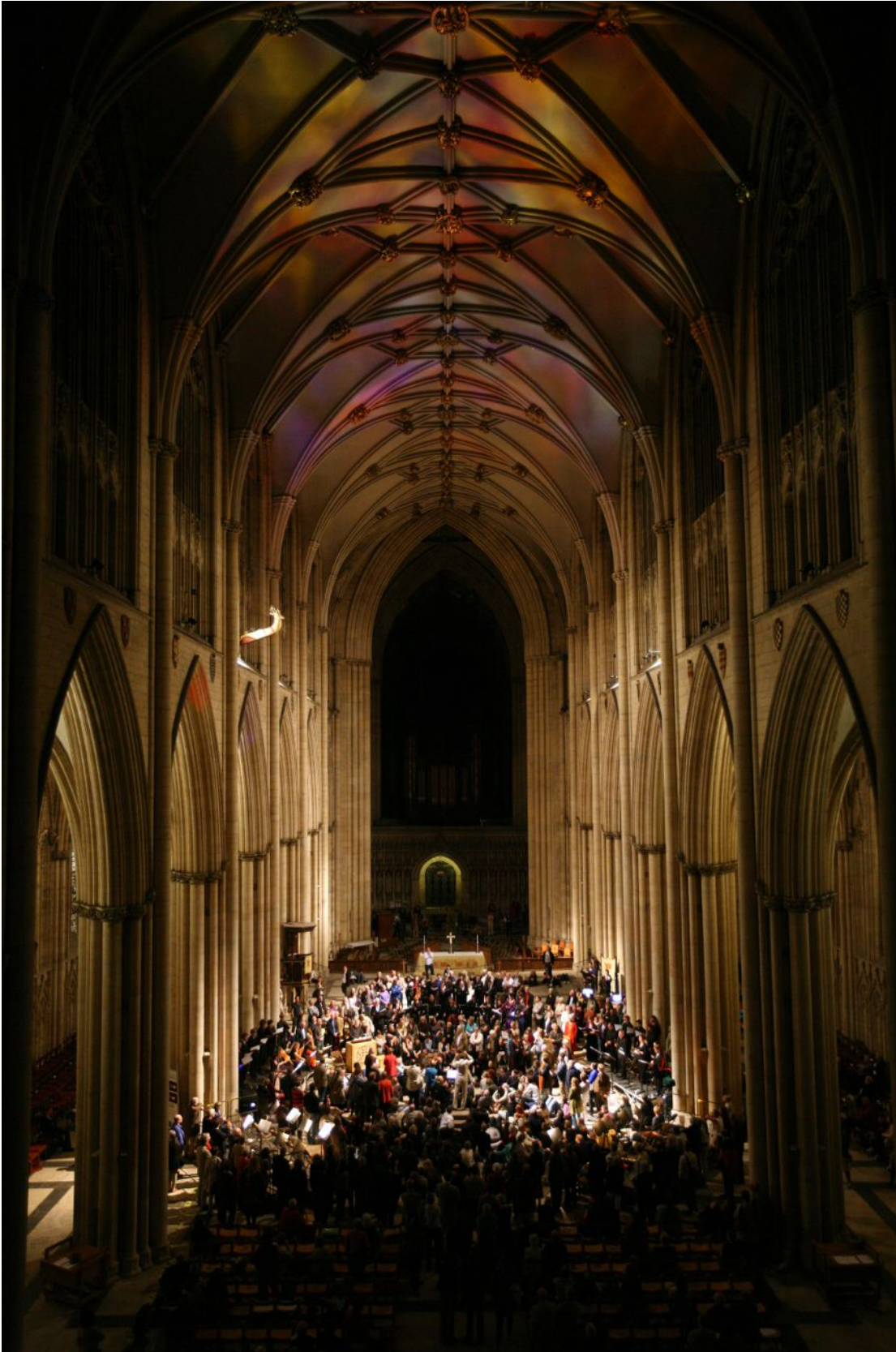


*ifagiolini*

Striggio and Tallis – UK tour  
Summer 2012

Evaluation for funders



*All photos from York Minster, © Kippa Matthews*

## Background

In February 2011, I Fagiolini released the world premiere recording of the *Missa Ecco si beato giorno* by Alessandro Striggio. The story of this amazing piece – a mass in 40 parts, the likely inspiration for *Spem in alium*, which had lain miscatalogued in a library – caught the public imagination, and the recording stayed at the top of the classical charts for weeks, selling well around the world.

