



Music @ Saint Bartholomew's

<http://www.stbartholomews.ie>

January 2014



- Trip to Prague
- RSCM Awards Service
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Prague Diary (1)

December 5th 2013, the girls and men of Saint Bartholomew's embark on a great adventure to sing in the Annual Advent Choral Meeting in the chilly capital of the Czech Republic. Our story begins early one Thursday.

The morning was brisk, the traffic was bad, and two choristers were undeniably late to the airport. After this rocky beginning, the choir swarmed through Dublin's Terminal 2. Some were lost momentarily on the way, but eventually, the whole gang arrived in Prague Airport. We made ourselves more than accustomed to the bag retrieval area, while some girls ran back to the plane in search of an elusive purse. Planking was widespread, selfies were taken too often, and some choristers even claim they got heatstroke during those tremulous few minutes. After meeting Stacy, our guide

for the weekend, we headed directly to the Hotel Mánes. When most had unpacked, we congregated in the lobby to go find a traditional Czech dinner experience. The food was dumplings, dumplings, and more dumplings, with some side orders of honey wine shots.

Despite many warnings from parents, choir directors, and the lady at the Czech-in desk, some girls were a little unprepared for the sheer cold of the wind that hit us. The evening was free(zing), and we were allowed to split off into our respective groups for wandering purposes. Coffee was found within 41.76 seconds, and we huddled for warmth, fangirling over the fact that we were indeed in Prague. A movie night was inevitable, and that night we kicked it off strong with multiple movies

and one girl nearly dying of sleep deprivation. Knocks on the door came at about 11:00 pm, when we were reminded that we needed to be up early the next morning for singing (they clearly never had to stay up all night writing an article for *Music @ Saint Bartholomews...*). We took the law into our own hands and got at least five hours of delicious rest, broken by some 2:00 am trips to the shops for snacks.

Champagne flavoured energy drinks were our vice and friend for the mornings to come. Naturally, with the excitement ahead, some had trouble actually sleeping at all, and ended up waking up every hour on the hour, until it was so early that breakfast had begun. Eventually, everyone traipsed drowsily down for some breakfast. Popping throat lozenges like it's nobody's



Prague Diary (2)

business, a certain soloist sat in fear of death by embarrassment. Thankfully, moments later Tristan reminded her that she wasn't singing her solo until tomorrow, when her voice would be even worse.

Stacy brought us on a nice little jaunt through the city to our first location, Saint Nicolas Church, in Old Town Square. We were singing in the first concert of the Advent Choral Meeting. Feeling important, we waltzed into the stunning church and headed straight to get changed for our first Prague-tice of the trip. Before the concert began, we took full advantage of a small break, and roamed around the Christmas markets mid snow flurry, doing some impromptu dancing. There was confusion at times as to whether we were really a choir, or just a cleverly disguised and highly uncoordi-

nated dance troupe.

Three choirs sang before us, and we sat in the back listening in awe, and even joining in for a rendition of Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah*. After our short performance, we were freed into the square. In search of lunch, we wandered off immediately, which unfortunately meant we missed the first group photo of the trip.

While glancing around the town and feeling the Christmas vibe seeping slowly into our very souls, we had an overwhelming urge to sing *Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas* in the middle of the snow. Deciding that rehearsal for such an event was necessary, we headed straight back to the hotel. Minus Stacy and with no help from Google maps, we didn't get lost once, which was a surprise to everyone involved, and a massive plus for Team Sniffles

(all the best supervision groups need a team name). Recordings of what happened next have been deemed too distressing to be released to the general public, with one report of bleeding eardrums.

