

Scuola Corale Lugano Cathedral

“Singing for Life!”

With the opening of the Cathedral in Lugano last October, after some seven long years of resto-ration, the choristers of the Scuola Corale della Cattedrale di Lugano (the Lugano Cathedral Choir School - SCC) is at long last able to offer once more their precious service of choral singing in this wonderful setting.

Founded in 1984 under the guidance of Robert Michaeli, the SCC is supervised by the Bishop of Lugano, financed by the Cathedral and Parish authorities and administered jointly by the Cathedral Parish Priest and the Master of the Choristers.

The SCC enjoys an enviable international reputation for the very high quality of their singing and musical interpretation in both services and concerts and has been repeatedly honoured as guest choir in the gala concerts of the International Pueri Cantores Federation [the official international federation of the Catholic Church for youth choirs all over the world]. The SCC has very successfully sung in numerous well-known Churches all over Europe, including St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican City; the Cathedrals of St. John's Lateran, Rome; S. Maria dei Fiori, Florence; Nôtre Dame, Paris; St. Peter's, Exeter, Liverpool (both the Anglican and the Metropolitan.), Dresden, Loreto, Chester, Krakow, Granada, Guadix and Stockholm; the Abbeys of Einsiedeln, Montserrat, Ealing St. Blasien and Buckfast and the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge.



What does the SCC do?

Every year the SCC sings both ordinary and solemn high masses (sometimes recorded live for radio or television), as well as concerts, often with orchestra or other ensembles. The SCC statutes require that the repertoire each year include works from all historical periods, including Gregorian chant, polyphony and music by living composers (our choirmaster has written many pieces both for the liturgy and for concerts). Choristers are often also required to perform solo parts during the liturgy, such as Psalms, readings and formal prayers, as well as solo parts in anthems or other music. Although singing is usually either in Italian or Latin, there are often pieces in many other languages. Internal communication is usually in Italian, but French, German and English are well understood, used and spoken by most of the choristers and by the choirmaster.

The SCC and TESIS

This year the SCC is proud to announce its collaboration with TESIS (The American School in Switzerland), which will offer a unique opportunity for TESIS students and selected members of the TESIS faculty. Induction will be made through a brief interview and a short test, so as to assess ability levels and teaching requirements at individual level. This will not be an examination, in the sense of meeting predetermined levels of knowledge or abilities, and previous experience is not obligatory.

How do you become a member of the SCC?

All students are welcome to apply for entry, so long as they are able to take part in processions; are willing and able to participate in all our activities (which obviously include the liturgy of a Catholic Cathedral) and show the necessary determination to work hard and to make progress within their individual capabilities.

What does singing in a choir entail?

Chorister will normally go to two regular practices per week and there are opportunities for individual vocal coaching. They also sing services and concerts as planned in the official calendar, which is approved by vote at the beginning of September.

Obviously most performances take place on Sundays or on feast days, but sometimes the SCC may take part in other projects, such as choir tours, congresses and special concerts elsewhere in Switzerland or abroad, which usually take place during school holidays. All alterations or additions to the calendar are always subject to approval by vote. Absences may obviously be unavoidable, but they must be organised between members of the same voice, in such a way as to guarantee the viability of the commitments of the choir.

What are the qualities that make up a valued chorister?

Probably the most important aspects depend neither on their voice nor on their technical knowledge but, rather, on more fundamental qualities, that are often over-looked in our merely highly competitive and constantly performance-based places of labour and learning: honesty, generosity, passion, modesty, respect, concentration and, above all, trust. In a choir no-one is a star, not even the choirmaster: each member learns that the choir needs their contribution – modest or brilliant as may be – just as much as that of anyone else. A choir-leader must serve their choir in exactly the same way as the youngest beginner and vice versa. A choir is a school, not only of life, *but for life!*

Why is it worth joining a choir?

It is no coincidence that all of the most highly admired universities, colleges and schools throughout the world always have at least one choir that is of the highest level and not just for students, either. It is likewise truly notable how choirs and choral music have been and are, to this day, central players for progress in the struggle against poverty in such differing circumstances such as those in the Congo, Nigeria, India, Mexico, Haiti, Venezuela and eastern Europe.

In the words of the SCC motto: "Paulo maiora canamus" [Virgil, Eloghe, IV,1] – "Let us sing of more important things" – or, in the words of St. Paul: "I will sing with the spirit, but also with the understanding" [Corinth. 14,15], choirs really do strive to do and to make things better for themselves and others, and to help those around them feel and seek the same. One should never underestimate the power, benefits and truth that choral singing really does give, both to its practitioners and to its audiences.

Rehearsals

Twice a week
Days and times tba

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How is training organised?

The SCC works somewhat like an apprenticeship within a mixed ability class. Those with more experience and higher ability levels are always available to help and encourage others when needed and all choristers are monitored by the choirmaster and well-supported in their quest for proficiency, self-confidence and independence.

As well as the training that each chorister receives in the choir, individual vocal tuition is also available, as well as the five levels of the internationally acclaimed Royal School of Church Music (RSCM) course, "Voice for Life", which each chorister can follow by themselves and at their own individual pace, if necessary with guidance from the choirmaster or with help from others.