It was then planned to give a series of live performances of the Mass in 40 parts, along with the Striggio motet on which the mass is based, and *Spem in alium* performed here with voices *and* instruments. The concerts also included the newly-reconstructed *Magnificat* by Gabrieli which appeared on I Fagiolini's latest CD, released in June 2012.

A crucial part of the project was that in each venue a local amateur choir would join with professional singers and musicians to perform in the concert, giving them an unrivalled learning opportunity, and potentially having a great impact on the future work of those choirs.

The concerts took place in the following venues:

King's College Cambridge (20 May)

Bath Abbey (5 June)

Tewkesbury Abbey (9 July)

York Minster (12 July)

St Augustine's Kilburn, London (22 September)

Robert Hollingworth, director of I Fagiolini writes:

'Throughout the planning, workshops and performances of the Striggio UK tour, we had two goals: not only to bring these extraordinary pieces to beautifully apt buildings but also to involve a fine local choir in each place, so that education was not just an add-on but at the heart of the project. It was clearly a huge thrill for the amateur singers taking part to work with the cream of the UK's professional Renaissance singers and players but the enthusiasm of these local choirs fed back to the professionals, renewing each performance and keeping the project incredibly fresh.

Each show had a different character: we thought it would be hard to beat the atmosphere at the first concert in Kings College, Cambridge, but as we moved on through Bath and Tewkesbury abbeys, the amazing venues and huge sell-out (every time) local audiences made each performance special. The fourth performance in York Minster was further supported by iMove to allow the audience to enter the performing circle and be literally sounded on every side. We made a short film about this striking evening which has just been released on our YouTube and Facebook site as well being sent to all the performers, increasing the project's impact.

Finally, in London we dared to promote the event in a church outside the safe traditional centre of professional concert-giving as we wanted to use its amazing architecture: we were again rewarded with a sell-out audience which was able to experience the project in 3-D as we used balconies to place two of the five choirs high up.'

## Feedback from amateur singers

A survey was sent to all the amateur singers who took part in the tour in each of the five locations. (Copy attached as an appendix).

91 responses were received – a 57% response rate overall.

### Demographics

The vast majority of singers (74%) were aged between 25 and 64, with 5% aged 16-19, 20% aged 20-24 and 1% aged 65 or over.

58% of respondents classified themselves as semi-professional singers who undertake occasional paid singing engagements. 41% were amateur singers.

Most respondents had heard the works before they performed them (but they had all been encouraged to listen to the CD beforehand, and a number of copies were sold through the I Fagiolini website during this period).

Most people had performed at least *Spem in alium* before, but 17% had not performed any of the works before this concert. However, 60% of respondents had not performed the Striggio Mass before.

### Outcomes

56% said it had improved their vocal ability – either to some extent, or to a significant extent.

57% said it had improved their ability to perform as part of an ensemble.

33% said it had improved their ability to perform in front of an audience.

43% said it had increased their interest in going to concerts.

85% said it had increased their overall sense of musical accomplishment.

70% said it had increased their motivation to find new performance opportunities.

*This is a selection of comments from respondents about the reasons for their scores:*

The combined effect of the high standard of performers, interesting textures from various instruments and, not least, Robert's coaching of our singing group.

Singing in a 40-part motet involved careful counting and above all acute listening skills to feel your way through the *Spem* as well as watching the conductor of course. I felt good after singing the *Agnus Dei II* and *Spem* mainly because it was the first concert I've been in since giving birth 6 months ago and therefore was an accomplishment in itself as well as a musical one. It has spurred me on to get back into proper singing again and sing with different choirs and maybe even doing solo/ chamber recitals again.

I am bone weary with all I have on my plate at the moment, and aware my energy may give out before my voice does, but this performance stirred me in such a way that you'll have to carry me off to stop me yet a while!

Working one to a part! I suffer from nerves quite badly, and I really had to face this head on in that environment. It made me really question my ability and where I needed improvement as the standard was very high.

Enjoyment of performing in a Pro-Am environment. Opportunities for performing Big Band Renaissance music have dwindled over the years but this rekindled happy memories of large scale Praetorius and Schutz performances of the past.

