



Valuing the Support of Child Choristers

an address by

Dr. Barry Rose, OBE

delivered at St. George's School Chapel
Middletown, Rhode Island
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Dr. Rose, second from left in the second row, following the service
in which this address was given.

To view the service: vimeo.com/800372349
The address begins at 45:12



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Of all the sacred liturgies in England, the brightest star among them all in the firmament is the Office of Choral Evensong, sung day in, day out in our Cathedrals and our Collegiate Chapels by choirs who are often the envy of the worldwide choral scene.

So important is Evensong in my country, that it is broadcast each week, live or recorded, by the BBC. There's a regular Choral Evensong broadcast—it is that important.

For nearly 40 years (that's four-zero years) I was privileged to be part of that tradition, but more importantly, my son Timothy was a chorister with the best church choir in the world, St. John's College, Cambridge, whilst our younger daughter, Nicola, was one of the first pioneers who started England's very first residential Cathedral girls' choir—at Salisbury Cathedral, in September, 1991.

Now, I'm telling you all this, not just as a proud parent of a now 51-year-old and a now 41-year-old, but in appreciation of the amazing skills that they learned in their time as choristers, not just musical. Our Tim has never sung a note or played his flute since the day he left St. John's College, Cambridge, but he's learned, as Nicola did, the many non-musical skills: independence, self-reliance, self-confidence whilst still being a team member, self-discipline, care for others, an appreciation of beautiful language and how to speak it as well, punctuality—the list goes on and on and on.

Just think about it. From day one in the choir, boys and girls are being asked to be adults. And that is true of singing in this, the Choir School of Newport County. For the treble line here today, this is the one and only thing you are asked to do as a professional singer from day one, from the moment you step into this choir. Let me explain.

If you are a talented instrumentalist, violinist, flautist, trombonist, trumpeter, whatever, you may make it to the school orchestra, perhaps going on to a state-funded youth orchestra and then maybe to music school for several years to hone your craft—after which, if you're lucky, you *might* make it into one of the professional orchestras.

From day one in this choir, and other choirs, you are the equivalent of a member of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, or the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. If you like, in sporting terms if you want it that way, you're in the Olympics straight away—never mind school sports day.

Training such as this is priceless—whether or not you continue to make music after you've sung in the front row of these choirs. But priceless training comes at a price—and this is where this choir school needs your financial support, ladies and gentlemen, if it is to continue to give children this priceless education. I know that it also needs parental support, and determination, and an understanding that this is something special, which will shape your son or your daughter for the rest of their lives, and give them so many personal qualities they won't get anywhere else.

My wife and I didn't flinch at all when we were asked to pay the full school fees—no scholarship—at Salisbury Cathedral School when our daughter started. We knew it was for her greater good. And times galore we were asked to drive our son up to Cambridge or to some airport or something in the middle of the school holidays so they could go on some choir trip. That's what you do, as a parent. You give it all up for your child, and they get something special out of it.

Now there's nothing more beautiful in church (now, I'm going to be lynched by the clergy for saying this) or chapel than beautiful singing by a well trained choir. Without sounds in them, these buildings are just empty shells. (You go to a French cathedral, it's an empty shell, apart from a clergyman at the front playing a guitar on a Sunday or something like that!) It's music, of course, real music that makes it come to life.

The psalmist said this: he exhorted us to 'worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness' and it's choirs, such as this one, that help *you* out there to 'worship the Lord in the holiness of beauty'. Turn that 'round. Think about that, and don't let it stop for lack of support—in finances or membership for people to come and learn. Newport, and the whole of Rhode Island I think, would be poorer without it.