



## Choir

The Brasenose College Choir comprises undergraduates, graduates, and senior members, largely from Brasenose, in addition to a modest intake from other colleges. The choir prides itself on its friendly atmosphere which fosters musical excellence within a sociable environment. At present the choir is almost entirely voluntary, but choral awards are offered to members of Brasenose. Auditions for these take place at the beginning of the academic year.



Chief among the choir's duties is singing Evensong every Sunday, but it also sings for various special services and events, including two Carol Services, Roman Catholic Masses, the annual joint service with Lincoln College, and College occasions including feasts. The choir rehearses every Thursday, and every year workshop, with singing teachers or professional church musicians, are organised.

The choir has recently visited cathedrals in Birmingham (both RC and Anglican), Gloucester and St Albans. And following a successful tour of Rome in the summer of 2004, which included singing Mass in St Peter's Basilica, the Bishop of Santa Maria Maggiore invited the choir to participate in the Basilica's annual festivities of *Santa Maria della Neve*. The choir went to Paris in the summer of 2006 and last summer joined forces with Pembroke College, Oxford in a tour of Lombardia, Italy. Brasenose choir will return to Rome in June 2010.

### Choir tour 2009

Last summer the choirs of Brasenose and Pembroke joined forces for a short tour of *Lombardia*, Italy. Based in the historic city of Lodi with excursions to nearby cities, the itinerary included two concerts and one High Mass. We were most fortunate to have the delightful company (and voices) of several senior members of Brasenose: Susan Lea and daughter Ruth, Nicholas Proudfoot with Anna Proudfoot, and our Senior Tutor, Andrew Stockley.

Our adventures began with a Ryanair flight which, due to adverse weather conditions, took us to Parma instead of Bergamo (some 170Km away). After a long wait at Parma airport, which involved singing to the guards to thank them for keeping the airport lounge open for us, we eventually arrived in Lodi, ready to commence a weekend of glorious singing.



The first concert took place in the *Chiesa di San Francesco*, a magnificent church which dates from the thirteenth century. Particularly fine were the frescoes, dating from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries, which adorned walls and pillars of the church. In the concert the choir presented a history of English sacred music, ranging from the sublime music of William Byrd to the ever-popular Ding Dong (a French melody adopted by the English). It was wonderful to see such a large crowd in the church. The evening concluded with dessert - a fitting way to celebrate our first concert!

The second day saw us in the historic city of Crema for a concert in the *Chiesa di San Bernardino* (now an auditorium). It was a privilege to sing to a huge audience in this great venue - a favourite recording venue for *Deutsche Grammophon*. The local newspaper reported:

*The public,[...] responded with a huge attendance, filling the great nave of the Church of San Bernardino, right up to the entrance: a sign that these events represent a great opportunity for everyone to be involved.*

The concert, like the previous one, was recorded and broadcast on local radio stations.

The tour concluded with High Mass in the *Basilica di San Marco*, Milan. It was a privilege to adorn the liturgy of a Basilica which has such a rich history: Mozart resided in the adjoining monastery in 1770, and on 22 May 1874, Giuseppe Verdi's *Requiem* received its first performance in the church. For our visit William Byrd's intimate three-part Mass (composed for Byrd's Catholic community in the 1590s) was a fitting setting to sing. The Mass concluded with Byrd's intricate *Laetentur Caeli*. The music was greatly enjoyed by the congregation and earned us an applause!



The music was all sung unaccompanied but no choir trip would be complete, for me at least, without sampling the local organ tradition. I was most pleased to play two instruments in Crema, one of them in the church where the composer Francesco Cavalli (1602-1676) was baptised. It was a pleasure to demonstrate to several enthusiastic organists in the group (and those choir members listening from downstairs) the full tonal pallet of this colourful 'Serassi' instrument. Eighteenth- and

nineteenth-century Italian organ music was very much influenced by opera and the organs of the time were built to cater for this new style. It was a new and pleasing experience for the listeners in the church - judging from their happy faces!

The tour was organised by Giampiero Innocente, director of the *Collegium Vocale di Crema*. Maestro Innocente is a great admirer of all things connected with Oxford (and Cambridge). We are most grateful to him and look forward to seeing him in Brasenose in the near future. The two choirs must also thank Laurence Lyndon-Jones (senior organ scholar, Pembroke College) for everything he did to make the trip a memorable event. Our grateful thanks also go to the Principal, Senior Tutor, Bursar, and Chaplain for their constant support. We must, of course thank the alumni that sponsored the tour through the Annual Fund. May there be many more tours to come!