Tone and tuning - Robert's incredible attention to detail in the first couple of rehearsals. Overall sense of musical accomplishment - this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be part of something amazing. Will be talking about it for years to come.

Working with professionals at a professional level

Listening intently to such a large ensemble focused ensemble singing skills. Tuning was crucial and therefore a higher level of concentration was required.

Excellent teaching. The short rehearsal time made it necessary to learn the music quickly.

Hollingworth's brilliant musical direction, and the effort and sheer power of singing in 40 parts in a round

I think that singing alongside members of I Fagiolini was a huge inspiration and learning curve as it gave me a greater understanding of the level of singing that is needed in order to be in a professional consort.

Robert Hollingworth was fantastic as a conductor. Not only did he take the ensemble with great skill and humour, but during rehearsals he gave us all a great amount of useful information regarding singing technique.

Taking part in the performance with professional musicians definitely added to the satisfaction and enjoyment. Although I perform in a mixture of amateur and semi-professional situations this experience was a real highlight as I was still challenged due to the complexity of the pieces. Robert also gave interesting advice on how to approach the music.

Based on the story of the 40 part mass being mislabelled as a four part mass, and as part of my masters is the editing of early music, I am inclined to go and try to find other such forgotten masterpieces. Nothing makes me more excited than to present music which is largely unknown.

The innovative approach to audience placement and general approach to the delivery of the music was really impressive and was a great experience to be part of

It has increased my ability to sing as part of an ensemble by furnishing me with new skills and it has provided me with a sense of musical accomplishment because it was an honour and privilege to perform alongside such talented and reputable professional musicians.

The nature of these big works, performed in acoustics like the York minster, require great personal responsibility and attention to tempo, line and ensemble, and offer the chance to challenge your ear to pick as much out of the texture as possible.

The biggest influence (as in, new thing for me) was the promenade approach where the audience could move around the space, lie down, look at the lights and lit-up stained glass.

Tuning - in 40+ years of singing have never had the opportunity to sing in any other tuning style apart from Equal Temperament. I sing standard repertoire quite frequently, but want to find more opportunities to sing Renaissance.

Accomplishment - there were many logistical challenges to be overcome on the day in a very short space of time. It was very satisfying to do this

The sheer scale of the music, the chance to sing with such superb singers and the wonderful audience involvement and reaction.

Raising personal standards through close involvement with professionals

It's always wonderful to sing with true pros, as one's own breathing and technique improves just being with them. Being part of such a complicated project meant I really had to listen to many ensembles and choirs...I worked harder at this than normal! I would love to be involved in a similar project.

More awareness of my place in the harmony by thinking about tuning.

To have played my own (small) part in such a complex operation, and to have been involved in such a wonderful performance (and to be able to hear it back on the radio!) - all of these have given me personally a great sense of accomplishment.

I Fagiolini set and reach very high standards. It was a great pleasure to have this opportunity to sing with them, and to get a sense of their supreme ability.

I frequently perform Renaissance music, but this was an another level entirely - to sing such complex music with so many incredible professional and amateur musicians in one of the great venues in the country was a once in a lifetime experience.

It was just such a thrill to be treated as a professional by Robert - and by the rest of the performers.

*The survey asked whether the singers' level of interest in performing Renaissance Music had changed in any way as a result of taking part in the project. This is a selection of responses:*

I feel that there must be many more possibilities to combine groups for works so I look forward to discovering more. I think that the coaching from Robert and singing with the pros has given me a bit more consistency in my voice.

It was very inspiring to work with fellow musicians who shared my passion for this kind of repertoire. It was also very exciting to work with Robert and Hugh Keyte, whose vast knowledge in the field made it all the more educational and fulfilling.

Yes, I have seen how to make Renaissance music exciting on a large scale

I found it very interesting and enjoyable to perform this music in a unique way - performing early music can sometimes become less enjoyable if new ideas about performance of it are not explored.

As mentioned, it has increased my ability to sing as part of an ensemble by furnishing me with new skills and it has provided me with a sense of musical accomplishment because it was an honour and privilege to perform alongside such talented and reputable professional musicians.

The collaboration between singers and viols (and how we were all spaced in the choirs) in Spem in Alium, Ecce Beatam and the Striggio Mass in 40 parts was a totally new experience for me, and I really enjoyed learning about how the difference in timbres affected how the audience experienced the performance. It increased my enthusiasm for the possibilities of performing Renaissance music in new and innovative ways.

