

MILITARY WIVES CHOIRS AND WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL JOIN FORCES TO COMMEMORATE THE 100 YEAR JOURNEY OF THE UNKNOWN WARRIOR



- To commemorate the centenary of the burial of the Unknown Warrior, Westminster City Council has joined forces with the Military Wives Choirs to re-record '*Abide with Me*', a hymn originally sung at the funeral itself.
- The brand-new arrangement, due to be released digitally on 6th November 2020, will be accompanied by a music video and a moving documentary following the Journey of the Unknown Warrior as told by the Military Wives Choirs.

<https://www.militarywiveschoirs.org/military-wives-choirs-and-westminster-city-council-unknown-warrior>
[Westminster.gov.uk/unknownwarrior100](https://www.westminster.gov.uk/unknownwarrior100)

To commemorate the 100 Year Journey of the Unknown Warrior, members of the Military Wives Choirs from across the country have re-recorded a hymn sung at the funeral itself in 1920. '*Abide with Me*' was one of two tracks to survive experimental recording at the original ceremony to become the first electrical recording ever sold to the public.

The project, which was produced during a period of present-world uncertainty, was conducted by Hilary Davan Wetton, one of Britain's most distinguished and dynamic conductors, and produced by Sean Hargreaves. 70 members of the Choirs travelled from across the UK to record each vocal part individually due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Of over one million British and Commonwealth servicemen and women killed in World War I, some 165,000 would never receive a proper burial. Many were left in unmarked graves on the battlefields where they fell. Some were simply never found, leaving family members with nowhere to mourn their loved ones.

In 1920, one unidentified fallen serviceman was chosen at random and returned from the fields of France to represent all those who had died in the war.

And, on 11th November 1920, this unknown warrior was given a full state burial – his procession moving through packed London streets, before being laid to rest amongst Kings and Queens in Westminster Abbey. The ceremony also included the unveiling of the Cenotaph by King George V.

This national outpouring of grief followed a period of incredible suffering – and remains a moving demonstration of togetherness in the face of adversity.



Mark Shearer, Member for St James's Ward and Armed Forces Champion, Westminster City Council, said "To be re-recording this single with the Military Wives Choirs during the current situation, and to be reminding people of this incredible event that brought the country together 100 years ago, makes this such a special collaboration."

Julia Hudson, Music & Performance Manager, Military Wives Choirs, said "Our choir members have come from all over the country during challenging times, to produce something that fittingly commemorates the centenary of an event that brought people together during the most difficult times this country has ever faced."

Interesting details about the collaboration

- Conceived before the impact of COVID-19 had hit, and then created and recorded during lockdown, the production of the track became a journey in itself – showing the power of music to bring people together during difficult times.
- '*Abide with Me*' features 70 Military Wives Choirs members from 30 choirs across the United Kingdom, conducted by Artistic Director Hilary Davan Wetton
- With over 70 choirs and more than 2,000 members in British military bases across the UK and overseas, the Military Wives Choirs is a charity that brings all women in the military community closer together and empowers them through singing
- The choirs are usually recorded in groups of over 100 in a live, concert hall setting, which wasn't possible to achieve during COVID-19. Therefore, the track was produced in a socially distanced way – 70 choir members rehearsed solo and then recorded individually, both with the conductor's guide video. These vocal recordings were combined to produce the finished choral track, using careful mixing to preserve the Military Wives Choirs' authentic and moving live sound.
- The music team wanted to respect the history of this well-loved hymn as it would have been in 1920, while adding some 21st-century colours. They achieved this by combining a contemporary piano figuration, reminiscent of modern acoustic tracks, lush string orchestration and unexpected synths, crafted by sampling a solo female voice. Traditional elements were maintained through the choral arrangement and added trumpet descant in the final verse.
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The song will be released digitally on 6th November and will be accompanied by a music video which succinctly tells the story of the Unknown Warrior and captures their final journey through Whitehall to Westminster Abbey, and a touching documentary which re-tells the story of the Unknown Warrior as told by the Military Wives Choirs.

ENDS



Notes to editors

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MUSIC CREDITS

Military Wives Choirs - Abide with Me

Music: William Henry Monk

Lyrics: Henry Francis Lyte

Arranged for the Military Wives Choirs by Sean Hargreaves, Julia Hudson and Hilary Davan Wetton

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The Military Wives Choirs is a registered charity in England and Wales (1148302) and Scotland (SC045217)

Conducted by Hilary Davan Wetton

Produced by Sean Hargreaves

Featuring Sgt Robert Parry, The Band of the Scots Guards - Trumpet

Archive footage and images: *"Footage supplied by British Pathé"*