

## Three Choirs Festival Announces Programme for 2026 Edition

The Three Choirs Festival returns to Gloucester from 25 July – 1 August 2026, bringing eight days of world-class music to the city in a programme that celebrates Elgar's enduring legacy, champions living composers, and celebrates a landmark moment for Gloucester Cathedral's refurbished and renewed organ.

In the 75th anniversary year of the Elgar Society, audiences can hear some of the composer's best-loved works, including the *First Symphony*, *Sea Pictures*, and *Cockaigne*, with the festival closing with his choral masterpiece *The Dream of Gerontius*. The programme also features a special lecture and the launch of a new book, *The Importance of Elgar*, with essays by over sixty composers, conductors, performers, and commentators, including Gloucester Artistic Director Adrian Partington and musicologist Christopher Morley.

Central to the Gloucester 2026 Festival will be the Cathedral's new organ, which will be completed this summer. At once the oldest and newest in the country, the instrument takes centre stage in Poulenc's *Organ Concerto*, Janáček's electrifying *Glagolitic Mass*, and features in the Celebrity Organ Recital by Thomas Ospital. A dedicated talk, *The Gloucester Organ: A New Era*, explores the story behind this remarkable project. At venues outside of the Cathedral, a continued series of recitals by young performers from the Royal College of Organists showcases the next generation of talent.

Whilst celebrating the legacy of the world's longest running festival, the Three Choirs Festival continues its commitment to living composers. Gloucester-born Gavin Higgins, the Festival's inaugural Associate Composer, premieres a new setting of the *Magnificat* and *Nunc dimittis*, sung by the three cathedral choirs and broadcast live on BBC Radio 3. Works by Cecilia McDowall, Cheryl Frances-Hoad, and Judith Weir feature across the week, demonstrating the Festival's role as a champion of new choral music.

Large-scale choral-orchestral masterworks form the backbone of the evening concerts set against the awe-inspiring backdrop of Gloucester Cathedral. These include Mozart's *Requiem*, Beethoven's *Mass in C*, Monteverdi's *Vespers*, and Rachmaninov's *Vespers*. These are performed by the Festival's own choirs – the combined Three Cathedral Choirs, Festival Chorus and Youth Choir – alongside visiting choirs and ensembles, La Serenissima and Ex Cathedra, Sydney's Philharmonia Choirs as well as resident orchestra the Philharmonia Orchestra.

Internationally celebrated artists including Roderick Williams, Ian Bostridge, Mark Padmore, Charles Owen, VOCES8, and APOLLO5 appear in chamber recitals and late-night concerts, offering audiences the chance to experience music in both the grandeur of the Cathedral nave and the intimacy of Gloucester's historic venues.

Participation and community remain fundamental to the Festival's ethos. Come and Sing workshops invite audiences to take part in Mozart's *Requiem* and a full cathedral Evensong, while the Gloucestershire Academy of Music collaborates with young musicians and community

choirs in a concert exploring music and wellbeing. Free services, open rehearsals, and accessible family events ensure that the Festival continues to welcome audiences of all ages and backgrounds.

Beyond the concert hall, Gloucester itself becomes part of the story. A series of city walks explores Roman, Saxon and monastic Gloucester, while talks examine composers' lives and legacies. Outdoor theatre, a silent film with live organ improvisation, and late-night performances create a week-long cultural celebration across the city.

*"The 2026 Festival reflects everything that makes Three Choirs unique", says Chief Executive David Francis. "The richness of the choral tradition, the excitement of new music, and the extraordinary sense of community that brings performers and audiences together each year. The debut of Gloucester Cathedral's new organ, alongside the return of Elgar's greatest works, makes this a particularly special year."*

Gloucester Artistic Director Adrian Partington said: *"I am really looking forward to this year's Festival. The vision of the Festival is to enrich lives through the power of choral music and to bring people together through shared, inspirational experiences. I have created a programme which allows all parts of our community to come together across eight days in one of Europe's great buildings, be they visiting artists, choral singers, participants or audience members. I can't think of another festival which has such a clear focus on great choral masterpieces, and I am proud that the Gloucester 2026 Festival is showcasing an array of these exceptional works"*.

Booking for the 2026 Three Choirs Festival opens from 16 March for supporters and 13 April for the general public. Full programme details can be found at [3choirs.org](https://3choirs.org).

**\*\*END OF RELEASE\*\***

A folder of relevant images can be accessed [here](#).

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**NOTES TO EDITORS**

**Artistic Directors:**

Adrian Partington **Gloucester (2026)**  
Samuel Hudson **Worcester (2027)**  
Andrew Reid **Hereford (2028)**

1. The **Three Choirs Festival** has its origins at the end of the 17th century in visits by the lay clerks of Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester to one another's cathedrals for joint services and informal singing. More formal annual 'music meetings' can be traced back to around 1715 and have continued ever since, interrupted only by the two world wars and in 2020 the coronavirus pandemic, making this the oldest continuously running classical music festival in the world. The event rotates between the three cathedral cities on a three-year cycle. The next festival takes place in Gloucester 25 July – 1 August 2026 and is the 298<sup>th</sup> Three Choirs Festival.

The vision of the Three Choirs Festival is for the power of choral music to enrich lives through shared inspirational experiences.

2. The **Three Choirs Festival Chorus** is drawn from auditioned singers in and around Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester, with the largest contingent each year coming from the host city. Amateur choral singers have been taking part in the festival since the middle of the 19th century to augment the cathedral choirs of each city. In 2010, the **Three Choirs Festival Youth Choir** was established for singers aged 14-25.

3. There are many ways to get involved with the Three Choirs Festival. To find out more about opportunities to **volunteer**, joining **Three Choirs Festival Chorus**, or **Youth Choir**, or performing on the **Bandstand**, please visit us at <https://3choirs.org/join-in>.