

**The Choir of St Giles' Cathedral** is an adult choir of thirty singers drawn from a wide variety of walks of life from the City of Edinburgh and further afield. Their main task is the singing of the two Sunday morning choral services, the 10 o'clock Holy Communion and the 11.30 Morning Service, under the direction of The Master of the Music, Michael Harris. In addition to this they sing on many special civic and national occasions, such as the Installations of the Order of the Thistle. St Giles' Cathedral, founded in 1124, is situated on the Royal Mile and has been at the centre of Scottish history for many centuries.

Whilst the raison d'être of the choir is the leading of the worship on a weekly basis in St Giles' Cathedral, from time to time the choir undertakes outside engagements, as well as joining with the choirs of St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, Edinburgh, and Paisley Abbey for an annual joint Evensong.

The choir's repertoire is wide ranging, from the polyphony of composers such as Tallis, Byrd, Palestrina and Lassus, through Bach motets and music of the Romantic era to contemporary composers such as John Tavener, Gabriel Jackson, Cecilia Macdowall and Sally Beamish. The choir organises a number of fund-raising social events, and enjoys singing secular repertoire from time to time as well in venues other than St Giles'.



In 2004 they undertook their first foreign tour, to the USA. This was followed by a tour to south-west France in October 2006, USA and Canada in 2009 and northern Italy in 2011. In 2013 they enjoyed a highly successful tour to Switzerland, the Black Forest and Alsace. In July 2015 they will be giving concerts in Bavaria.

They have broadcast on many occasions over the years on both radio and television, including BBC Choral Evensong. In June

this year they released two new discs on St Giles' own Aegidius label, *O clap your hands* AGD 001 and *On Christmas Night* AGD 002.

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**Michael Harris** has been Organist and Master of the Music of St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh, since 1996; he is also a Lecturer at the Ian Tomlin Academy of Music at Edinburgh Napier University. Prior to moving to Edinburgh he held posts as Sub-Organist of Leeds Parish Church and Assistant Organist of Canterbury Cathedral.



As Organist of St Giles' Cathedral he hosts many organ concerts on the famous Rieger organ (built in 1992) and his work has involved him in numerous recordings and broadcasts, both for Television and Radio. Under his direction the Cathedral Choir has visited the USA, Canada, France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy and Greece.

He has made a number of solo recordings, including a disc of the music of William Wolstenholme, released in 2011. He has directed the Cathedral Choir in a series of CD recordings, with two new recordings, on St Giles' own label, Aegidius, released in 2014 to critical acclaim.

Michael has given recitals at many venues in Germany, Belgium, Italy, Norway, Poland, USA, Australia and New Zealand, as well as in the UK, where he has played in many of the major venues. He was Music Director of the Scottish Chamber Choir from 1998 to 2010, and is currently director of the a cappella vocal ensemble, Cantica Alba, who have given concerts in Scotland, Germany and Malta, and have just returned from a tour of Denmark.

He is also much involved in organ and choral education. He has led a number of study tours to Germany, with a special interest in the organs of Thüringen and Saxony. His Edinburgh Napier University duties include supervision of final year performance students, and directing the University Chamber Choir.

**Peter Backhouse** (Assistant Organist) began his musical training as a chorister in the choir of York Minster. Later he studied music at Edinburgh University where he graduated BMus (Hons), having won the 3<sup>rd</sup> Year Class Medal as well as the Tovey Memorial Prize for his organ playing. He is a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists and holder of their Choir Training Diploma, as well as an Associate of the Royal College of Music. In 1977 he was appointed Assistant Organist at St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral. This post, with its daily accompaniment of services, as well as many concerts, recitals, broadcasts and recordings, kept him busy for over 20 years.



In 2000 he was appointed Assistant Organist at St Giles' Cathedral, and combines this post with teaching music at The Edinburgh Academy. He has served on the Council of The Edinburgh Society of Organists for many years, including two as President. He supports the work of the Royal School of Church Music and was for a number of years an organ adviser in the Edinburgh area for the Scottish Federation of Organists.

He has played for services and given recitals in many cathedrals, including Westminster Abbey, Canterbury, Durham, Ripon and St Albans Cathedrals, St George's Chapel Windsor, King's College Cambridge, the Temple Church London and recently at York Minster. As a continuo player he has played with all the major professional ensembles in Scotland.

Railways have interested him all his life, and he is a qualified signaller on the Bo'ness and Kinneil Railway. His photographs, principally of organs, churches and walking holidays, continue to be published, and he tries to find time to enjoy cricket and walking.