



Application Pack

Ref: WA338

Assistant Organist, Westminster Abbey

Salary £46,800 per annum

Full time – Permanent
6 days per week

Closing Date: Monday 15 July, noon



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A Letter from the Organist and Master of the Choristers



Thank you for your interest in the role of Assistant Organist at Westminster Abbey.

I have been directing the music here since January 2023, having inherited an exceptional group of singers, organists and administrative colleagues from my distinguished predecessor, James O'Donnell. The Music Department is fortunate to enjoy great support from the Dean and Chapter. It is a very happy and mutually supportive team; these qualities are important to me, and I like to work in a collaborative way, both within the department and with colleagues across the Abbey.

Matthew Jorysz has been the Abbey's Assistant Organist for eight years. He has contributed greatly to the Abbey's musical success during that time, not least when playing at the State Funeral of Queen Elizabeth II and the Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla. He has been appointed to succeed Peter Holder as Sub-Organist, when Peter moves on to be Organist and Official Student at Christ Church, Oxford in September. I count myself exceptionally fortunate to have had two such talented, kind and wise colleagues as Sub-Organist and Assistant Organist during my first terms at the Abbey.

In April, our Organ Scholar Carolyn Craig moved on to become Assistant Director of Music at Wells Cathedral. From September, our Organ Scholar will be Paul Greally, currently holding a similar post at King's College Cambridge. Greg Morris has been Director of Music at St Margaret's Church since 2019. The Abbey is unusual in having such a strong team of professional organists within the Music Department. This reflects the fact that the Abbey is an exceptionally busy place, which enables us to provide fulfilling and stimulating musical opportunities for all of them. During May and June our present Assistant Organist is conducting 11 services and playing for 28 services.

Former Abbey Assistant Organists have gone on to a variety of musical careers, including some international recitalists and a number of senior cathedral Director of Music posts. We are taking this opportunity to increase the role of Assistant Organist from part-time to full-time. The aim is that, for suitable candidates, it could provide an excellent prelude to running a cathedral music department elsewhere. I am looking for a flexible, musically agile colleague who is not fazed if asked to play or conduct unfamiliar and demanding repertoire at short notice. Strong sight-reading, improvising and other keyboard skills are crucial.

At the heart of our work are the daily services, the choristers' general musical education, and being in constant readiness for any great State occasions which might arise. The successful applicant will be joining us near the start of an exciting new chapter for the choir and for the Abbey's music more widely. A new Head started at the Abbey Choir School in January 2024, as did a new General

Manager for the Music Department. We will soon have new people in the roles of Sub-Organist, Assistant Organist and Organ Scholar. The St Margaret's Choristers, a choir for teenage girls aged between 11 and 17, was inaugurated last September. The first joint service involving our boy and girl choristers took place on June 23rd.

Abbey Choir Concerts this year have included *Messiah*, *St Matthew Passion* and *Creation* performed in collaboration with the Academy of Ancient Music, St James' Baroque and Britten Sinfonia. We plan to broaden the range of concerts in the Abbey and to build our digital presence, not least through regular live-streaming. Our Assistant Organist will contribute significantly to the creation of new filmed digital content. I hope the coming years will also see a development of musical partnerships, through which we can share music-making with pupils at London schools. The Head and I are keen to strengthen pastoral and teaching links between Choir and Choir School; the Assistant Organist will play an important role in this. Our approach to teaching and nurturing the choristers must be child-centric.

I am hoping that our appointee will share with the Sub-Organist and me in the creation and realisation of a compelling strategy for the future of the music here. It is hoped that the imagination and creativity of the Assistant Organist will enable them to work with other Abbey departments in meaningful ways. I am absolutely committed to the central, primary goal of providing outstanding musical contributions to the Abbey's liturgy eight times a week. I am seeking a colleague who will empathise with my own philosophy of choir training as well as bringing stimulating new ideas. A key component in the sound of a choir comes from the warmth of personality of those who run it, and the wellbeing of all choir members is a top priority for the Abbey's organists. Equally importantly, we seek an organist with thrilling virtuosity, a strong imagination and sense of colour, an innate sensitivity to the way organ playing can enhance the liturgy, and the ability to accompany in a way that helps and inspires the singers. The Abbey's organs offer almost limitless possibilities!

Westminster Abbey is a truly extraordinary place. If appointed, I hope that you will be as excited by the opportunities of working here as I am!