After recovering from fits of laughter, we readied ourselves for what would become the best walking tour we had ever been on. We met the rest of our group, who had just flown in, and set off straight away. Following Stacy's bobbing blue hat and re-enacting the ministry of silly walks, we tried not to feel the bitter wind. Every single time that we moved off, after listening to Stacy talking about our surrounding, we would lose almost half our group. This added much to our amusement, especially when a certain conductor started to describe where we were, using facts we had learned sec-



Saint Nicholas Church



Walking Tour

Prague Diary (3)

onds earlier. When we reached Old Town Square, the snow was dancing around our heads. In our moment of weakness, Prague decided to attack. Apparently, in the Czech Republic there is an old tale that naughty children will get captured by the devil at Christmas time and put into a sack. This was demonstrated by a lovely fellow with his face painted black and holding a chain. We would have lost a few choristers here, if it wasn't for Stacy's ingenuity of just pushing him away.

Once we returned to the warmth of the hotel, we collapsed, while a selection of the group departed for the infamous Blacklight Theatre for some Modern Interpretive Dance. We stayed in however, singing incredibly loudly, and watching the city from the balcony. At midnight, the snow started to stick. We ran

outside faster than we could put our shoes on, and found the men of the choir in a matter of minutes. The ambush we attempted didn't go quite to plan, as we all fell over on arrival, but we did get some good hits in. Cleverly, Mr Russcher went inside to avoid the worst of the attack. Alliances were formed, betrayed, and formed again. The English tourists who joined us were pelted, and one stray snowball hit a local who proceeded to punch a signpost.

Reaching breakfast by a healthy twenty minutes before we were meant to be outside and ready, Strepils and energy drinks were being dealt under the tables. We slid our way to church number two, which was a much more comfortable sing. With the power of the tenors and basses behind us, we sang our hearts out, particularly enjoying Mark Bowyer's solo

in *Mighty Wonder*. Bravos were heard throughout the crowd.

After our short bout of singing, we had some relaxation time before all the choirs came together for some common singing in languages everyone knew well, such as Czech, and African. To heal the voices, we dined on warm cups of honey mead, while wrapped in blankets in the depths of the Christmas markets.

The common singing was hilarious to say the least. We were sitting at the back of the church, and as we were attempting to remember how to pronounce the jumble of letters in front of us, we fell ever so slightly out of time from the other choirs, much to the enjoyment of the conductor. The ending of *Jingle Bells* was solely directed towards us.

After a quick jaunt to another Christmas market,



The Devil at Christmas



Messages in the snow

Prague Diary (4)

we began carol singing some of the classic old tunes to an ever growing crowd. The snow wasn't as kind to our cassocks, as it was to us, which were notably dirtier around the bottoms than they had been before our walk.

We were finished our singing for the whole trip now, and all that was left was the dinner cruise. Suddenly, the thought struck us, 'Don't we usually find ridiculous presents for the choir director on these sorts of trips?' We had three hours, zero ideas, and five presents to buy. Being the pragmatists that we are, this was no bother. After questioning certain people 'in the know', we found a deliciously soft and suitably embarrassing hat, lots of chocolate and nothing illegal at all.

On the cruise were two other choirs. This of course led

to a lot of drunken singing on the part of the adults, while the girls hung their heads in disappointment, and learnt some Croatian in the bathroom with the other choir. One thing I completely forgot to account for on the trip was the fact that when you buy presents for people, you're expected to make a speech. Some mumbled thanks later, we were back on the tram home.

Sleep was abandoned that night in Team Sniffles. We didn't want to go home the next day, so we made the most of the time we had left. We loaded up on questionably named energy drinks, dyed our hair pink, and sang songs of our adventures off our balcony to anyone who would listen.

Our worst fears had come. It was our last day in Prague and we had to pack up our things before one last trip

outside. We went by tram to Prague Castle and spent a few minutes trying to make the guards of the castle laugh before beginning our tour. Some taller members of our group managed to watch the changing of the guard before we left again. We did make friends with a particularly inebriated man who we would've gotten to join our choir if it weren't for the language barrier.