Yes, This project really brought the music alive in a way I've never experienced it before, even when singing Spem in Alium in the Chapter house.

Yes, I think taking part in the project gave me a new appreciation for Renaissance music largely due to listening closely to the intricate polyphony in our repertoire.

No. Already mad for it :-)

To perform with professional early instruments has really enhanced my enjoyment of singing this period of repertoire. Spem has been on my list to sing so I am thrilled to have performed it in such a professionally backed performance. It has been a fantastic opportunity. I did not know the other pieces so that has been great to discover new repertoire.

Much of my performing involves one to a part small scale singing, and it was incredible to be a part of essentially a one to a part massive project like this. It is entirely preferable to singing four part music with 10 per part for example.

The promenade aspect was fascinating and made me reconsider the function of polyphony in these works

Absolutely - while this was not the first time I've done with these large-scale choral works with I Fagiolini, the possibilities for creative use of space and instrumental/vocal timbres continues to excite me and give new ideas. Also, seeing the effect upon the audience of having a chance to engage with the music in a more active way is inspirational - it clearly works.

The concert was thrilling and has shown what is possible with great singers, instrumentalists and superb direction. I was particularly encouraged to try mixing instruments and voice parts in performing Polyphony and did so for the first time last Sunday in my own choir. We sang Byrd's Mass for Four Voices with a Viola on the Tenor part.



## **Audience feedback**

Two promoters – Cambridge and York – collected audience feedback for us:

### **Cambridge**

Sunday was a terrific experience. I Fagiolini were sensational and I don't think I have ever heard such music so brilliantly performed. The series was a towering success.

Congratulations on such a fantastic concert. We really enjoyed every minute. It was great being in the midst of the sound. I had had misgivings about the swimming pool nature of King's acoustic, but the reality worked very well. The sound was blended but the detail not obscured. Fabulous!

What a spectacular occasion!

Thank you for arranging the magnificent concert yesterday! I doubt whether we shall hear such a sound again. It was astonishing that we could hear a soprano over five sackbuts, two cornetts, and various dulcians at different times, not to mention the noises off. The Spem in Alium was the best I have ever heard.

The concerts were all great, Sunday night's though was some combination of unearthly and astonishing.

### **York**

Really amazing to be able to get up so close to the performers

I wish there had been a second half, I was ready for more.

It was such an intense experience - especially when standing in the middle

We want more like this

Has anything ever sounded so good in the Nave!

This was the best experience of my entire life

A moving and memorable experience. Wandered round and heard polyphony from every possible angle, and Spem from the middle

Simply a fabulous occasion- sound in the round!

Classical music felt all inclusive

Last night's was one of the best unusual, memorable experiences I've had.

All classical concerts should be like tonight's at York Minster. Just Wonderful!

Striggio in York Minster freeform audience created huge sense of humanity surrounded by sublimity

I had to pinch myself to remind me this was real!

Simple but effective. Would like to see more experimentation in promenade type events

Oh that heaven is like this!

It was a wonderful way to experience the music in a dynamic and accessible setting

Music beautiful, lighting wonderful, a fantastic experience.

.A wonderful, creative way to transport us back in time and experience the music as it was meant to be heard in this heavenly space.

Probably the greatest and most moving experience of our lives! More more more please

Absolutely brilliant - a once in a lifetime experience



Amazing. I don't know if it made me think differently about classical music but I thoroughly enjoyed the full sensual experience

So unusual to be able to move at will and not be inhibited. A very moving, fascinating and unique experience. Extraordinary.

There are some concerts that go beyond enjoyment and become profound spiritual experiences. This was one and I hope never to forget

I enjoyed it very much. I am in the 'early days' of exploring early music and this event has encouraged me further

A great and moving experience.

It was absolutely magical.

It was a stunning experience to be surrounded by such beautiful music

The first piece moved me to tears – if there is a heaven, this is what I want it to sound like



## Experimenting at York Minster

For the two performances on 12 July in York Minster, presented as part of York Early Music Festival, the idea of getting the audience as close to the musicians as possible was taken to another level. In association with *imove*, a Cultural Olympiad initiative in Yorkshire, the stage was set up to allow the audience to move inside the circle of performers so that they could experience the music in their own way.

For the second performance, the *imove* team had designed a light show, illuminating the space from inside and out.

