcome the Sistine Chapel Choir to Westminster Cathedral where, on 6 May, it will sing for the first time in this country. The concert will be a historic moment.”

Speaking about the visit of the choir of Westminster Abbey to Rome, The Archbishop of Westminster went on to say: 'I welcome this generous ecumenical gesture by the Holy See. It signals the mutual appreciation of our musical and spiritual traditions.'

Canon Christopher Tuckwell, Administrator of Westminster Cathedral said: "It is a tremendous honour for Westminster Cathedral to have been chosen to host the first public concert to be performed by the Sistine Chapel Choir in Britain. The Pope's personal choir can be sure of a warm welcome from London's Catholic community and music lovers during this historic visit. As the home of Westminster Cathedral Choir, the Catholic musical tradition is at the heart of our liturgical life. The performance by the Sistine Chapel Choir will be an opportunity to further extend our knowledge of the beauty and glory of Catholic music and to experience for ourselves their musical style."

The Director of the Sistine Chapel Choir, Monsignor Massimo Palombella said: "I am looking forward immensely to singing in the Mother Church of the English Catholic community, building on the communion between the Holy See and the English Catholic Church, in the footsteps of the Holy Father's visit in 2010. I have long admired the quality and precision of the English sound and it will be a joy, too, to be able to develop closer ties with Maestro Martin Baker, whose magnificent work cultivating the place of the choir at the service of the liturgy is exemplary."

Westminster Abbey Choir visit to Sistine Chapel Choir in Rome.

The invitation to Rome came after Pope Benedict XVI visited the Abbey in September 2010 when he attended Evening Prayer and prayed at the tomb of St Edward the Confessor with the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Reverend and Right Honourable Dr Rowan Williams, as part of his State Visit to England and Scotland.

The Pope has asked that arrangements for the June collaboration be made in such a way as to reflect the Christian vocation of the Choir and encourage the enriching mutual exchange of gifts between the two liturgical and cultural traditions. As Westminster Abbey is formally known as the Collegiate Church of St Peter, there will be an important shared resonance as both choirs celebrate their patron together.

The two choirs will together sing at First Vespers in the Basilica of San Paulo fuori le mura on 28 June 2012 and at the Papal Mass in the Vatican Basilica on the morning of 29 June 2012.

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