I'd like to thank, on behalf of my team, and the rest of the choir: Tristan for being so laid back for the entire trip; every single supervisor for putting up with their choristers for better and for worse; and all the men who joined us on this roller coaster of greatness. I'd also like to apologise to everyone for shouting 'WE'RE IN PRAGUE' every twenty minutes or so.

Cliona Rogan



Prague Music

Over the course of our trip to Prague, the choir sang in two formal concerts, one Christmas market, and a selection of other places, including the back of a boat and a fair few hotel rooms. As always seems to be the case, our singing only improved as our trip went on.

Our first concert, sung by the Sopranos and Altos, involved many staples of our repertoire, including Fauré's *Messe Basse* and *Tantum Ergo*. We also sang carols taken from Britten's *Ceremony of Carols*, including *Wolcum Yole!* and *Deo Gratias*.

Our second concert, this time with the Tenors and Basses, was more of a chance

to show off the versatility of the choir. From early 20th Century Bairstow's *Let all Mortal Flesh Keep Silence* to traditional carols, with a contemporary setting of *Gaudete*, and two more soulful songs, *Mighty Wonder* and *Remember O thou Man* thrown in. We finished the second concert with everyone's favourite *Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas*, made all the more special by some very enthusiastic singing from our alto line!

Our two formal concerts finished, the choir was able to relax a little and really enjoy singing with (or in some cases against) the other choirs,

though whether they enjoyed singing with us is a question still to be answered. This common singing involved a selection of traditional hymns of many cultures and in many languages, including Czech. Following this, the choir marched to a Christmas market, and sang a selection of Christmas Carols, including *Good King Wenceslas* and *Adeste Fideles*. Our singing wasn't quite finished yet though, and dinner on the boat on Saturday night led to a memorable sing-song among the adults, joined by the girls for Duruflé's *Ubi Caritas*.

Sallyanne MacCarthy

The "Stanford" Concert

One of the challenges in publishing this magazine is figuring out how to say something unique and (hopefully) interesting about an event that takes place every year with only minor adjustments. Whatever you might choose to call it, the annual *Concert of Carols and Festive Readings* has been taking place in Saint Bartholomew's since 1989.

The decision to tinker with a successful formula was forced upon us last year

due to the unavailability of Alan Stanford. His rather large shoes were filled for us by former chorister and presidential candidate, Senator David Norris, who performed the usual readings in his own unique style.

This year we were delighted to invite Tim Thurston of Lyric FM, also a former member of the choir, to present the evening. Tim produced his own choice of readings interspersed with

some of the old favourites. The choir also tweaked their programme, with eight new carols, six totally new to the repertoire, and two that were last heard in Saint Bartholomew's in 2006 and 2010 respectively.

Though we didn't actually sell out, we managed to shift almost three hundred tickets, allowing us to raise a sizable amount of money for both church and choir funds.

Richard Bannister

Prague Highlights

My recent trip to Prague, on my first choir tour with Saint Bartholomew's, was fabulous, not least because I had never been to Prague, but more because it was a welcome break from college (where I'm a full-time 'mature' student). Most of all, it allowed me to concentrate on visiting a beautiful city whilst doing something I love – singing!

With my partner in tow, we were excited to visit a new city. Our first impressions did not disappoint. Not just the architecture, but the general buzz of the festive atmosphere was really palpable. Prague has a special something to attract everyone. It was cold; there was no doubt about that! But in between rehearsal and per-

formances, we explored the city, meandering through the little streets and squares, and admired some fabulous buildings and churches.

Of course along the way, we tried some of the local stuff, *klobasa*, the very nice Czech sausage; and *svarák*, the locally made mulled wine (probably the best I've ever tasted) – all this experienced at the local Christmas markets in the squares. Christmas trees and snow added to the very special atmosphere. Evenings were free for us to explore the local hostelries with some members of the group. Czech beer does not disappoint the taste buds, especially at a fraction of the prices you would pay in Dublin. Some of us did

try the more potent green stuff (absinthe) – which is not for the fainthearted.

