

An introduction to the
Choir School of Southwest Florida



In residence at
Saint Luke's Episcopal Church

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The Choir School of Southwest Florida exists to use music as a positive intervention in the lives of youth through out-of-school arts learning, including vocal training, private instrumental lessons, and leadership development in children and youth ages 7-17.

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Mission

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History

The Choir School of Southwest Florida trains boys and girls to sing professionally with adult singers. The program incorporates the style of training that began one thousand years ago and continues today in the great cathedrals in England. The traditions established for this choir school are primarily based on traditions common to other Royal School of Church Music (RSCM) choir schools in the U.S. and England. St. Luke's Church has a history of men and boys choirs, girls choirs, and mixed choirs. Due to a change in demographics, these programs were abandoned for a short time. Changing times and socio-economic factors led a group of musicians from the church to feel the time was right to try this model once again in a modified, modernized format. In August 2011, our founding board was established. In October 2011, the Choir School board began recruiting children interested in musical training, from several neighboring schools.

Admissions

The Audition and Interview

In the course of the audition, the Choirmaster evaluates the chorister's conduct, singing ability, and reading skills. The Choirmaster takes into consideration the potential of each chorister as well as any special needs he/she may have. The chorister can relax because no preparation is required for the audition. In addition to the interview and audition of the chorister, the parents or guardians must be present for a brief interview at the time of the chorister's audition.

Acceptance

The Choir School of Southwest Florida auditions children and youth from a broad geographic area and from all faith traditions without discrimination with regard to race, color, or ethnic origin. Students do not have to be Episcopalian or members of St. Luke's Church to participate in the Choir School of Southwest Florida. However, anyone who is interested in learning more about the Episcopal Church or becoming an active member of St. Luke's Church is always welcome.

Commitment

The growth and development of each chorister is realized by a commitment to the excellence that is shared by the Choir School of Southwest Florida and participating families. The commitment of the Choir School is to provide the finest musical education in the context of the religious and liturgical life of the parish

and to nurture the best examples of citizenship. The commitment of participating families is to review the choir schedule, to participate in scheduled rehearsals, weekly performances, and concerts, and to communicate *limited* but necessary absences to the Choirmaster. Before a family makes a commitment to the Choir School, the chorister and family can participate in a four week trial period. During this time, parents and guardians are encouraged to observe as many rehearsals and weekly performances as possible. By the end of the four weeks, the chorister, family, and Choir School staff can confidently evaluate the experience.

Parental Involvement and Support

The Choir School of Southwest Florida is a demanding program, and while it has many incentives and rewards, parental support and encouragement are of utmost importance. In the course of a season, choristers will experience many high points and exciting opportunities, and they will also experience times when they are tired, frustrated, and in need of encouragement. Parents are encouraged to be a part of the whole experience for their child. Parental attendance at worship services and concerts is optional; however, choristers seem to perform especially well when parents are present. Parents and family members can provide praise and share in the joy and satisfaction of chorister achievements. Parents are encouraged to participate in a variety of volunteer jobs in the Choir School.

Financial Package

All children who are accepted into the Choir School of Southwest Florida, based on the voice audition and interview with the Choirmaster, attend and participate in the Choir School free of charge. Choristers receive training and benefits valued at \$3,000.00. The program is fully funded by scholarships. All choristers receive all lessons, training, services, meals, travel, and any other opportunity without charge to the choristers. While not required, participating families are invited to contribute to the Annual Operating Fund of the Choir School.

Musical Education

Professional choral and vocal training

The chorister receives classical singing instruction, learns how to read music, performs a variety of choral music that spans five centuries and a variety of languages, including English, Latin, French, and German. The musical curriculum of Choir School of Southwest Florida follows the principles of choir training as set forth in the syllabus *Voice for Life: Choir Trainer's Book*, the curriculum of the Royal School of Church Music (RSCM). This curriculum is in widespread use in similar choirs and choir schools throughout the English-speaking world.

Music Theory Instruction

The study of music theory helps students better understand the basic building blocks of musical composition and how to read music. Specifically, the students learn about pitch notations, rhythm notation, intervals, scales, key signatures,

time signatures, chords, and harmony. Understanding music theory helps students become better musicians.

Professional Voice Instruction

Through the study of classical vocal techniques, choristers become skillful, knowledgeable, and therefore more capable, singers. They learn that singing is a whole body, whole person event, far more than just an exercise in achieving beautiful tone. Additionally, what is learned in voice lessons and public performances becomes a positive influence in all areas of life: self confidence, increased independent work habits, mental and physical discipline and more. Specific topics include: basic principles of vocal technique, breathing to sing, vocalizing, practicing, vocal health, song learning method and expressive singing.

Professional Instrumental Instruction

In addition to the enjoyment one receives when playing a musical instrument, instrumental study also increases overall musicianship, enhances abstract reasoning skills that help children in academic studies, including math and science, and promotes healthy discipline that is transferable to other areas of interest. After completing the probationary period, choristers will be eligible to receive thirty-minute private piano or organ lessons through the school. If a student is currently studying with an established teacher, a future scholarship program may be able to help cover some if not all of the chorister's lesson fees. This scholarship program will be announced when it is available, and students will be able to apply for consideration at that time.

Performances

In addition to singing for liturgies at St. Luke's Church, the choir is featured in concert series and civic events throughout the Southwest Florida region. Travel costs are covered by the Choir School.

Summer Choir Camp

Each summer the Choir School holds a one-week summer choir camp that gives the choristers an immersion experience in music, art, and drama, as well as recreational activities.

