



“one of Britain’s very best choirs” (New York Times)

Choir | Consort | Orchestra | Education
Jeffrey Skidmore OBE Artistic Director & Conductor

Artistic Director

Introduction

Ex Cathedra is a world-class ensemble that leads the choral sector in the fields of performance, learning and wellbeing. We believe that singing is for everyone, and seek to reach and engage as many people as possible through outstanding vocal experiences. We do this by exploring, commissioning and performing the finest choral music, nurturing young singers, and delivering an extensive, inspirational learning and wellbeing offer for participants of all ages in schools, hospitals and communities.

Read more: www.excathedra.co.uk/about-us

Watch our short #WeareExCathedra film: https://www.youtube.com/shorts/qrss_qdNz74

Our artistic director and founder, Jeffrey Skidmore, will be retiring in 2027. Under his leadership, Ex Cathedra has become renowned as ‘one of Britain’s very best choirs’ (New York Times). We are looking for a visionary artistic leader to take the organisation forward into the next phase of its life, in a changing world for the arts.

The person will be an outstanding choral conductor, who is passionate about the value of choral singing in the areas of performance, education, and participation. They will have proven artistic and leadership experience and the ability to inspire performers, staff, and our existing and future stakeholders. They will have a perspective and aspirations that are both national and international, alongside a commitment to honour Ex Cathedra’s historic roots in the West Midlands.

The Artistic Director position is a part-time role comprising an average time commitment of three days per week (flexibly planned), working remotely or in the Ex Cathedra office in Birmingham as appropriate, plus concerts. We offer a competitive remuneration package of a retainer (in the form of salary and appropriate benefits) plus performing fees (paid separately, at an agreed freelance rate).

Ex Cathedra is committed to building an inclusive and diverse organisation that reflects our region and the communities with whom we work. We recognise that diversity brings a wealth of benefits, but that there is a lack of diversity in the choral sector. We are looking for someone who shares our values, and we welcome applications from under-represented sectors of the community. If you have any access needs relevant to the application process, please get in touch with us directly to discuss them.

“a phenomenal feat of musicianship”
(New Yorker)

Terms and conditions

The Artistic Director role is part-time, comprising an average time commitment of three days per week (flexibly planned), working remotely and in the Ex Cathedra office in Birmingham as appropriate, plus concerts and rehearsals. Ex Cathedra typically undertakes about 25 prior rehearsals, 30 concerts and 1 recording project (3 days) per year.

We offer a competitive remuneration package covering a retainer (in the form of salary and appropriate benefits) plus conducting fees paid separately at an agreed freelance rate.

We envisage a fruitful long-term relationship with our Artistic Director, and the post is offered on a renewable fixed-term basis, the initial period being six years.

Ex Cathedra is committed to the safeguarding and the care of children and vulnerable adults who are engaged in and participate in our work. The Artistic Director role is subject to Safer Recruitment and DBS checks at the enhanced level.



Top left: Liz Dilnot Johnson's *When a Child is a Witness*, Coventry Cathedral, Feb 2022 with Kadialy Kouyate
Bottom left: David Fanshawe's *African Sanctus*, Symphony Hall, Jan 2022 with the CBSO and Keneish Dance
Top centre: Akash Parekar from Milap close-up from Roxanna Panufnik's *Unending Love*, Town Hall, May 2022
Centre: Stockhausen's *Mittwoch aus Licht* with Birmingham Opera Company, 2012
Bottom centre: Tallis' *Spem in alium* at Douai Abbey for Newbury Spring Festival, 2018
Right: annual Good Friday Bach *St Matthew Passion* at Symphony Hall, 2019

Principal responsibilities

The Artistic Director is accountable to the Board of Trustees and reports directly to the Chair, working in collaborative partnership with the General Manager and the Director of Education and Participation.

The Artistic Director will be responsible for:

Artistic leadership

- working with the Trustees to set and deliver Ex Cathedra's overall vision across both performance and learning
- creating and conducting outstanding concerts, touring, recordings and broadcasts
- working closely with the Director of Education and Participation to ensure the artistic and learning functions are in synergy, and creating projects where the multiple aspects of the Ex Cathedra family come together in shared endeavours
- inspiring, motivating, recruiting, training and developing Ex Cathedra's pool of professional, semi-professional, student and amateur talent, working with guest conductors and players as appropriate
- commissioning new music and developing relationships with composers and creative figures
- researching, and planning to deliver all the above
- working with Trustees, General Manager and Director of Education and Participation on strategic planning in relation to all the above, aligning artistic aspirations with organisational and financial objectives.

Advocacy, external relationships and profile

- acting as the public figurehead of the organisation with external stakeholders as required
- representing the organisation to the press as appropriate
- building relationships with promoters
- building artistic partnerships and relationships.

General

In relation to all of the above, developing close and collaborative working relationships with key internal stakeholders and colleagues in all of the above, in particular Trustees, General Manager, and Director of Education and Participation.

