City of Birmingham Choir: Equinox Cultures in Harmony

# Further Information

# EQUINOX : CULTURES IN HARMONY

## 17 March 2012 Symphony Hall, Birmingham, UK

**What is Equinox?**

Equinox is a unique and innovative **inter-cultural choral celebration** being promoted by the City of Birmingham Choir to be held in Symphony Hall on 17th March 2012.

**Who will be performing along with City of Birmingham Choir?**

**350 singers reflecting the cultural diversity of the West Midlands**. For the project, the City of Birmingham Choir has helped to create Chinese and Indian choirs and joined forces with several other established choral groups - Black Voices, Town Hall Gospel Choir, World Music Youth Choir, SHAAM, Echo Doliny Polish Folk Choir and Bournville Young Singers. In addition there will be **three percussion groups**, one playing African djembe drums, and the other two from the Birmingham Schools' Music Service playing dhol and a range of orchestral percussion.

**Will all of these groups be performing together?**

The event will open with a percussion fanfare composed by City of Birmingham Choir member John Barber. Each of the six cultural groups will then be singing pieces of their own choosing linked to the theme of Equinox. The event will climax with all the choral groups and the percussion combining in the **world premiere of a specially commissioned piece by Christopher Long** with text in Hindi, Mandarin Chinese, Arabic, Swahili, Polish and Latin chosen by the participating groups. Chris worked with CBC and CBSO in 2005 on the PRS Adopt a Composer scheme writing 'O Lord Remember' for which he gained the Making Music British Composers Award 2006.

**Why is the event called Equinox?**

Equinox captures the notion of equality as it occurs twice a year when the sun crosses the celestial equator and night and day are of equal length. It is celebrated throughout the world with a variety of **cultural festivals emphasising rebirth, fertility, creation, family and world citizenship**. Examples include the Arab 'Nowruz' and the Indian 'Holi'. It is also marked as New Year's Day and Mother's Day in several countries. The date of Easter is determined by the Sunday after the first full moon on or after the March equinox.

**What is the Cultural Olympiad?**

The significance of the Equinox project has been recognised nationally by the award of the **2012 Cultural Olympiad Inspire Mark**. This makes Equinox part of the largest cultural celebration in the history of the modern Olympic and Paralympic games. The Cultural Olympiad is designed to give everyone in the UK, and especially young people, a chance to be part of London 2012 and

inspire creativity across all forms of culture. Equinox reflects the Olympic values of **'respect'** for different cultures; **'excellence'** in the power of people to create experiences that motivate and inspire; and **'friendship'** through forging links between peoples based on a shared passion for humanity.

**How will the audience know what to expect?**

On 11th September 2011, over 100 of the participants came together for an experimental workshop within **Birmingham ArtsFest**. Three groups sang individual pieces (Sanchita Pal Ensemble, Polish Folk Choir and the Bournville Young Singers) and all the groups combined to learn and perform an extract of early ideas by Christopher Long. Nobody knew quite what to expect but by the end audience members and performers alike were struck by the "energy", "emotion" and "momentum" had been created, suggesting that the Equinox event would be both powerful and important. A short video of the ArtsFest workshop can be viewed at www.facebook.com/EquinoxConcert or http://www.citychoir.org.uk/members/equinox-project/

**Are there any other examples of inter-cultural music making on this scale?**

As far as we are aware, no-one has attempted an inter-cultural musical celebration on this scale before. Performances by the world renowned viola da gamba player, Jordi Savall, have been described as "the sounds of a dozen different nations and three world religions consorted in a richly believable utopia"[1]. In 1997, the Oxford based choral group, I Flagiolini, and the SDASA Chorale from Soweto met in South Africa for an intensive cultural exchange project to compare, contrast and combine their respective musical worlds[2]. The project, known as Simunye (we are one), enabled the two groups to explore how singing together in their own cultural styles could, as the composer Roderick Williams put it, change the way people see the power of direct communication in music. But **bringing together six cultures is probably unique**.

**Who else is involved in Equinox?**

The project has been generously supported by a **Grants for the Arts** award from the **Arts Council England** and the **National Lottery Fund**. The **Royal Society for the Arts** has designated it as an official regional RSA event and will be hosting a pre-concert talk. **Anita Bhalla OBE** Chair of the Midlands Arts Centre and community arts champion will be presenting the concert. **Adrian Lucas** will be conducting Christopher Long's composition.

**Will Equinox have a longer term legacy?**

The event will be recorded so that a wider audience can share in this experience of inter-cultural music making. The newly formed Chinese and Indian choirs plan to continue to meet, develop and share their musical heritage with others. The hope is that this project will inspire future collaborations between peoples of different cultures in the West Midlands and beyond. It is intended to open doors for the City of Birmingham Choir and the other participating groups to

[1] Jordi Savall "The King of Spain" by Alex Ross *The New Yorker,* May 2, 2005.
[2] http://www.ifagiolini.com/projects/simunye/

work together creating artistic excellence and fostering cultural understanding, friendship and respect.

**Will there be special rehearsals so all the groups can sing together?**

There will be two workshops when members of the press can attend by invitation to meet / interview members of the participating groups and learn more about the project.