Incentives and Rewards

Standards

Each chorister in the Choir School typically earns three standards for each rehearsal, service, and concert by full and active participation. One standard is given for attendance. A second standard is usually awarded for musical progress, and a third is given for individual leadership. Up to two standards may be withheld for any rehearsal, service or concert, if in the observation of the choirmaster, a chorister is not participating fully or progressing properly. In addition to demonstrating mastery of the goals set forth for each level of achievement in *Voice for Life: Choir Trainer's Book*, a minimum of 250 standards

per chorister per year is required for promotion to the next level and to receive additional stipend for that rank.

Promotion

Choristers need to earn 250 standards per year to be promoted to the next level of achievement. Choristers receive their choir vestments and Royal School of Church Music ribbons and medals as they are promoted from one level of achievement to the next. Promotion results in a stipend increase. Choristers are honored each year on Promotion Sunday with special liturgy and presentation of ribbons and medals, followed by a reception in their honor.

Team Points

In addition to making individual progress in the Choir School, choristers learn how to function as team players. To foster team effort, group skills, and healthy competition, the choristers are divided into teams. Team points are earned when choristers set the best example in deportment, singing, and overall participation.

Chorister Stipend

Choristers receive a cash stipend for each rehearsal, service, and concert in which they participate. Chorister stipends provide educational opportunities for a sense of accountability, money management, and stewardship. Chorister pay ranges, and is dependent upon attendance and rank. Base pay is \$.75 per call with an additional \$.25 added each consecutive year of service with promotion. Head Chorister, Team Leaders, and Student Assistants receive additional pay for their roles of responsibility. In the course of a choir season, a chorister can make between \$135 and \$300 dependent upon attendance and rank.

Stipend Scale

First year—Probationer .75 per call

Second year—Light Blue ribbon \$1.00 per call

Third year—Dark Blue ribbon \$1.25 per call

Fourth year—Red ribbon \$1.50 per call

Fifth year—Yellow ribbon \$2.00 per call

Additional stipend may be awarded for a particularly challenging or special performance as deemed by the Executive Director. This additional stipend is calculated as double or triple normal stipend per call.

Recreation

Recreational events with chaperones are planned throughout the year for fellowship, relaxation, and fun! The Choir School participates in field trips, pizza parties, and ice cream socials just to name a few events!

Expectations

Attendance/Time Commitment

During the week, choristers meet for two weekday rehearsals, which are held on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. Instrumental and voice lessons are scheduled at a time that is convenient for both the instructor and the student's family. During the academic year, choristers are required, as part of their training, to perform on Sunday mornings. This Sunday morning performance is of vital importance since the choir joins with the adult Chancel Choir to present at least one anthem, one psalm setting, service music, hymns, and descant each week. Additional concerts and performances are presented in a wide variety of venues in Fort Myers and throughout Southwest Florida. Events that include choir performance are not optional and choristers are encouraged to participate. If a chorister does not attend, he/she loses standards and stipend for that event. Several of the Choir School outings each year are non-performing activities and are optional. Choristers are responsible for signing in each day upon arrival to Choir School. They initial with pen in the date column of the attendance record.

Sick Leave

Students receive three paid sick days per semester. These sick days apply to rehearsals, as well as performances. If a student is not present for any given number of days over, or the number of events missed exceeds, the three allotted sick days per semester, the student does not receive stipend or standards for those days or events missed. In the event of excessive absences, the student is asked to leave the program. During the Parent/Child interview, which is conducted at the time of the time of the audition, the parent is provided with information regarding the Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday schedule. If the family's schedule conflicts with the regular rehearsal/performance schedule on an ongoing basis, then the child is not admitted into the Choir School.

Transportation

Transportation to and from church is available for choristers on weekdays and Sundays. On weekdays, children are picked up from school and dropped off at home. On Sundays, choristers are picked up for rehearsal and performance and returned home, on an as needed basis.

Access to the Arts

Students of the Choir School are exposed to great musical masterpieces of Western Civilization on a weekly basis. The literature they perform is of the highest quality, is of significant historical value, and is learned in an environment where high performance standards are expected.

Leadership Training

Special classes are offered throughout the year, providing choristers with the opportunity to develop leadership skills. These skills are reinforced in the context of every rehearsal and performance. Choristers who consistently demonstrate

leadership by example, may be invited to serve as Head Choristers, Team Leaders, and Student Assistants.

Leadership Positions

Head Chorister selected by Artistic Director and Executive Director, receives an additional \$1.00 per call during the year-long appointment.

Team Leaders selected by Artistic Director, receive an additional .25 per call for term. This position rotates monthly.

Student Assistants

Student Assistants assist in a variety of administrative tasks, including: library work, vestment organization, mailings, and phone calls. Choristers who demonstrate excellent commitment to the Choir School may apply for Student Assistantships. These assistantships are paid positions, as opposed to stipendiary, and are open to older choristers.

Citizenship and social skills

Choristers learn how to interact in an intergenerational community, relating to a wide range of personalities and backgrounds.

Work ethic

Choristers develop good habits that sustain them throughout their adulthood. Specifically, choristers learn to: derive satisfaction from hard work, compete in a healthy fashion, focus on the task at hand, develop individual standards and leadership skills, and become a team player.

Tutorials and Activities

The Choir School offers students assistance with homework, computer learning, and special projects through its tutorial program. Group activities and projects are available for those choristers who have completed their homework for the afternoon. In connecting adult mentors with students, the Choir School helps choristers develop a vision for college and beyond, and to develop effective study habits for academic success.

Academic Advantage

Young people who participate in the arts are more likely to receive recognition in academic achievement. A recent study from the College Entrance Examination Board found that students of the arts continue to outperform their non - arts peers on the SAT, and that SAT takers with experience in music performance score higher on the verbal and math portions of the test than students without the experience.

NOTICE OF NONDISCRIMINATORY POLICY AS TO STUDENTS

Choir School of Southwest Florida admits students of any race, color, national or ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school. It does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin in the administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school-administered programs.