Andrew Nethsingha

About Westminster Abbey

Above all else, the Abbey is a church, a place of prayer and praise and holy ground at the heart of the nation. It is also a treasured part of Britain's heritage and a leading venue for tourism. The Abbey has occupied a central place in the celebration of great events for the nation and remains one of the most beautiful architectural masterpieces in Britain.

A living Church, Westminster Abbey is where the coronation of Kings and Queens has taken place since 1066, and where many of the Kings and Queens of England and of the United Kingdom are buried. Principal among them is St Edward the Confessor, King of England from 1042 to 1066, whose shrine is at the heart of the Abbey Church. Beside and around them are buried or commemorated many of the great women and men from almost every century of British history: statesmen and politicians, lawyers, warriors, clerics, writers, musicians and artists.

Neither a cathedral nor a parish church, Westminster Abbey (or the Collegiate Church of St Peter in Westminster, to give it its correct title) is a Royal Peculiar under the jurisdiction of a Dean and Chapter, and with direct accountability to the Sovereign. This relationship with the Sovereign dates back to the origins of the Abbey over a millennium ago, but its current form stems from the Charter granted to the Abbey by Elizabeth I on 21st May 1560.

We are a welcoming community, though also complex and multi-faceted, with around 600 highly committed employees and volunteers. We have deep respect for the heritage of which we are the custodians, whilst we evolve continuously to meet the opportunities of the future. In recent times, this has included the creation of new departments to focus on transforming our digital presence and delivering a significantly expanded programme of public and community engagement. In addition, our newly created Employee Engagement Forum and Social Engagement programme are helping us to support and develop our staff and volunteers. We have also reshaped our governance arrangements, including a Strategic Board, established last year, to help us navigate the challenges and opportunities of the coming decades.

The Dean and Chapter of Westminster defines our Mission in these terms:

- To offer daily divine Worship to Almighty God and resource the Church in this vocation;
- To serve the Sovereign;
- To proclaim the Gospel to the nation and Commonwealth, celebrating the distinctive witness of the Christian faith and engaging with the public square;
- To provide a safe, welcoming and inspiring environment for all who come to the Abbey;
- To care for the precious resources entrusted to us: our people, partnerships, buildings, heritage and money.

Following the State Funeral of Queen Elizabeth II and the Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla, which were broadcast to national and international audiences in their millions, interest in the Abbey is very strong. We attract over a million visitors from around the world every year, and our summers and peak period are incredibly busy. However, we receive no regular income from the State, the Church of England or the Crown, and rely almost entirely on income from visitors.

It is an exciting time to join the Abbey, and we look forward to receiving your application and, if successful, welcoming your contribution to the Abbey's history.

Music at Westminster Abbey

The British Choral Tradition is judged throughout the world to be an important part of our national heritage and the spiritual treasury of the Anglican Church, and the Abbey's choir plays a central role in nurturing this tradition nationally and internationally through the excellence of its contribution to our public worship and through an active programme of concerts, recitals, recordings, broadcasts and occasional tours.

The Abbey Choir forms an integral part of the structure and life of the worshipping community of the Abbey. The choir sings eight choral services each week during term time, and the choir's performances at the major national and State occasions taking place here throughout the year are right at the heart of such worship. Over time, the composition of the choir has gradually evolved from four boys recruited as polyphony developed to the world-renowned choral foundation of today, with around 30 choristers singing with 12 professional lay vicars and receiving their education in the Abbey's dedicated Choir School. A new choir for teenage girls was founded in September 2023. The Abbey is currently embarking on an ambitious digital programme, including the introduction of regular live-streamed services.

The Organs of Westminster Abbey

The organs play a vital role in the Abbey's life and worship, supporting the singing of choir and congregation in services, featuring in concerts and recitals, and in regular use for broadcasts and recordings. The grand organ is a fine Harrison & Harrison instrument, installed for the coronation of King George VI in 1937. With four manuals and 84 speaking stops, it incorporated some of the pipework from the previous five-manual instrument, built by William Hill in 1848. The organ was expanded by Harrison & Harrison in 1982 and again in 1987, resulting in the 94-stop five-manual instrument we know today. The Abbey is also home to the two-manual Queen's Organ (Mander, 2013), which can be found in the Lady Chapel, where it is used principally for small-scale services such as weddings and memorials, as well as a five-stop continuo organ by Kenneth Tickell (1995) and a practice organ by William Drake (2017).

