

My gap year led to a career in West End musicals

GABRIEL Vick's experience in Portsmouth led him to a career in the West End – and to the premiere of a musical that he has co-written.

He signed up to the gap-year scheme when the trend was to spend a year working abroad. He devoted a year to teaching and singing in Portsmouth instead.

Since then, he's appeared in a variety of West End shows over the past 10 years, including *Avenue Q*, *Cabaret*, *A Little Night Music*, *La Cage Aux Folles*, and *Charlots of Fire*. He played Feuilly in the film version of *Les Miserables*.

The new musical comedy *Miss Atomic Bomb*, which he wrote with Adam Long and Alex Jackson-Long, is now being staged at St James's Theatre. It's set in Las Vegas in

the 1950s and stars TV comedian Catherine Tate.

It all started when he came to Portsmouth Cathedral back in 2001-02 to be a choral scholar and teacher.

"I wanted the real world experience of what it is like to work in a job and live independently," he said. "I worked as drama assistant at Portsmouth Grammar School and sang as a tenor in the choir.

"There was a lot of joy and happy memories. In the school, I learnt how to be responsible for a group of children on my own and create and carry out lesson plans. I directed shows and put on and judged pupils' events. One of my former pupils, Glynn Jones, is now a stand up comedian!

"In the choir, I continued to hone

my craft and we even enjoyed a tour to Caen. I sung with military bands and even paraded behind a donkey on Palm Sunday. I enjoyed David Price's can-do attitude – I once enquired how he was going to pay for a proposed revamp to the music school. He simply smiled and said 'faith'.

"David encouraged us gap year students – me, Simon Day, Andy Ford and Will Ings – to start our own close harmony group called Mind The Gap which was a real joy. I was personally inspired by the visit to my school of the Kings Singers and desperately wanted to sing the arrangements I had heard.

"We practiced regularly after Evensong and began to get gigs with those associated with the cathedral, and put on a fabulous concert towards

the end of the year in the nave. I love the fun and freedom of a capella singing. I'm a bit of a theatrical show off so it suited me down to the ground!"

Gabriel studied at Christ Church, Oxford, and then went to the Royal Academy of Music to study musical theatre.

"The year in Portsmouth helped with confidence and life experience," he said. "The close harmony group definitely kept alive my love of stage performing. In *Miss Atomic Bomb*, you will find plenty of a capella close harmony moments – and now you know where that came from!"

Miss Atomic Bomb is being performed from March 7 until April 9. For more details, see www.stjamestheatre.co.uk



Gabriel Vick

Exploring faith and liturgy led to my ordination

IT was a chance for Jamie Hawkey to explore faith away from home – and it led to a call to ordination.

Jamie spent his gap year on the choral scholar scheme at Portsmouth Cathedral in 1997-98, and it was a pivotal year for him. He came back to our diocese nine years later as a curate at St Mary's Church in Fratton. Since then he has worked at Westminster Abbey and is now dean of a college at Cambridge University.

He said: "I wanted something which would give me a year's experience of singing almost every day, and to expand my horizons

of musical life before going up to Cambridge as an undergraduate choral scholar.

"I got so much out of it! Musically, my sightreading came on in leaps and bounds, but more than that I made some magnificent friends, grew in my faith, and found myself really loving Portsmouth diocese.

"David and Kitty Price became lifelong friends, and I got to know Bishop Kenneth. He became quite an inspirational figure for me as I explored a call to the priesthood, and began to think about how pastoral and academic work could be held

together with integrity.

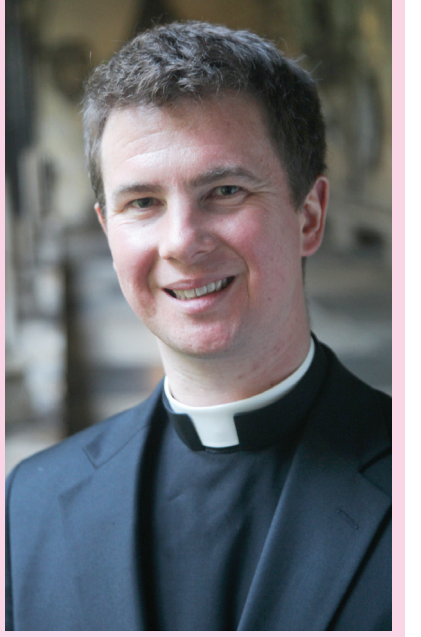
"I enjoyed so much about it. The tour to Estonia will always stay with me – especially the beautiful gratitude and hospitality from people who had little, and who had been through so much. But the day-to-day singing of the liturgy was also essential for me.

"Portsmouth was somewhere where I was able to explore my faith away from my home context. When I was ordained some nine years or so later, I went to serve as a curate at St Mary's with Bob White, one of the most tremendously gifted parish

priests in the Church of England.

"Without the gap year scheme, it's quite likely that I would never have ended up in Portsmouth, and in St Mary's parish, which was the place which taught me more than anywhere else how to be a priest. And the rhythm of a choral liturgical life has remained very important to me."

He became precentor at Westminster Abbey and is now dean of Clare College, Cambridge, director of studies in theology for the college, and assistant diocesan director of ordinands for Ely diocese.



