

WREN | 300

SQUARE MILE CHURCHES



Hear Wren's City churches filled with song in the *Wrenathon* – a celebration of community singing and historic architecture

What better way to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the death of Sir Christopher Wren (1632-1723) - one of the United Kingdom's greatest architects – than hundreds of people across London and beyond gathering together and lifting their voices in song in some of the churches he designed following the Great Fire of 1666.

The *Wrenathon* is curated and produced by Holly Hunter on behalf of the Square Mile Churches Wren300 project and spans two weeks in June, culminating in a unique, not to be missed vocal music marathon featuring singers from 11 community choirs across nine City of London churches on one, single day.

Activities kick off with *Our City Sings (13 – 23 June)*, an eleven-day programme of musical recitals, performances and open rehearsals taking place in some of the historic churches associated with Wren, located within the City's Square Mile.

Our City Sings will foreground the choirs, Evensongs and recitals that are a part of City life, bringing them together in celebration of Wren300 – enjoy Evensong in St Paul's, learn to be a conductor with Music in Offices: Come Sing & Conduct at St Martin-within-Ludgate or watch Collegium Musicum of London Chamber Choir in an open rehearsal, plus lots more. Listen, enjoy, and in some cases, join with the diverse voices of the Square Mile.

The grand finale of the *Wrenathon* takes place on **24 June** and is, fittingly, a *Vocal Marathon* in nine City churches. As the title suggests, this is a day of glorious vocal music featuring hundreds of singers from over eleven community choirs, with styles including gospel, a cappella, pop, immersive choral theatre, global and folk song, plus a wonderful variety of classical choral music featuring vocalists young and old.

All the performances are 25 minutes long, with 20-minute intervals in between allowing audiences to make their way to the next participating church – plus, they are totally free to enjoy.

The musical programme will also highlight pressing social issues, such as climate crisis (in *Earth Makes No Sound*), while also acknowledging Wren's links to transatlantic slavery and colonialism (with a special collaboration between NewYVC and Adisa).

The fun begins at midday with Singology Gospel Choir, a community chorus directed by Mark De-Lisser performing at All Hallows by the Tower. At 12:45 Sing Tower Hamlets (a community choir based in East London and directed by Leanne Sedin) will be showcasing an exciting collaboration with city workers and migrant women that was borne out of a series of workshops held at St Katharine Cree, with the specific aim to co-create a new song for the *Wrenathon*.

From 1:30pm, at St Botolph without Aldgate, NewYVC - a choir for young people aged 11-25 in Stratford – and poet Adisa, will create a powerful performance that addresses issues of contested heritage, Sir Christopher Wren's links to transatlantic slavery and the role of the church in colonialism. The performance intertwines NewYVC's unique vocal arrangements with Adisa's spoken word recital to create something truly memorable.

A cappella group SOUND picks up the musical baton at 2:15pm, bringing their blend of pop, soul, R&B and other contemporary music to St Mary Abchurch. They like to practise innovative new approaches, so their performance is definitely one to watch!

St Stephen Walbrook plays host to the 80-strong Finsbury Park Singers and recently established Finsbury A Cappella for a rafter-raising performance (from 3:45pm) that will feature everything from pop to gospel, classical to musical theatre and jazz to folk. This *Wrenathon* event is in collaboration with Central London Samaritans, the founding branch of the wider Samaritans organisation, that began supporting people from its base at St Stephen Walbrook, 70 years ago.

Taking centre stage at St Vedast-alias-Foster (4:30pm) will be Southwark Chamber Choir - an ambitious chamber group singing sacred and secular repertoire. Established in 2015 as a staff choir at the Imperial War Museum London, they are directed by Jordan Theis. Their *Wrenathon* performance will be inspired by Wren's contemporaries, in a program featuring music by Handel.

45 minutes later at Holy St Sepulchre (5:15pm), Filament Theatre Company presents a site-specific series of improvisations and works from their archive, including *Earth Makes No Sound*, a collaborative choral work inspired by the elements and changes that are happening to our planet. Directed by Osnat Schmool and Sabina Netherclift, Filament Theatre Company explores the possibilities of dynamic choral singing and the relationship between voice, movement, harmony, body percussion and improvisation. For this performance, audiences will be immersed in sound, as they completely take over the nave of Holy St Sepulchre.

The *Wrenathon* begins to draw to a rousing close from 6pm as the London Chinese Philharmonic Choir, conducted by Bo Wang, stands to sing at St Michael's Cornhill. It is the largest community Chinese arts organisation in the UK and includes people from China, Hong Kong, Macao, Singapore, Malaysia and the UK itself. As music is the language without borders, London Chinese Philharmonic Choir use music to promote Chinese culture and exchange.

The *Wrenathon* culminates at *Ye Olde Watling* pub, burned down in the Great Fire of London, and rebuilt out of old ship's timbers by Sir Christopher Wren in 1668 to house his workers. Grab a drink to sing-along with shanties and maritime songs with the London Sea Shanty Collective to culminate the day of song!

Holly Hunter, Creative Producer, *Wrenathon* says "*The Wrenathon celebrates the power music has to bring people together and represents the myriad of different singing communities across London and beyond. I am excited to present*

such a wide range of vocal music, sung by people from all walks of life, in the beautiful Wren churches of the Square Mile.”

For more information and full listings of what to see where, and when, visit www.squaremilechurches.co.uk

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

IMAGE - Erin Aniker Illustration

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