The earliest evidence of any organ in the Abbey dates from 1304, referring to 'a pair of organs' in the Lady Chapel. From the late sixteenth century there was an organ in the quire, of which no accurate details survive, but it was certainly played by John Blow and Henry Purcell - two of the most eminent names among the list of distinguished Organists of Westminster Abbey. A new organ, built for the Coronation of George II in 1727, was re-located and placed on the central screen at the entrance to the quire. This was replaced in 1848 by the Hill organ, built on the north and south sides of the nave screen where the Harrison & Harrison instrument now stands. The two organ cases, built originally for the Hill organ in 1895 by the architect J L Pearson, were coloured and reinstated in 1959.

No significant changes were made to the original specification until a major overhaul in 1982. A second, unenclosed choir division was installed in the north case, and new stops added to the Great and Pedal divisions. At the console, a fifth manual was added in preparation for the Bombarde division located in the north triforium. Completed in 1986, this new department comprises fanfare reeds and a robust chorus, giving the organ a greater presence and supporting large congregations on major occasions. 2006 saw a complete overhaul of the console. The memory capacity was doubled to 512 channels; ten thumb pistons serve each of the four main manuals; new reversible thumb pistons are in place for 32' stops; and the music desk is now fully adjustable. In 2008 a new rank of pipes was added in the north triforium: a Violone 16', playable on the Bombarde and Pedal.

The organ of St Margaret's Church is a three-manual instrument built by J W Walker and Sons Ltd.

Job Description

JOB TITLE:	Assistant Organist
ACCOUNTABLE TO:	Organist & Master of the Choristers (OMC)
KEY RELATIONSHIPS:	<p>All Music Department staff and associated freelance singers (12 Lay Vicars, Sub-Organist and Organ Scholar, 2 singing teachers, c 250 deputies and members of the Special Service Choir, Director of Music and other staff of St Margaret's), Dean and Canons, Receiver General, Head of Westminster Abbey Choir School, Security, Works and Conservation departments.</p> <p>External: Organ builders/tuners, visiting musicians.</p>
BACKGROUND:	<p>Westminster Abbey has one of the few fully professional choral foundations in the world, with a historic musical tradition and an international reputation. At its heart is the Choir of Westminster Abbey. Comprising some thirty boy choristers and twelve professional adult singers (known as Lay Vicars), the choir plays a central role both in the daily choral services in the Abbey and in the many royal, State and national occasions that take place here.</p> <p>The Abbey Music Department exists to provide choral and organ music at all services and public events in the Abbey, and to ensure that the music performed in and associated with the Abbey is of the highest possible standard. The department is led by the Organist and Master of the Choristers (OMC), who heads a music staff of 27, comprising the Sub-Organist, Assistant Organist, and Organ Scholar, together with the twelve Lay Vicars, two part-time singing teachers and two management/administrative staff, the Director of Music at St Margaret's and their team, comprising a Music Coordinator, three Music Chaperones and two Singing Teachers for the St Margaret's Choristers.</p>
JOB SUMMARY:	<p>The Assistant Organist supports the Organist and Sub-Organist in all musical matters, including contributing to the leadership of the Abbey's music foundation. They will be called upon to provide voluntaries, improvisation and accompaniments for statutory and special services, including regular streamed services, and to perform in the Abbey's concert and recital programme. The Assistant Organist is responsible for organising a weekly series of Sunday organ recitals. They take a lead in the administration and oversight of visiting choirs, liaising closely with the Minor Canons' Department, which has ultimate responsibility. They also work with the Organist and Master of the Choristers and Sub-Organist in developing, training and directing the Abbey Choir, including leading some rehearsals for the choristers and full choir.</p>

MAIN DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

These include, but are not limited to:

