



# Medal glory for Bradford girls

by Claire Bennett

The Bradford Catholic Girls' Choir (BCGC) have proved their singing skills are of the highest calibre after bagging a bronze medal double at the prestigious World Choir Games in Latvia.

The competition, which is widely known as the choral equivalent of the Olympics, saw 27,000 singers in 460 choirs from 73 countries pitted against each other in the hope of taking home a medal.

After months of preparation, the choir arrived in Riga on 8th July and sang in two categories in the exclusive Champions' Competition, reached through an extensive selection process.

They won a bronze medal in both the 'Sacred Music with accompaniment' category, held at the 13th century St Peter's Church, and the 'Youth choirs of equal voices' category, at Riga Stradins University.

Although they are widely featured on BBC broadcasts such as *Songs of Praise* and also regularly partake in liturgical singing at local Masses, this is the biggest competition the choir has attempted to date.

"They've done a couple of big UK ones in the past, but it's the first international competition they've taken part in," said Tom Leech, who has been musical director of BCGC for over two years.

Along with some fundraising events by the choir, the tour was made possible through the generous financial support of Leeds Trinity University, The Fattorini Trust, the Knights of St. Columba, City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council and The Emerald Foundation.

BCGC also accepted the opportunity to perform for the British Ambassador, Sarah Cowley, at a special reception held at the British Embassy, sang for passengers dur-

ing a boat trip on the River Daugava and took part in workshops with the Latvian State Choir, renowned composer Eriks Esenvalds, gospel musician Andre Thomas and Canadian vocal expert Zimfira Poloz.

Latvia was a fitting host country for the Games as it is renowned for its love of music. The Latvian Song and Dance Festival sees 30,000 performers descend on the country every five years.

During the trip, the group also got some time to do some sight-seeing with a tour of Riga's open air Museum of Ethnography, where they sang in a 17th century traditional wooden church.

Mr Leech added: "We are so proud of the girls' achievements – they've worked incredibly hard and the tour was the icing on the cake of a very busy year.

"To see them singing alongside some of the best choirs in the world was really moving."