

The Mirror Magazine catches up with the Choir Director of the Jesus College Choir (JCC) Cambridge on the choir's upcoming performance

## For the love of music and travel

By Vinusha Paudyal

While most students pack up and go home for the holidays such as Christmas and Easter, for the Jesus College Choir (JCC) Cambridge it means along tour season. Known for their on point renditions of classic tunes, both secular and spiritual, the choir is currently warming-up for a tour of Sri Lanka this month.

It was when Professor Manouri Senanayake, sat in on one of the choir's many public performances in Cambridge that the idea of visit took shape. Encouraged by the choir's enthusiasm when they visited India last, the Professor who is now President of the Jesus College Choir (JCC) Tour Fund in Sri Lanka for this year, says proper ground work "started I would say about 18 months ago."

Director of the JCC, Mark Williams says since the choristers became aware of their latest destination, there has been a lot of fervent googling. "They have spent a good deal of time on the internet," researching sight-seeing options and are particularly excited to stop by at Sigiriya and the Elephant Orphanage at Pinnawala. In all honesty however he says, "I think they are delighted to be travelling somewhere warm," given the current weather in England.

Mr Williams was the Assistant Organist at the St. Paul's Cathedral in London and Director of Music at the St Paul's Cathedral School at just 21 in 2000. Taking over as choir director of the JCC in 2009 he feels the choir is eager not only to tour the



Mark Williams, Director of the JCC



Priyan De Livera.

country but to share their music.

"They have a packed schedule here," according to Secretary of the JCC Tour Fund for the Sri Lanka Tour, Priyan De Livera. "Not just sightseeing, the choir intends to hold workshops for schools around the country." Starting off in Galle he says they will be singing at services with school choirs in Colombo, Galle, Kandy and even Jaffna. The main event however is to be a concert on December 15 at the Ladies' College Hall.



Professor Manouri Senanayake. Pix by Nilan Malligapso

Studying various areas of interest ranging from natural sciences and languages to engineering Mr Williams says the common denominator among the students is the love

for music and travelling. Grateful that France, USA, Ukraine and Ireland are some of the places the choir made a stop at he says memories from each of those destinations still live on. "Whenever we visit a country we take away something from the culture" and he is confident the Sri Lankan experience wouldn't be too different. "So the choir was extremely excited when the tour was first proposed!" There were a few nat-



Members of the Jesus College Choir (JCC) Cambridge at a workshop

ural concerns, being away from home in terms of safety and health however he feels these have been eased by the meticulous planning of the organizing committee in Sri Lanka the Director feels the trip will be yet another rewarding experience.

A group of students who balance studying and their commitment to the JCC which leaves time for little else, Professor Manouri knows the strain it could be, if one didn't enjoy the experience. They go through competitive auditions to get in and once they do make it, she says their practice schedule is hectic to say the least. The Director too admits that the choir has been rather busy as of late. Apart from the regular services that the choir sings for in their chapel he says the choir has recently showcased in The Royal Albert Hall, Ely Cathedral and the King's College Chapel. Having just a few weeks to catch-up on a festive repertoire leaving much of the practicing for their

appearances in Sri Lanka, to after they get here. Unaffected by the hectic schedule, he says "Happily the choir is quick to learn music and enjoys the challenge of learning a new repertoire and performing it in new venues," he says.

The JCC will be performing a repertoire of some common and lesser known festive numbers. "There should be something for everyone," Mark promises of the concert on December 15. Building on from seasonal numbers like 'Deck the Halls' to 'Jingle Bells' the choir also hopes to have some slightly more reflective numbers including Elizabeth Poston's 'Jesus Christ The Apple Tree' and 'A Spotless Rose' by Herbert Howells.

Tickets for the concert at Rs. 5000, 3000, 2000 and 1000 for reserved seats along with balcony seats at Rs. 500 can be purchased at Odel.