

Harmony: Kids' choirs

By Mary Shapiro
Journal staff writer

The St. Louis Children's Choirs hope to foster harmony — through harmony.

Developing musical excellence while building character has been the primary goal of the organization throughout its 11 years of serving local youngsters.

Music Director Ethelyn Sparfeld, who heads a staff of six, says the group strives to offer vocal training and performance opportunities for the more than 160 youngsters aged 6 to 18 years old who are served in more than 20 municipalities and 70 schools

in 12 school districts throughout the St. Louis area.

"We stress choir members developing personal qualities such as commitment, concentration, promptness, a positive attitude and mutual support, as well as a deep love of music," Sparfeld said.

The music performed ranges from the Renaissance and Baroque periods up to contemporary pieces, Sparfeld said.

Students can audition for any of the four choirs — childrens choir, chorale, concert choir and chamber singers — during the summer or in between school semesters. They then are placed

in one of the choirs according to their musical ability, experience and training.

"We really want to give an opportunity to those children really committed to music, those who love it, rather than those who might view it as just a hobby," said Sparfeld, who has been with the children's choirs for eight years.

The choirs are constantly on the go, conducting elementary school tours, giving Christmas and spring concerts, performing shows at local nursing homes, and regularly performing with the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra and at the Japanese Festival

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develop excellence

at the Missouri Botanical Garden and the Festival of Flowers at Christ Church Cathedral.

Next summer, a tour of eastern Europe and Russia by the concert choir and chamber singers is planned, with a total of eight stops, including Leningrad, Moscow, Prague and Vienna.

Also in 1990, the concert choir will perform at Carnegie Hall in New York during the International Children's Choirs in Concert.

"We're really gratified to have been chosen," Sparfeld said. "Twenty-seven choirs were chosen from all over the world and, of those, eight or nine will be

able to go."

The non-profit organization receives 90 percent of its income from tuition paid by students. Less than 10 percent of the choirs' income comes from individual donations, corporate support, grants or performance honoraria.

Despite a tight budget, the group is looking for a permanent base of operations. Currently, it is headquartered at 11901 Olive Blvd.

"We really need a large facility for rehearsals. We now rehearse at Parkway East Junior High School, but they often have their own concerts

and other events scheduled. It has been increasingly hard to find a place to perform that can handle us," Sparfeld said.

"We envision for the St. Louis area developing satellite training choirs all over the county and in East St. Louis with our central hub being downtown to better serve the entire metropolitan area as a regional asset," Sparfeld said. "But we need more financial support to accomplish that."

The next children's choirs audition will be Dec. 30. For appointments, call 537-3150 or 993-9626.