The Rev Jamie Hawkey

Pioneer has played in cathedrals all over the country

JAMES Davy's year working at our cathedral was a pioneering one – he was the first gapper to be an organ scholar.

He went straight from school, after experience of being a chorister, to be organ scholar in 2000-01. It helped him to decide to pursue music as a vocation, and he is now organist and Master of Choristers at Chelmsford Cathedral.

"It was a terrific experience," he said. "It was my first real experience of cathedral music from the inside, apart from being a chorister. It was good to see behind the scenes. It also started me off on the journey to where I am today 16 years later.

"Portsmouth was a good place to be, because they gave me a lot to do – I wasn't just the traditional office boy making the tea. It was my first regular experience of accompanying choristers for weekly services, and I learnt how to accompany the Psalms, among other things.

"In my second term, I played for a service with a 15-minute anthem, which was the biggest thing I'd ever done. I had to learn it then, which means I've been able to

play it since. It was a lot of responsibility.

"It did help me to think about whether I wanted to do this as a job, and it gave me a taste of what it would be like."

James went on to be organ scholar at Durham Cathedral for three years while he was studying at university there. He also ran a chapel choir in his second year. Then he was assistant organist at Winchester College, subsequently organ scholar – and latterly acting assistant Master of Music – at St Albans Cathedral, and then was appointed to his first paid position as assistant director of music at Blackburn Cathedral, where he stayed for six years before moving to Chelmsford.

"I hope to come to the reunion," he said. "There have been lots of changes in personnel, but David and Kitty Price are still there, and there are some men in the choir who I know.

"I'm enjoying my job here in Chelmsford. It's a small cathedral, but very active. Music is well supported and I've been able to build on the work here. There have been appearances on radio and TV and at the Edinburgh Festival."



Best cathedral gap year scheme in country marks 25 years

It is 25 years since the very first choral scholars began arriving at our cathedral for their gap year.

These were young singers and musicians who wanted to spend a year working at our cathedral, helping with the vast array of services and concerts.

It would allow them to devote a year of their lives to serving God through music, and also help them to decide whether to make music a career. Typically, it would be their gap year between school and university, although some choral scholars have been postgraduates.

Since the scheme started in 1991, a total of 103 choral scholars have spent a gap year working at the cathedral. Many have gone on to become professional singers, organists and musicians, in churches, cathedrals and in the secular world.

And next month, our cathedral is hosting a special 25th anniversary celebration, gathering together as many of those former choral scholars as possible. They'll meet up on Bank Holiday Monday – May 2 – for a reunion that will include Evensong, dinner and the chance to look at old photos and share memories.

It's a scheme that has been praised by many of those involved with music around the country.

Ralph Allwood, who was director of music at Eton School for 26 years, said: "I am very pleased to recommend the gap year scheme at Portsmouth. Every single person I have recommended it to has reported to me that they are enjoying



Memories from 25 years of gap year choral scholars: (top left) Mind the Gap singing on board HMS Warrior; (centre) on a tour to Belgium in 2010; (top right) choral scholars Chris Hann, Tim Burt and Mike Bunch singing; (below): Oli Jones singing for the 60th anniversary of D-Day

themselves enormously, they are learning a lot and that they can think of no better way of spending that precious year."

Dr David Price, our cathedral's organist and Master of Choristers since 1996, inherited the scheme from his predecessor Adrian Lucas.

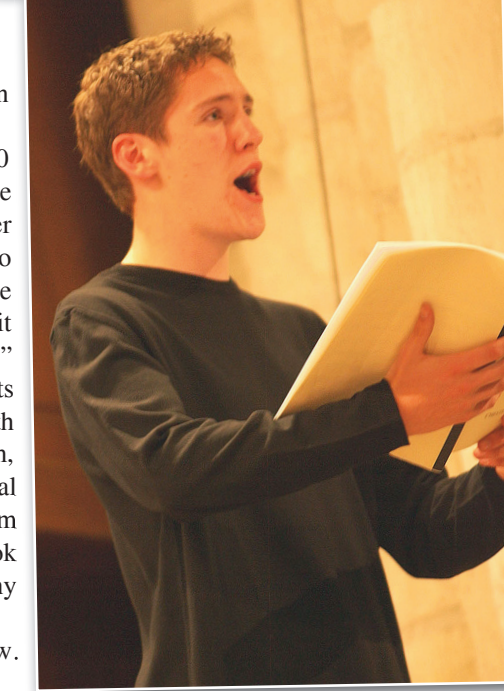
"When I started, there was only one choral scholar each year, but the new headteacher of Portsmouth Grammar School, Tim Hands, arrived and we agreed to increase it to five or six each year," he said.

"Now there are up to seven each year. They all sing every day for us, and they all have jobs at the grammar school in different departments. There's always one in the music department and often one teaching sport, but they also teach

English, maths and lots of other subjects.

"One of the reasons the scheme has become popular nationally is that they recognise they can get experience behind the scenes both in the cathedral and in a school. And of course, they often get experience of travelling abroad with the choir when we go on tours.

"It is always a bit of a shock every September, as half of the back row of the Cathedral Choir changes, and that new team has to blend together. But it's great to have some fresh blood coming into the choir each year, and one of the most satisfying things about this job is to share the cathedral with them, and mould them into a new team – before waving them goodbye and seeing them excel elsewhere.



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