- Playing the organ for statutory and special services in the Abbey and, on occasion, elsewhere (such duties being shared with the Sub-Organist and Organ Scholar).
- Accompanying the Abbey Choir in rehearsals, broadcasts and concerts when requested to do so (including playing orchestral continuo from time to time, on the chamber organ, harpsichord or fortepiano).
- Sharing with the Sub-Organist and Organ Scholar the organ-playing duties for visiting choirs (normally outside Abbey Choir terms).
- Taking rehearsals with the Abbey Choir and directing services when requested.
- Assisting the OMC and Sub-Organist as required in the training and rehearsal of the choristers, and leading many of the junior choristers' separate rehearsals. The Assistant Organist will usually be present at early boys' rehearsals four times per week.
- Playing a full role in the daily pastoral oversight of the choristers.
- Liaising with the OMC, Sub-Organist, Organ Scholar and Singing Teachers to ensure the training and development of the choristers occurs in a well-coordinated manner.
- Contributing to the planning and delivery of chorister recruitment and outreach activities. Being on the auditioning panel, alongside the OMC and the Sub-Organist, for chorister voice trials.
- Co-ordinating the weekly Sunday organ recitals in the Abbey, including engaging recitalists, making rehearsal arrangements, editing and publishing programmes, and undertaking all relevant administration.
- Playing not fewer than six Sunday recitals each year.
- In conjunction with the Minor Canons, overseeing the musical arrangements for visiting choirs (normally outside Abbey Choir terms), and advising as required on musical content for weddings in the Abbey's Lady Chapel.
- Co-ordinating visits by groups or individuals to the organ, including demonstrating the instrument.
- Mentoring and training the Organ Scholar (in conjunction with the OMC and Sub-Organist)
- Assisting the OMC and Sub-Organist in recruiting, auditioning and re-evaluating members of the list of Deputy Lay Vicars.
- In relation to services at which they are due to play, selecting organ repertory for music lists and service papers in a timely manner, in liaison with the Sub-Organist.
- Selecting and planning the repertoire for those Lay Vicar services which the Assistant Organist directs, subject to the approval of the OMC.
- Playing a full part in the planning and administrative work of the department, including attending regular department meetings, researching repertoire for special projects, writing programme notes as required, participating in audition panels, and proof-reading the musical content of service papers.
- Consistently performing to and maintaining the highest musical standards, commensurate with the international reputation of Westminster Abbey and the Abbey Choir, and their tradition of excellence.
- Adhering at all times to the Abbey's policies, protocols and codes of conduct, with special reference to Safeguarding and Health and Safety matters, and undertaking training as required.
- Undertaking any other duties which are within the scope, spirit and purpose of the job, as requested by the OMC.

Person Specification

This section outlines the knowledge, skills and abilities the post-holder needs in order to fulfil the requirements of the post. 'Essential' criteria are those that the post-holder absolutely must have in order to do the job. 'Desirable' criteria are those qualities that would be either useful, or an advantage or those which the post-holder can be trained to do.

Essential

Education/training:

- Music degree or senior professional qualification relevant to the post (e.g. FRCO)

Knowledge/Experience:

- Significant experience of organ playing, both liturgically and as a recitalist, to a high professional standard and demonstrating a wide repertoire.
- Experience of choral conducting, accompanying and training to a high professional standard.
- Experience of playing for live broadcasts and streamed services.
- Experience of performing in recordings.
- In-depth knowledge of church music and organ repertoire.
- Deep understanding of the Anglican musical tradition and liturgy.
- Experience of working with and training children's voices in sacred repertoire.
- Sophisticated skills as a continuo player.

Skills/Aptitudes:

- Exceptional organ playing, conducting and choir training skills, with the ability to direct and perform a wide range of repertoire in different idioms with stylistic fidelity and interpretive authority.
- Exceptional musicianship and technical proficiency, including improvisation in a broad range of styles.
- Fluency in sight-reading, score-reading, transposition and harmonisation.
- Ability to motivate and inspire choristers and adult professional musicians.
- Aptitude for working with children, including balancing their pastoral needs with musical demands.
- A strong understanding of child protection and safeguarding matters.
- Ability to perform to the highest standards under a significant degree of pressure, public scrutiny, and time constraint.
- Flexibility: willingness and ability to take on musical roles at short notice.
- Aptitude for team working.
- Excellent communication skills.
- Keen eye for detail.
- Highly developed organisational and administrative skills, and familiarity with the full range of standard IT programmes, both musical and general.

Personal Attributes:

- Strongly in sympathy with the Christian mission and values of Westminster Abbey, with a willingness to take an active part in its liturgical life.
- A person with a strong commitment to collegial working.
- A person of integrity and discretion, with a mature approach and sound judgement.
- An excellent motivator, communicator and role model for the Abbey's musicians and other colleagues, with a high standard of personal presentation and organisation.
- Commitment to ongoing study and professional development.

Desirable

Education/training:

- Higher degree or evidence of postgraduate study.