Our final morning was spent on further explorations of the side streets, looking for souvenirs, coffee (there's always a Starbucks when you need one) and wishing that we could stay a few more days to see more. It was a fabulous, albeit too short, trip, well organised and supervised by a number of great people. Congratulations to all involved – I will treasure my memories of Prague and especially the fabulous acoustic in Saint Salvator's Church, where I sang my *pièce de résistance* solo in Bob Chilcott's *Mighty Wonder*!

Mark Bowyer











Prague Theatre

Blacklight Theatre is a style of performance that originated in Asia, and has since become a specialty (and considered by many to be a must-see) of Prague. That's according to Google anyway. I'm not sure how many members of the choir would agree with that.

Our trip to the Blacklight panto was memorable to say the least. We were treated to a charming story involving two robbers, a comically incompetent police officer, and a suitcase of cash and Class A drugs. Being the Blacklight theatre, this story was interspersed with modern interpretive dance. These dances involved brightly-coloured shapes and dancers on a blacked-out stage,

moving in an abstract way. Black lighting is also used extensively to create an illusion of floating.

On the whole, it's quite an unsettling experience. The panto scenes were done almost completely through mime (so as to eliminate any language barriers for non-Czech speaking audiences), and relied heavily on slapstick for humour.

Perhaps the highlight of the night was watching the reactions of our fellow audience-members, and knowing that both their baffled and confused faces, and their occasional (albeit awkward) outbursts of laughter must have mirrored our own.

Sallyanne MacCarthy

Things Choristers Don't Say...

"The sopranos, realising the descant is a harmony, sang it delicately so as not to overshadow the melody."

"I've never once met a fidgety boy chorister."

"Advent is such a great time to bring out all those Rutter gems we haven't sung in a while."

"As an alto, I just love it when our entire part in hymns consists of an endless string of D's..."

"As a non-soprano, I hate singing the descants at Christmas."

"There's a really good recording of this on YouTube by an American choir."

"Fauré wrote a Libera Me? Don't think I've heard it..."

"Boy, do I hope there is a nice long sermon today."

For more, visit:

<http://tinyurl.com/pw46wuj>



Image Theatre Prague



Image Theatre Prague

RSCM Awards Service

A record number of candidates participated in the RSCM Voice for Life examinations this year. More than forty choristers were examined at bronze, silver and gold level. A number of successful candidates attended an awards service, which was held in Saint Bartholomew's on November 9th. This year we held two award services – one in Dublin and one in Limerick. This is something we will do again as numbers increase, and candidates from different parts of the island take part.

We were delighted to welcome members from Saint Mary's Pro-Cathedral, Armagh Cathedral, Saint Gall's Church, Carnalea and our own choir from Saint Bartholomew's, all of whom joined us for a service

of choral evensong. The service was led by Fr Andrew (who gave out the certificates), assisted by Mark Bowyer. Tristan Russcher conducted the choir, and David Grealy played the organ. Music included *Noon in E minor* and the anthem was *Brewer, O praise the Lord*.

There were a high number of bronze and silver awards, as well as a record four successes at gold level, all from Saint Bartholomew's. This is an amazing success, not only for Saint Bartholomew's, but also for RSCM Ireland. The continuing high standard of those who passed their examinations is to be commended.

The Voice for Life training scheme provides a framework for choral singers to de-

velop their vocal skills, their musical and liturgical understanding, and their knowledge of repertoire. The scheme comes with a range of teaching material and supporting resources, and gives plenty of advice on the practicalities of running a choir. The object is to encourage choir trainers and teachers to work with their groups more effectively, and to help singers grow as people as well as musicians. For more information about Voice for Life why not take a look at the Voice for Life webpage: www.rscmireland.com/voiceforlife/ or ask Mr Russcher for more information!