The audience response was extremely good to both events, and the musicians – particularly the amateur singers – also noted that it gave them a new perspective on performing to have the audience so close to them.

A photographer, Kippa Matthews, was engaged to document the concert and the tour. The photos were used in local publicity, and some are included in this document.

I Fagiolini also commissioned Polyphonic Films to produce a short film that looked behind the scenes at the concerts, and got reaction from audience members.

The film can be viewed at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=7\\_X3000fGmc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_X3000fGmc)



## Press reviews

**The Guardian** 6 June 2012

Rian Evans

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If Robert Hollingworth's *I Fagiolini* began as a handful of beans in Oxford in 1986, this Bath festival concert was a bit like having several splendid beanstalks sprung from them, with Jack himself handing out golden eggs in the form of the most glorious polychoral music by the 16th-century Alessandro Striggio. In the mid-1560s, Striggio's extravagantly scored work effectively served as diplomatic Fabergé eggs on the European mission he undertook on behalf of Cosimo de' Medici. It was on a detour to London that Striggio met Queen Elizabeth I and that historical connection was the seed of this diamond jubilee celebration.

*I Fagiolini* won major awards last year for their recording of Striggio's 40 and 60-part Mass, missing for over four centuries, but hearing the performance live in Bath Abbey was a spine-tingling experience. Five choirs of eight parts each – *I Fagiolini* joined by the Bath Camerata and supported by organ, viols, sackbuts, cornets and dulcians – were disposed around the nave, creating a captivating atmosphere where individual voices emerged with clarity as well as making concerted harmonies swell and fade, separating and fanning out in a kaleidoscope of sound. The second *Agnus Dei*, with 20 more individual lines added for dazzling effect, was unlike anything of its time.

Striggio's brilliant *Ecce Beatam Lucem* had opened the performance, and Tallis's *Spem in Alium* – probably inspired by Striggio, though written some 40 years later for Elizabeth I – sounded even more magnificent with the presence of instruments. The Venetian splendour of Gabrieli's *Magnificat a 20.28 (con il sicut locutus)*, reconstructed by Hugh Keyte, was also stunningly executed under Hollingworth. By contrast, *I Fagiolini*'s final offering of William Byrd's six-part motet *O Lord, Make Thy Servant Elizabeth* conveyed a suitable austerity.



**This Is Bath** June 2012  
Lloyd Williams

The phrase 'magnum opus' might have been coined to describe the two major works which completely filled the abbey. Striggio's recently rediscovered *Missa Ecco si beato giomo* in 40 parts rising to 60 in the final *Agnus Dei* and Tallis's response, *Spem in alium*, also in 40 parts.

Preceded by a 40 part motet, *Ecce beatem lucem*, the Mass is music on the grand scale, and the abbey acoustic was on its best behaviour. The effect was one of total immersion as the music reaches the ears antiphonally, amplified by complex instrumental writing to augment the multi-layered choral sound, giving it a percussive intensity. If occasionally the period brass instruments tended to dominate, blurring the words, this was a small price to pay for the overwhelming sound reaching us from every part of the abbey. And the quality of the voices and instruments combined was utterly compelling, directed from the middle of the nave by Robert Hollingworth, surrounded, as it seemed, by musicians everywhere.

The Tallis, preceded by a robust male voice plainchant, is more completely integrated, less percussive and of course, more familiar. Tallis brings a warm legato to his rich polyphony, in contrast to the Striggio and with a smaller instrumental presence, this well nigh flawless performance was, quite simply, heavenly.

And we had miniature palette-cleansers, as BBC Radio 3's Martin Handley described them. A tranquil *Canzon* for organ by Merulo played by David Roblou, an arrangement by Bassano on a theme by Palestrina and a delicious motet, *O dulcissima Maria* by Viadana, soulful and pleading, for mezzo Clare Wilkinson, lute and organ.

And to finish, a quite extraordinary setting by Gabrieli of the Magnificat, arranged by Hugh Keyte with the refrain *sicut locutus est*, written perhaps for 20 or 28 parts? A setting of triumphant life and harmonic complexity which was absolutely breathtaking. A serene vocal sextet encore sent us out into Abbey Church Yard, wondering if Heaven might actually be like this.



### **Late Night Striggio, York Minster**

I Fagiolini, with similar forces, appeared on the day they were announced as York University's ensemble-in-residence next year, with their conductor Robert Hollingworth as Reader in the music department.