Person specification

We are looking for an individual with:

- proven experience as an outstanding professional choral conductor and choir trainer at the highest level, including experience of working with instrumental ensembles
- first-rate knowledge of choral repertoire across all periods, and the choral landscape
- a track record of identifying and nurturing talent, and a commitment to professional development
- strong artistic leadership skills and the ability to inspire the best from our freelance and amateur musicians, and amateurs
- the ability to create and deliver imaginative, original and high-quality artistic plans
- the ability to think, work and plan strategically, in a manner that aligns with Ex Cathedra's key priorities
- a proactive, entrepreneurial, and collegiate approach that puts the interests of all stakeholders at the heart of the decision-making process
- the ability to foster close and collaborative working relationships with all colleagues and key stakeholders
- an informed and sympathetic understanding of the other factors that impact artistic decision-making, particularly financial and safeguarding issues
- a commitment to building an inclusive and diverse organisation that reflects our region and the communities with whom we work
- an understanding of the wider issues of relevance and inclusion in a changing landscape for choral music, including trends in musical taste; demography and diversity of our city and region; the talent pipeline; funding; digital consumption/engagement; social justice and environmental responsibility
- a range of established relationships and contacts in the field, and the ability to develop new ones
- some understanding of charities, governance and the role of the Board of Trustees
- the commitment to make Ex Cathedra the key priority in their professional life and career.



Rebecca Ledgard & Marianne Ayling deliver *Singing Medicine* at Birmingham Children's Hospital

Appointment process

Interested parties are welcome to have an exploratory informal conversation with Peter Trethewey (General Manager) and/or Paul Keene (Trustee).

To apply, please send, by Friday 1 December 2023:

- a letter of application, outlining your vision for Ex Cathedra and describing your suitability for the role in relation to the requirements outlined above
- a full CV
- links to relevant performance videos and audio material
- names and contact details of two referees.

to Peter Trethewey, General Manager, Ex Cathedra, peter@excathedra.co.uk.

We want to cast our net as widely as possible, to survey the field of talent in an open process. Once we have received expressions of interest, initial interview conversations will be held with a small number of applicants in early 2024. Those whom we wish to take forward will then be invited to work with Ex Cathedra as guest conductors in future seasons, in an informal and friendly process to allow all parties to get to know each other over time on a trial basis. It is envisaged that the new Artistic Director will be invited to perform with the ensemble as Artistic Director Designate in Jeffrey Skidmore's final season, to ensure a smooth transition.



Members of our Junior Academy of Vocal Music

What other people say

“one of Britain's very best choirs... superb” ([New York Times](#))

“proof, if proof were needed, of why Ex Cathedra are regarded as one of the UK's elite choirs” (www.seenandheard-international.com)

“Under the leadership of Jeffrey Skidmore this ensemble has acquired a justly-deserved reputation as one of the UK's finest chamber choirs. This disc [Celestial Bird] will surely enhance its reputation still further. It also serves to remind us that though they made their name for their historically informed performances of Baroque music, much of it rare, they have consistently been highly effective advocates for the choral music of our own time.” (www.musicweb-international.com)

“possibly the best choral experience I have ever experienced as a member of the audience...I was completely absorbed from start to finish. I closed my eyes at times and was transported into the firmament. It was magical. I was enthralled.” ([Arts Council England assessor](#))

“Being a professional choral singer is such a unique vocation, with no real guide book on how to go about your work. Training with Ex Cathedra is that guide book which every young singer wants - lessons in how to be a professional in a safe, supportive environment. I am hugely grateful for this opportunity.” ([Ellie Sperling, 2018-19 Scholar](#))

“I really can't think of a comparative scheme in which a conductor is able to experience the breadth and depth of an organisation, from rehearsals to board meetings.” ([Sarah Latto, Associate Conductor, Spring 2019](#))

“We just want to say a huge thank you for what you do. When Marianne first visited [redacted] on ward 18 at BCH some time early this year, our little girl was so overwhelmed by all the pokes and treatments and strangers and drugs that make her feel sick that she was quite traumatised and withdrawn. Marianne got out a horse hand puppet and gently sang with us - even though [redacted] didn't want to engage. She left the soft horse puppet behind which was then cuddled for the next few days - and when ‘the singing lady’ came back to fetch her horse [redacted] was already more willing to play along. And so she came more and more out of her shell and back to her usual cheeky self - the one who chose the super sticky slug in the bravery box to play pranks on everybody which eventually turned into the slimy slug song 😊. I strongly believe that experience of song and the soft hand puppet to cuddle was the beginning of her remarkable recovery!” ([Parent of Singing Medicine patient](#))

“[Redacted] has been part of the Junior Academy and Girl's Academy for a number of years and has gained so much from the experience. She has loved taking part in *The Nutcracker* at the Hippodrome, *St John Passion* at Symphony Hall and many other projects - amazing opportunities, which would not otherwise be available to her. These academies have expanded her horizons, given her confidence, which she did not have before - to sing to large audiences and in professional performances. This is a fantastic experience, we feel very lucky to be part of it.” ([Parent of Academy of Vocal Music singer](#))

“I have to confess that I had a little moment when the children were singing in the mall... I thought it was wonderful and I know from the sheer abandonment and exuberance that my children displayed that they did too.” ([Deputy Headteacher](#))