Mark Bowyer



Concert with Dublin Symphony Orchestra

On 30th November our choristers joined with the Dublin Symphony Orchestra in their annual Christmas concert in Saint Bartholomew's. Isabelle McGeough gave an impeccable performance of *Suantraí*, supported by the girls, men and orchestra, and the boys had the opportunity to perform *See amid the winter's snow*. With

more than a hundred singers between the combined ensembles, it was a bit of a tight squeeze; but the stirring rendition of *O Holy Night*, as performed by our boys, girls, men and full orchestra, was fully appreciated by the enthusiastic audience, gaining an immediate standing ovation.

Tristan Russcher

Chapel Royal Concert

On 24th November the girls and men of the choir held a fundraising concert in the Chapel Royal, Dublin Castle. Mary Heffernan, the mother of Paris (one of our girl choristers), and a key member of OPW staff, convinced the castle administration that we should perform in the newly-restored Chapel Royal, a venue well-known to Dubliners, and a common sight in the TV series 'The Tudors'.

The superb surroundings lifted our performances of *The Wexford Carol*, *Gaudete* and *The Twelve Days of Christmas*, along with highlights from Benjamin Britten's *Ceremony of Carols*. Serving not only as a dry run for our Christmas concerts, it was a great pleasure to sing in one of Dublin's most historic landmarks in front of an appreciative audience.

Tristan Russcher

Out of Silence

Newly formed string ensemble, "Out of Silence", performed a concert in Saint Bartholomew's on Tuesday 19th November.

The eleven musicians – six violins, three violas, three cellos, and a double bass – filled our church with glorious Bach, Mozart and Tchaikovsky, as well as some more recent music by composer Avro Pärt.

It was a great pity that there were not more people in the audience to appreciate the performance; be assured that this was a professional group of musicians. Hopefully they will perform again in Saint Bartholomew's some day.

Bobby Barden



Dublin Symphony Orchestra



Chapel Royal

Television Broadcast

The choirs of Saint Bartholomew's have appeared on national television on various occasions, most recently when the boys and men broadcast a service in January 2008, conducted by the then director of music, Peter Parshall.

In December 2013, the boys, girls, and men joined together to record *The Wexford Carol* as part of RTE's "Carols from the Castle", scheduled to go out at 6:15 pm on Christmas Eve. The choir was asked to ar-

rive at 6:00 pm on Wednesday 4th December, although it was almost an hour later before we were allowed to enter the Chapel Royal – and another thirty minutes before we began to sing.

Once things were underway, the task was completed almost painlessly. A number of full takes were made, providing the production crew with enough footage for the finished product.

Richard Bannister

Safeguarding Trust

The Church of Ireland has a policy document entitled *Safeguarding Trust*, which can be found online on the Church of Ireland website. A number of copies are held in the parish, one of which is available to the public in the vestry of the church. The document sets out a code of practice to protect the welfare of all children and vulnerable adults in our care. In this parish we aim to keep the policy under continual review, and, from time to time make you as parishioners aware of it, and of our commitment to it. If you ever have cause to be concerned about the welfare of any child or vulnerable adult within the parish, you can con-

tact any of the panel members in confidence. The panel members are Niamh Harty, Bernard Ward and Andrew McCroskery. These names and telephone numbers are available on a sheet on the notice board in the church porch. The panel is not only for the reporting of concerns, but also serves as a point of contact for suggestions. Please don't be afraid to contact us if you feel that there is an area of child welfare in the parish that needs revision, or an area where we could improve. In the meantime, I encourage you to familiarise yourself with the contents of the Safeguarding Trust policy.

Andrew McCroskery

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Submissions

Submissions for future issues of this magazine and all enquiries about advertising should be sent to the editor.

Friends of the Choir

This magazine is sent by post to friends of the choir; for further details, contact the Administrator, Claire McIlrath on 01-6688522 or admin@stbartholomews.ie.

Future events

A full schedule of services and events is available on the diary page of the parish web site, located at <http://www.stbartholomews.ie/>.

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