

## JOB DESCRIPTION



**Job Title:** Organist/Director of Music

**Reports to:** Senior Rabbis

**Liases with:** Rabbis, Wardens, Choristers, Head of IT, Ritual Co-Ordinator, Facilities, together with organ maintenance and repair technicians.

### **Context**

West London Synagogue (WLS) is Britain's oldest and foremost Reform Synagogue with an international reputation for excellence. We have approximately 3,000 members and provide a wide range of formal and informal Shabbat and festival services as well as a religion school, study and learning opportunities and youth activities. The synagogue is deeply committed to Social Care with an experienced team providing one-to-one and group support to the community in areas such as managing mental health, bereavement, serious illness, coping with ageing and disability and loneliness. The synagogue is also committed to Social Action providing a drop-in centre for asylum seekers, night shelters for the homeless and many other services to help the most needy in our local community and beyond.

WLS is a lively, active, inclusive community of progressive Jews. Everyone is welcomed from everywhere and around the globe. We provide varied Shabbat and festival services, formal and informal alike, family services, weddings and High Holy Days. WLS's goal is to provide an exciting and spiritually nourishing Jewish life for everyone of all ages and ensure there is something for everyone.

The Choir at WLS is one of the best in Britain. At present, it consists of nine professional singers, some of whom have been at the Synagogue for more than 25 years. They accompany the liturgy, singing at almost every service, either seated behind the Ark, or out in the congregational pews (increasingly popular with the congregation). As well as singing at the weekly Sabbath services, the choir sings at Weddings, B'nei Mitzvah and Memorials, both at the Synagogue and outside.

Whilst supporting and encouraging congregational singing, their repertoire is drawn from the great 19th and 20th century European tradition. Almost unique amongst British synagogues, you will regularly hear the music of Sulzer, Lewandowski, Hart, Mombach, Naumberg, Bloch, Adler, Weiner, Janowski, Castel Nuovo-Tedesco, Helfman, etc., together with the finest of home-grown material by Salaman, Verrinder, Rideout, Mark Raphael (who composed the famous V'shameru for our Sabbath morning service) and not forgetting the music of our own Chris Bowers-Broadbent.

*History:* A mixed male and female choir, together with the organ, has played an important role in the liturgy since the Consecration Service, in January 1842. By the 1850's, the first choirmaster, Charles Salaman, and organist, Dr Verrinder, were setting about laying the foundation of a choral tradition, arranging the ancient melodies and composing much new music: a tradition that happily continues, unbroken, to this day, with the current Director of Music, Chris Bowers-Broadbent.

### **The Organ and Directors of Music**

It is hard to miss the presence of the organ, gloriously displayed as it is in the chamber immediately behind the Ark (which also houses the Choir and the organ console). The organ is a large 4-manual instrument built by Harrison and Harrison. It was beautifully restored in 2008 (thanks to a very generous benefactor from the congregation). Its Edwardian but bright sound is unusually perfect both as an accompanying as well as a solo instrument.

*History:* An organ was installed in our previous synagogue in Margaret Street in 1859 (the first organ to be installed in any synagogue), where *Dr Charles Verrinder* became organist and choirmaster. Verrinder was a remarkable man and a distinguished organist and composer. Among his most loved settings of the prayers is *Esah enai* (Psalm 121).

Verrinder died in 1904, and was succeeded by *Dr Percy Rideout*, a professor of piano, organ and composition. Soon after Rideout's appointment, the organ, originally built by Gray & Davison, was thoroughly re-built by Harrison & Harrison in 1908. Rideout continued the tradition of composing prayer settings, the Festival setting of 'Vayehi' being one of his most brilliant. The congregation celebrated his 50 year's service in 1954, by which time *Arnold Richardson*, who had been his assistant, took over as organist.

Richardson, being a first-rate recitalist (he was one of the 4 organists to preside at the opening of the Royal Festival Hall in 1951), did not wish to be also choirmaster, so Mark Raphael was appointed to that post, to be succeeded by Sidney Fixman in 1968.

Richardson suffered a heart-attack in 1970, and *Chris Bowers-Broadbent* (who had already been having lessons on this organ from Richardson, his Academy professor) took over for a short time, that year playing his first Yom Kippur, and finally succeeded to the post of organist when Richardson died in 1973. Sidney Fixman retired in 2010 and since 2012 Chris Bowers-Broadbent has taken on the role of Choirmaster and Organist.

## **Purpose of the Job**

The role of the Director of Music is a world class Organist who will also provide leadership to the Choir and work with other musical staff at WLS to enhance the synagogue's music tradition. The Director of Music will play a collaborative, innovative and creative role with energy and artistic skill to bring the entire WLS community together and will have the interpersonal skills to thrive in a congregational environment.

## **Main Duties and Responsibilities**

1. To play the organ at Shabbat (Friday evening and Saturday morning) services and festival services (both evening and morning), including the High Holy Days, in a manner to inspire and engage the congregation.
2. To provide leadership and management of the Choir at WLS.
3. To work collaboratively with other WLS musicians on planning and organising the Choir for Shabbat services, Weddings, B'nei Mitzvah and Memorials.
4. To engage meaningfully with the community and inspire and facilitate a participatory and spiritual experience for all congregants.
5. To manage and oversee the Music Library and ensure Music is catalogued and lead on the research for new Music.
6. To manage the recruitment, appointment, management, training and development of the Choristers.
7. To choose, rehearse and conduct the choir, looking after the Choristers, preparing the music service by service (transcribing it onto Sibelius, printing, duplicating and sorting into folders), researching new music.
8. To respond to Rabbinical requirements and prepare the required Music.
9. To lead the rehearsals with the Choir.
10. To ensure the Choral direction and organ accompaniment are appropriately covered.
11. To undertake training and development as necessary for this post.
12. To check and authorise each Chorister's invoices.

13. To book and oversee the organ builders/tuners and humidifier organ blower technicians for required maintenance and repairs; check and authorise their invoices.
14. To ensure WLS's safeguarding, safety policies and Data Protection policies are followed in running the Choir.
15. To carry out any other duties as reasonably required by WLS.
16. To act as an ambassador for WLS, representing WLS in a proactive way, consistent with the values of WLS.

## **PERSON SPECIFICATION**

### **Essential Experience and Skills**

1. A talented organist and musician who is highly proficient as a liturgical accompanist and has a wide range of experiences in music.
2. Previous experience of playing the organ and/or leading, organising, inspiring and training Choristers in religious services.
3. Has proven ability to arrange music.
4. Has strong organisational skills.
5. Has excellent communication and interpersonal skills.
6. Has the musical and personal skills to enthuse the Rabbis and Choristers.
7. Is able to relate warmly to adults and children.
8. Is able to work creatively and committed to their own professional development.

### **Desirable Experience and Skills**

1. Will have had some experience of playing the organ and/or leading Choristers in Jewish services for Shabbat services and festivals.
2. Proven ability to be pro-active, working alongside WLS's existing musical cultural programmes.
3. Some knowledge of Hebrew would be very helpful.
4. Demonstrate creativity in music composition.
5. Experience of doing own research in music and composition.
6. Ability to engage with social media on behalf of WLS's music.
7. Has excellent IT skills and is able to work on sound effects and other IT aspects in directing the music.

### **Qualifications and Memberships**

Minimum bachelor's degree in Music and/or equivalent in organ playing.