

# ARCHICANTIORES

*Singing and performing for the architectural heritage*

ArchiCantiores - a troupe of musicians and wordsmiths - tells stories; they weave narratives around the heritage of the buildings and places in which they are invited to perform a bespoke blend of music and poetry, of songs and readings.

What's in a name, people may ask: well, a moniker that is unique,:

“Archi-”, obviously in support of architectural heritage;  
“Cantiores”, a found name that chimes with Cantor and Cantiones, Singer and Songs.

And if you think that strange, then check out the amazing musicianship of ‘the little green beans’, Robert Hollingworth’s highly polished musical ensemble “I Fagiolini”.

Jonathan Louth, architect and founder, says “I like to think we are a premier ‘rehearse-perform’ troupe in that, after individual preparation at home, our ensemble turns up at the venue where we are booked, rehearses, takes a break, and performs.

There is a spontaneity, a live-ness, an authenticity to the brand, allowing ArchiCantiores to reveal and respond to the mood of the event: exhibitions, receptions, banquets, festivals, halls, conferences, cathedrals & churches.

*Below, ArchiCantiores in performance with Duo Giuliano-Mikeleiz at Luke Hughes Gallery, featuring DKT Artworks’ “Quill” music stand, carved by Hugh Wedderburn - Credit DKT Artworks*

Subject to a sufficiency of funds, they go where invited. Since their roots in the ArchiCantuor quartet that started in 2009, that has encompassed London, Munich, Paris, Berlin, Winchester, Faversham, York, and even Kansas USA.

The troupe presents sounds and texts that society will have heard through the ages, in times before the cut-glass perfection of CDs and downloads stole the practice of music-making from out of the homes of the population at large.

Then before the 2020 pandemic, ArchiCantiores went plural – supporting Holy Cross Cromer Street in “Open for Music”, exploiting the nuanced chamber acoustic of the church and its proximity to London KingsX: the nine-month series collaborated with and show-cased Gabrielli Ensemble, CarmenCo, Duo Giuliano-Mikeleiz among others, and featured new music by Jared Armstrong & Simon Morecroft, alongside Elizabeth Lutyens & Aaron Copeland. Morecroft’s Butcher of Rye cantata was presented to Sutton House Music Society, in Richard Griffiths’ scholarly & innovative conservation project there for the National Trust.



The pandemic drove the troupe online: first with Bloomsbury Festival at Holy Cross, in a live broadcast of Petite Messe solennelle in Rossini's original chamber setting for just 16 musicians. Then recently with a double bill of architectural films for Temple Bar Trust – the new tenants of Wren's Gateway at its home in Paternoster Square - also 'online'.

Circling around the heart of the Roman City (the Barbican fort) - and the Saxon town (the foundation chapel of St Paul's cathedral) up to the present day, the films trace the story of architectural places within the Square Mile through the voices & music that Londoners will have heard at the time of each architectural development. "London: This City is Made for Music" will become available later this year.

Nearly all of the 65 music tracks – Old Roman Chant to C21st composers - have been newly recorded, including Michael Berkeley's 400th anniversary work for the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries "Heare us, Heare us, Lord" with organ and Cecilia McDowall's motet "Deus, Portus pacis". The composers attended their recording session, Michael 'online' and Cecilia in person. The sessions brought together both collaborating musical directors, Ben Saul and Douglas Tang who hold the forces together when the engagement demands more than solo voice ensemble.

That focus on the "period of the event" came to the fore when Hugh Wedderburn and fellow carvers engaged ArchiCantiores to animate four reception-exhibitions with the Master Carvers' Association: titled "Patron and Maker", seven MCA carvers had created bespoke music stands in honour of Thomas Chippendale Snr's tercentenary. For the second time, ArchiCantiores had commissioned a poem from Paul Munden, "Quartet", set to music by ArchiCantuar. It was their convener, Marion Wyllie, who hit upon the plural moniker for these performances.

MCA then generated the hugely successful Grinling Gibbons Society, whose seminal tercentenary exhibition at Bonhams and Compton Verney was mirrored during 2021 by MCA exhibitions in Dalkeith Palace and York's Merchant Adventurers' Hall as well as the Dutch Church and St Mary Abchurch in the City: ArchiCantiores performed a hinterland narrative in each location. Ben Harms' carved hummingbird inspired a new poem from Oliver Comins, "The Hummingbird was an afterthought", which MCA exhibited with Paul Munden's commissioned poem "A Linden Antiphon".

Set to music by two composers in 2021 and part of the "City Made For Music" films, Munden's poem evokes Wren's stone pillars and Grinling Gibbons' quirestalls in St Paul's Cathedral: so ArchiCantiores is rolling out both the poem and the settings during this Wren300 year whenever possible.

A current focus of Peter Murray and the trustees for Temple Bar at Paternoster Square being the Sir Christopher Wren Dining Club, ArchiCantiores is opening up the initiative with "Music to Dine For" evenings: canapés, performance, and wine tasting for just 16 person audiences in the ancient upper room. Started on 25th April, "Coronations & Monarchs" followed the Tudor & Jacobean coronation processions through the City into the coronations at Westminster Abbey. 20th June will present Wren with Purcell in "A Fairy Queen for MidSummer": November 28th then "A Baroque Christmas" for the last tercentenary shout as Wren's style finally gave in to the Neo-Classical age in London.

The Wren300 and Charles III coronation performances commenced at Fishmongers' Hall for the Architects' Company Livery Banquet with newly-written words by ArchiCantuar to the Jacobean Broadsheet tune, Packington's Pound. "The Master's Tribute" celebrates the Architects' Company competition for an Eco-Pavilion and honours the 1660 texts for the Restoration of the Monarchy; "We shall exploit that this year to the uttermost" concludes Louth with Wyllie's approbation, "along with William Byrd's 400th anniversary."

Sign up for the Mailchimp with an e-mail to [archicantiores@hotmail.com](mailto:archicantiores@hotmail.com); and if you have a bright idea for closing a large funding gap in the City Made for Music post-production budget, please do drop us a line. All advices gratefully received.



Above, ArchiCantiores premiere of *The Master's Tribute* for the Architects' Company banquet at Fishmongers' Hall - Credit Stuart Le Sage

**The Hummingbird was an Afterthought**

*by Oliver Comins*

Trees growing in this place did not last long –  
cut for building and cut for burning.  
Eventually, with finesse and time,  
they were cut to make the shape of other things.

Whose deft blades teach this wood to speak?  
Trees become leaves and fruit they never were,  
make sea creatures walk upon the land,  
are shaped to resonate a hallowed sound.

Here, in the city, we are flattered by a reredos  
of a proper vintage – a reminder for most of us  
we only make the shape of who we are,  
not a tiny hummingbird's beechwood wings.

© Oliver Comins

**A Linden Antiphon**

*by Paul Munden*  
2021

Our human hearts  
take solace and shelter  
within forests of stone.  
The linden trees  
must rise elsewhere.

But lift up your thoughts  
to the interleaving  
linden voices  
in the gracefully carved  
and cloistered air.

© Paul Munden



*Above, ArchiCantiores at St Mary Abchurch in March 2023,  
Comfort in Winter's Cold - Credit Hugh Wedderburn.*