

## London A Cappella Festival 2010

Richard Eteson and Kevin Fox of the Swingle Singers talk about London A Cappella Festival at Kings Place.

### **What is meant these days by 'a cappella' singing?**

A Cappella means 'in the chapel style', which has come to mean 'without instruments'. Technically, any chapel choir could be described as an a cappella group, but the more contemporary groups have come to dominate the scene. These tend to be small groups of 5-7 people, singing everything from classical to jazz and the latest pop, using the voice also to provide 'instrumental' accompaniments.

### **You are Canadian and British – how does a cappella differ in the two countries?**

A great deal! I was in the choir at Kings College, Cambridge and there is a tradition in this country of the back row of a cathedral or college choir getting together to form close-harmony groups – the Kings Singers being a good example! They inspired me. (Kevin) I'm from Canada, where, like America, there is a thriving a cappella scene in colleges and universities.

### **What can we expect from your festival?**

The beauty of this festival is that we have an incredibly wide spectrum of music. We have Renaissance music sung by Stile Antico, the latest pop arrangements from Out of the Blue, Broadway from Voces8, and gospel from the London Adventist Chorale. In fact, there's everything from Byrd to Brian Wilson – the common thread is we are all singing in close harmony. Ultimately, we'd like to establish an annual A Cappella festival at Kings Place – that's the dream.

### **What's your unique selling point?**

The Swingle Singers are unique because of our pioneering history in the 1960s. We were the first to fuse Bach with jazz scatting and the vocalise treatment of instrumental music. We made this field our own, and the group has continued to sing using the voice to make musical sounds, rather than just 'singing'. We've embraced beatboxing in recent years: we worked with the famous beatboxer Shlomo and formed the Vocal Orchestra with him. We are still fusing different musical styles like the original group for instance, on our latest album, Ferris Wheels, Kevin arranged Eleanor Rigby in a gospel style; we sang drums and bass, and formed our own gospel choir by multi-tracking ourselves several times. We are looking forward to expanding that with the London Adventist Chorale for the Saturday night gala.

### **You are showcasing quite a few young, up-and-coming groups, I believe?**

Yes, there are some really talented, emerging groups. Out of the Blue (Friday), based in Oxford, have been blazing their way through international competitions with, in their own words, their 'signature blend of dazzling harmony and outrageously unprofessional choreography' - and are great fun. Voces8 (Friday) are on the way up, they are quite young, great performers and with a strong educational mandate. Stile Antico (Thursday) is already hugely popular in the Early Music scene, with a Harmonia Mundi recording contract.

### **What can we expect from the daytime programme on Saturday?**

Plenty of entertainment from Evolution and In the Smoke, who are both fantastic, and we are hoping to have some star beatboxers demonstrating their skills in the foyer. We'll fine-tune the workshop to suit the audience. It will definitely be interactive, and a lot of fun! If it's large and non-specialist, you can expect us to take apart some of our music and show them how we work; if we find ourselves with some good singers, we will teach songs and do some improvisation. It's always fun to teach the audience beatboxing – kids especially love that.