

Capella Regalis Men & Boys Choir: Learning from a great musical tradition

by Cheryl Bell

Boys' choirs have been around since the late Middle Ages. Their sound, it was believed, was considered to be the most pure and the most desirable imaginable. As a musical accompaniment to the church mass, which was their primary function, the boys' soaring voices swept the soul and spirits of the faithful—and those who faltered—ever higher until they mingled with the Divine.

Here in Halifax, a long history of boys' choirs continues to find life and renewed meaning in the shape of the Capella Regalis Men and Boys Choir. Formed in January 2009 as the Saint George's Men and Boys Choir, the group performed its inaugural concert at Saint George's Round Church with the Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia, Mayann Francis, in the audience. Last fall the choir moved to the King's College Chapel and renamed itself Capella Regalis.

Capella Regalis is the brainchild of music director Nick Halley. Inspired by his own formative experiences of singing in choirs when he was growing up, Halley

wanted to give boys between the ages of seven and 13, from all parts of Halifax, the unique blend of musical training, mentorship and performance that singing in a boys' choir can provide.

"I liked sports as a kid, particularly baseball," says Halley, who is just 28 himself, and who has recently been awarded a Canada Council grant to spend time in the UK studying boys' choirs and conducting. "But in hindsight nothing compared to singing in the choir and learning some of the best music in the world. There are very few activities in which a young boy can perform at the same—or even better—level than someone older, but singing is one of those activities."

By visiting schools with a small group of singers, Halley was able to inspire 16 boys to join the choir. For concerts they are joined by the 10 adult males of the choir, who are also members of the King's College Chapel Choir.

The boys receive a thorough training in the process of singing, reading and performing music from different eras, cultures and languages. The boys also benefit from the in-



Photo above: Some younger members of the Capella Regalis choir at King's College Chapel, Halifax

built system of mentorship that a men and boys choir provides. The youngest boys learn from the older boys, and they all learn to appreciate how the music works, what it means to their older peers, and the sort of dedication and focus it takes to do something truly well.

"The transition from boyhood to adulthood

is challenging for many adolescents," says Halley, "and more so in sections of the population lacking in good role models and in which there are few cultural and spiritual touchstones. A men and boys choir is uniquely capable of addressing the issues of leadership, focus and inspiration that so many boys face at this stage of their lives."

At King's College Chapel, Capella Regalis sings one choral evensong each month, attracting a large and appreciative audience. "The form and rhythm of the office of evensong are perfect for the boys," says Halley. "And because it is an almost entirely sung service, they are learning new music all the time, and becoming familiar with the great musical legacy of many centuries and cultures."

The monthly Capella Regalis evensongs not only enrich the lives of the boys, but the chapel as well. "It's always a pleasure to have the boys singing here," says Rev. Gary Thorne,

University of King's College Chaplain. "They bring their youth and energy, as well as their lovely voices. They also attract quite a following, which means that greater numbers of people get to experience music and worship here at King's College Chapel, and that is bringing a new vigour to our community."

"The boys are being taught in the great theological and liturgical tradition of the church, grow familiar with a university setting and benefit from the mentorship of the older students with whom they sing. Our hope is that they will eventually sing weekly evensong in the chapel and help to encourage a renewal of sacred music sung to the glory of God."

Capella Regalis will be singing at the opening service of this year's Anglican Synod on May 26, just before going on tour in Nova Scotia. The final concert of the season will be performed in Halifax at First Baptist Church on May 30.



Photo above: Some younger members of the Capella Regalis choir at King's College Chapel, Halifax