For this stunningly imaginative multiphony, the performers were arrayed in a circle in the Nave's centre, with the audience free to walk around and among them. Hollingworth used not merely extra voices from the University Chamber Choir, but renaissance strings, winds and brass supplied by the English Cornett & Sackbut Ensemble, City Musick, Fretwork, and the Rose Consort of Viols.

Alessandro Striggio's 40-voice motet and the mass based upon it demonstrated to the utmost the terraced dynamic – wave upon wave of glorious tone – that became so beloved of early Baroque composers.

Tallis's *Spem in Alium*, inspired by Striggio, sounded more daring, its clarity enhanced by instruments taking some of the voice parts.

But Giovanni Gabrieli's polychoral Magnificat, as written for St Mark's, Venice, took the laurels, a glorious sheen that brought the building into thrilling life.







Director – Robert Hollingworth

**Striggio Mass in 40 Parts: 2012 Tour  
Post-concert questionnaire for singers**

<b>Section 1: About you</b>	
1. <b>Name:</b> (leave anonymous if preferred):	
2. <b>Name of choir:</b> (if participating as a group):	
3. <b>Please indicate your age range:</b>	Age 12-15    16-19    20-24    25-64    65+
4. <b>Do you consider yourself to be (please delete as appropriate):</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> An amateur singer <input type="checkbox"/> A semi-professional singer (you undertake occasional paid singing engagements ) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A professional singer (paid singing engagements form a significant part of your overall income)
5. <b>Which of the major works had you performed in or heard before taking part?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Spem in alium                      Heard/performed <input type="checkbox"/> Striggio 40 part mass              Heard/performed <input type="checkbox"/> Ecce Beatam                              Heard/performed <input type="checkbox"/> Gabrieli Magnificat                  Heard/performed
<b>Section 2: About your involvement in the Tour</b>	
1. <b>Which pieces did you take part in today?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Spem in alium <input type="checkbox"/> Striggio 40 part Mass (complete) <input type="checkbox"/> Ecce Beatam Lucem <input type="checkbox"/> Striggio 40 part mass Agnus Dei 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Gabrieli Magnificat
2. <b>How much experience of performing Renaissance music have you had prior to this project?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> No experience <input type="checkbox"/> A little experience but I don't sing it regularly <input type="checkbox"/> Some experience <input type="checkbox"/> A lot of experience – this is my preferred repertoire
3. <b>Has your level of interest in performing Renaissance music changed in any way as a result of taking part in the project?</b>	<i>(please describe)</i>

<p>4. <b>Do you think that participation in the project had an impact on your musical development and interests in any of the following ways?</b></p>	<p>a) <b>Increase in your vocal ability e.g. breathing, tone, tuning.</b> <i>stayed the same / some / significant</i></p> <p>b) <b>Increase in your ability to sing as part of an ensemble.</b> <i>stayed the same / some / significant</i></p> <p>c) <b>Increase in your confidence in singing to an audience.</b> <i>stayed the same / some / significant</i></p> <p>d) <b>Increase in overall sense of musical accomplishment.</b> <i>stayed the same / some / significant</i></p> <p>e) <b>Increased motivation to find new performance opportunities.</b> <i>stayed the same / some / significant</i></p> <p>f) <b>Increased interest in going to concerts.</b> <i>stayed the same / some / significant</i></p>
<p>5. <b>Thinking about any increases you noted above, what were the key factors that influenced this?</b></p>	<p><i>(please describe)</i></p>
<p>6. <b>What resources have you used to help prepare for the performance?</b></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Scores sent out in advance</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Striggio Microsite</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Recordings</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Going to a concert</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Midi files</p>
<p>7. <b>Do you think that participation in the project had an impact on your choir as a whole?</b></p>	<p><i>(please describe)</i></p>
<p>8. <b>Please use the space to share any further thoughts about the project.</b> Please consider elements such as the rehearsal process, the venue/context, repertoire, direction in rehearsals, other performers.</p>	
<p>9. <b>If you would like to join I Fagiolini's mailing list please include your email address.</b></p>	<p><i>(If including your email address compromises your anonymity please sign up at <a href="http://www.ifagiolini.com">www.ifagiolini.com</a>)</i></p>

Thank you very much for completing the questionnaire.