One of the most delightful aspects of the SCC is the fact that it is a "working choir" – a choir that sings in public very often – and this necessitates truly **democratic** participation whereby its members, not only of differing abilities, backgrounds and constitution, but also of varying age groups, need to collaborate to the full, sharing experience, expertise and their time for the benefit of all.

Solo roles and other musical and non-musical responsibilities are systematically divided out between all members of the choir (in line, obviously, with their effective capabilities), in such a way as to constitute real opportunities for personal growth. This has always been one of the strengths of the SCC and is without doubt one of the most important factors in its success both artistically and socially, as well as educationally in the broadest sense possible.



What does being a chorister actually mean in practice?

Singing in a choir does not just mean making music in one of the most pleasurable ways possible to humankind, but especially learning to come together with others, often from very varied circumstances and of different ages and abilities, in harmony and with mutual trust and respect. This means working closely and very regularly with others in an honest and democratic manner and learning, together, how to cope with both success and failure.

It also means overcoming difficulties by consistently striving together so as to achieve excellence and confidence, both indi-

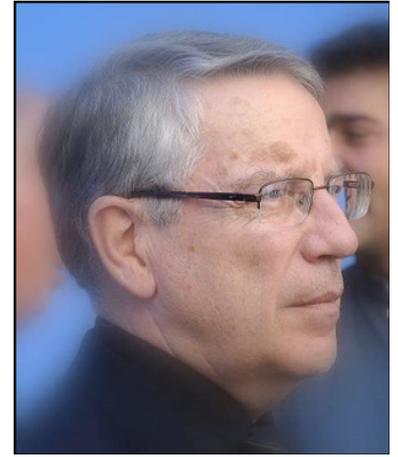
vidually and as part of a group which unremittingly aims for the highest possible levels of performance in very variable (and often difficult) circumstances.

The achievements of a choir, in fact, depend completely on each single chorister always giving their best and constantly aiming to become better and better.

The achievements of a chorister, on the other hand, help them to gain self-confidence and that most important ability of being able to approach others or to speak in public without fear or embarrassment, this is of primary importance for almost all professions, but especially business, law, medicine or education. We are proud to have helped many of our choristers to acquire this ability, which has served them well both in university and in their professional and personal lives. Engineering, science, mathematics, teaching (both in schools and in university) medicine, administration, theology and business are just some of the fields successfully taken on by ex-choristers, but also social professions and nursing and, of course, in family care.

The SCC is also very proud of its open and tolerant ecumenical tradition and entry is open to all young people, with no distinction of faith, beliefs or individual origin, and offers an outgoing, welcoming and friendly environment to all those with whom it comes into contact.

Master of the Choristers



Robert Michaels

Born in Bournemouth in 1946, he studied science and music at Canford School, Dorset (UK) – in particular with Antony Brown. He studied conducting and choir training at Zurich Conservatoire, organ with Renato Fait in Milan, Jean-Marc Pulfer in Lucerne and Erich Vollenwyder in Zurich, as well as gaining a First Honours degree in English Literature and Musicology at Pavia (Cremona) University and Open University. He became Organist of Lugano Cathedral in 1983 and founded the Scuola Corale della Cattedrale in 1984. He taught music and English in the Canton Middle Schools (Scuola Media) from 1974 to 2008, when he retired, but is still fully active as Master of the Scuola Corale and organist in Lugano Cathedral. He was President of the Swiss Pueri Cantores Federation from 2006 to 2017 and Vice-president of the International Pueri Cantores Federation from 2009 to 2017. He organised the first Pueri Cantores International Choral Course in Lugano in 2016 and co-directed with Héctor Eliel Marquez, master of the Granada Cathedral Choir and the Granada Opera Choir, the second such course in Granada (Spain) in 2017.

He has given numerous concerts all over Europe, mainly in Germany, Italy and Switzerland, but also in Nigeria, the USA, the Ukraine and in Mexico. He has published several editions of choral works for the Casa Musical Eco in Monza, Italy, and produced new performing editions of Handel's Messiah, Bach's Great B minor Mass, the Officium Hebdomadæ Sanctæ by de Victoria, Requiem by Gabriel Fauré, Te Deum by Otto Olsen, several Mozart and Haydn Masses and more than three hundred anthems, motets and spiritual songs by various composers from the Renaissance to today, many in bi-lingual editions and works with orchestra.

He has also composed several choral anthems and other works, including Occasional Cantata: "Discorso alla Luna", written and performed in Lugano in October 2012 for the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. He has also written many arrangements, including those for the International Pueri Cantores Congresses in Granada (2012) and Rome (2015-16). For many years he was often seen sculling on Lake Lugano [winning twice the yearly distance prize – notably 3016 km in 1999] and for almost 30 years taught alpine skiing to middle school boys and girls. He conducted the Papal Mass in St. Peter's on 1st January 2016 for the International Pueri Cantores Congress – Rome, which was televised on Mondovision.

Is certification available?

RSCM (and other) examinations are available for those who request or need certification and many of our choristers – to their delight – have frequented the very high quality RSCM choral and cathedral courses in the UK. Ex-choristers may also request a personal testimony from the choirmaster and the Cathedral administration, which includes a technical evaluation and other references as may be necessary.