

## **Protecting a Choral Legacy: A National Call for UNESCO Recognition**

### **Cathedral Music Trust and Partners Urge UNESCO to Protect Choral Heritage**

The charity Cathedral Music Trust has launched a national campaign, representing a collective voice of organisations from across the choral and cathedral music sector to secure UNESCO Living Heritage recognition for English Sacred Choral Music.

A centuries-old tradition renewed with every generation, is now being put forward for inclusion in the UK's contributions to UNESCO's Living Heritage inventory, overseen by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to ensure the distinctive beauty of English Sacred Choral Music is protected and continues to flourish.

Called upon by Royalty to set the mood at moments of national significance, choral music is regarded as one of the glories of the UK's cultural living heritage with a global reputation for excellence. Far from being a relic of the past, what makes English Sacred Choral Music unique is its continuity. Celebrated not only for its beloved historic repertoire but for the ongoing performance of its music in cathedrals, parish churches, chapels, and communities across the UK.

The living tradition is sustained by a wide network of musicians, educators, clergy, volunteers and communities, yet its influence extends beyond its central role in daily and seasonal worship. From the timeless strains of Evensong at cathedrals, parish churches, and chapels to great choral compositions, it has inspired classical and modern composers and music writers, to shape a wider musical landscape across genres, generations and denominations. English Sacred Choral Music plays a vital role in musical education within schools fostering connections, while continuing to flourish in choirs, communities, and other settings, remaining a cornerstone of the UK's international reputation for choral singing and shared cultural experience.

UNESCO recognition would represent more than symbolic honour.

It would help safeguard the future of the English sacred choral music by raising more awareness, strengthening support across the choral and church music sector and the wider cultural sphere, and further highlighting its global significance.



For Cathedral Music Trust, it would reaffirm its role as a national advocate and champion for enriching lives through music education and choral excellence, supporting a living tradition sustained by many, for the benefit of all.

**Emphasising the importance of English sacred choral music, Harry Christophers CBE, President of Cathedral Music Trust, comments:**

*“Our sacred choral tradition is second to none. It is the envy of the world and is a tradition that has been going for well over 500 years. The music from those days sounds as modern as anything written today, and to gain UNESCO Living Heritage recognition would ensure that the music, both written in the past and the present, continues to be celebrated and sustained for centuries to come, alongside the many choirs, organists, directors of music and all who make this world-class tradition possible in their pursuit of excellence.*

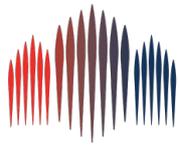
*I had the good fortune to be a chorister at Canterbury Cathedral, where I was deeply engaged with the English sacred choral tradition, and I can safely say that without that amazing experience, and being immersed in such a strong tradition, I would not be where I am today.”*

**Speaking about the global reputation of English sacred choral music renowned English composer, conductor, and producer Sir John Rutter says:**

*“When I guest-conduct abroad as a representative of our choral tradition, I am treated like a Brazilian footballer or a Hungarian chess master. Britain is recognised around the world as a crucible of choral excellence, an accolade that needs to be acknowledged.”*

**Jonathan Mayes CEO at Cathedral Music Trust added:**

*“Choral music is a one of the UK's greatest cultural exports, with our many world-class choirs and musicians enjoying an unparalleled global reputation. Gaining UNESCO Living Heritage recognition will support the work that we, and our partners undertake to sustain this living tradition, helping to ensure that we continue to build on the deeply rooted history and profound contemporary relevance of cathedral music.”*



The campaign highlights a simple truth: English Sacred Choral Music is not only a jewel of British culture but also a living heritage of global significance worthy of recognition, protection, and celebration.

This movement to safeguard cathedral music has been developed following extensive consultation with organisations and individuals across the sector, who have collectively agreed on the title and description for UNESCO to consider. These include the Royal College of Organists, Cathedral Organists Association, Conference of Catholic Directors of Music, Royal School of Church Music, Choir Schools Association, Church Commissioners, Association of English Cathedrals, Rodolfus Foundation, the 3 Choirs Festival and Professor Simone Krüger Bridge, Liverpool John Moores University.

Together, Cathedral Music Trust and these organisations are calling on supporters, congregations, and communities to play their part. Sing, attend, donate, or simply share the music, everyone has a role to play, and every action matters to future-proof and protect this living heritage.

**You can make an immediate difference by adding your name to the letter of support here: [UNESCO Living Heritage call-to-action campaign](#)**

Further information about the campaign and updates will be added to Cathedral Music Trust website here: [UNESCO Living Heritage](#)

**ENDS**

---



## Notes to Editors

### About Cathedral Music Trust

Cathedral Music Trust is a national grant-giving charity dedicated to supporting the extraordinary musicians who bring cathedral music to life, enriching communities across the UK and Ireland. Founded in 1956 as Friends of Cathedral Music, the Trust has positively impacted the lives of thousands of choristers, organists, composers, and musicians.

Through innovative programmes, sector-leading training, advocacy, and research, the Trust champions excellence in choral and organ music while ensuring it remains accessible to everyone. Our vision is to nurture a vibrant choral culture that inspires performers, audiences, and communities alike, safeguarding the UK's living cathedral music heritage for generations to come.

### About the Timeline Process for English Sacred Choral Music – UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)

#### Stage 1 - Expression of Interest (Already Underway)

Cathedral Music Trust has submitted an Expression of Interest on behalf of several partner organisations. This initial step allows organisations working in the same cultural practice to connect and collaborate where submissions are similar, strengthening potential applications.

Submissions: [UNESCO Expression of Interest Submissions](#)

#### Stage 2 - Call for formal Submissions

The official deadline for submissions to the UK Intangible Cultural Heritage inventory is Friday 27 March 2026.

#### Stage 3 - Publication of Inventories

The first inventories are expected to be published 4–6 months after the submission deadline (approximately August–September 2026), depending on the volume of submissions received.

#### Stage 4 - Creation of the UK ICH Inventory

Following acceptance of submissions, the next stage will be to compile the official inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage in the UK, documenting and recognising each living cultural practice.

#### Stage 5 - Safeguarding and Ongoing Support

The final stage will focus on the long-term safeguarding of the UK's intangible cultural heritage, ensuring traditions like English Sacred Choral Music continue to thrive for future generations.

#### For further information contact:

Laura Cottrell, Digital & Communications Manager, Cathedral Music Trust.

[laura.cottrell@cathedralmusictrust.org.uk](mailto:laura.cottrell@cathedralmusictrust.org.uk)

020 3151 6096