Knowledge/Experience:

- Sound knowledge of singing technique and an awareness of vocal health issues.
- Experience of curating or managing a concert series.
- Experience of compiling and editing concert programmes.
- Experience of arranging and composing liturgical music.
- Knowledge and experience of organ-building and maintenance.
- Experience of managing performance standards and performers.

Personal Attributes:

- A successful track record of working effectively in a complex, multi-functional organisation.
- Excellent time management, both in directing rehearsals and when undertaking administrative tasks and organ practice.

This Job Profile will be kept under review and may be amended by the Dean and Chapter from time to time. Any proposed changes will be discussed with the post holder.

Working for us

Employment Status and Start Date

This post is permanent, and the appointment will commence in the Autumn of 2024.

Salary

The salary is £46,800 per annum and is paid on the last Friday of each month. Salary is reviewed annually. Additional fees are paid for broadcasts, recordings and Special Services.

Probationary Period

The appointment is subject to a probationary period of six months.

Working Hours

The postholder will devote as much time and attention as is necessary to the carrying out of their duties. Unless agreed otherwise with the OMC, the Assistant Organist is expected to be on duty six days per week, including Sundays, during term time.

Annual Holidays

The holiday entitlement is eight weeks per annum including bank and other public holidays. This must be taken at times agreed with the OMC and the Sub-Organist, and generally during school holidays. In exceptional circumstances it may be necessary for the postholder to be recalled from holiday at the request of the Dean and Chapter.

Training

On-site training will be provided as required. Any further training needs will be assessed through the probation period and in annual appraisals.

Pension Scheme and Life Assurance

All employees can join a Group Personal Pension plan, where the minimum employee contribution is 3% and the maximum employer contribution is 9% (as determined by the level of the employee contribution). You will be auto-enrolled into our qualifying workplace pension scheme after 3 months, if you meet the eligibility criteria.

All employees are covered by death-in-service life assurance, whether or not they choose to join the pension scheme.

Staff Discount

All employees receive a 20% discount on purchases from the Westminster Abbey shop and a 30% discount on purchases from the Benugo outlets, which serve refreshments.

Medical Insurance

The Abbey will pay 50% of premiums to join a nominated medical insurance scheme after one year's employment, if desired.

Equality Statement and How to apply

Equality Statement

The Dean and Chapter aims at all times to recruit the person who is most suited to the job. The Abbey has also recognised that it needs to strengthen the diversity of its senior staff, so we are always particularly keen to hear from candidates who are from a diverse background and bring diversity of thought and experience to our team. Recruitment will be solely on the basis of the applicant's abilities and individual merit as measured against the criteria for the job. Qualifications, skills and experience will be assessed at the level that is relevant to the job.

We will ensure that our shortlisting, interviewing and selection procedures avoid discrimination in any way, including on grounds of age, disability, gender, marital status or civil partnership, race, nationality or ethnic origins, religion or belief and sexual orientation.

Please return the Equal Opportunities Monitoring Form with your application. This will help us monitor our recruitment practice. The form will not be seen by the people making the selection decision.

Safeguarding

Westminster Abbey is committed to the safeguarding of children, young people and adults at risk. To prevent them from harm, we undertake appropriate checks on staff and volunteers and require them to complete relevant safeguarding training. Offers are subject to an enhanced level criminal record check, receipt of references satisfactory to Westminster Abbey, right to work in the UK, proof of professional qualifications and medical clearance, which may include a medical assessment.

How to Apply

Please complete our application form as CVs will not be accepted.

You are also advised to read the Job Description and Person Specification carefully and think about how your experience, skills and abilities help you to meet the requirements listed in the Person Specification. Use the 'Supporting Statement' section of the form to tell us how you meet each of the requirements.

Clear information on how you meet all the requirements of the job, with relevant examples, will help us with shortlisting.

Please email your completed application to: applications@westminster-abbey.org.

Applications should arrive no later than 12 noon on Monday 15 July 2024. Interviews and auditions are scheduled to take place on Wednesday 24 and Thursday 25 July 2024 (candidates to be called on both days, and for organ practice on a prior evening), and we are hoping that the successful candidate will be able to commence on, or as soon as possible after, Sunday 1 September 2024.

We regret that, due to the large number of applications we normally receive, we may only be able to provide feedback if you have attended an interview. We appreciate your interest in our work at Westminster Abbey.