

MEET . . . THE ST. LOUIS CHILDREN'S CHOIR

by Elizabeth (Bo) Hanley, SLCC Vice-President

The goal of the St. Louis Children's Choir is the same as one of the prime Kodály philosophical concepts: musical excellence for everyone. Striving toward that goal develops vocal technique, musical reading and understanding, qualities of character such as persistence, accuracy, unity, concentration, promptness, quickness of thought, cooperation, commitment, support for one another and an over-all deep love and appreciation of music. This provides the framework within which SLCC members may work and experience the reward that comes from successful performances and a job well done.

Founded in 1978 by Diane Findley, the choir has grown to its current size of approximately one hundred. The main purpose is to bring together children without regard to sex, race, religion, national origin or school affiliation to experience a high quality musical development.

The children are divided into four levels, based on ability. The first level is the children's choir, beginning level, which meets 1½ hours per week, concentrating on music appreciation, Kodály training, rounds, some solo opportunities, and part singing. The second level, the chamber choir, (intermediate level) meets two hours per week, emphasizing reading skills, intonation, and solidifying independence of voices in two parts. The concert choir (advanced level) works mainly on three-part singing and sight singing. Small ensembles are encouraged in order to allow the development of individual creativity and expression. Children in all three levels are encouraged to develop a wide vocal range by

singing various voice parts. This year, an SATB ensemble has been formed to provide experience for more mature voices at a fourth level of development.

The children are provided with performing opportunities that stimulate them to reach an exceptional professional level. Recent performances include Powell Symphony Hall, National Conference of Christians and Jews, Greater American Choral Festival, St. Louis Japan American Society, Missouri Botanical Garden Japanese Festival, Arts and Education Council Children's Art Festival, Westport Playhouse Christmas Show, television appearances, semi-annual concerts at universities, churches and schools, and the Grand Opening of St. Louis Union Station.

Summer tours and performances greatly enhance the enthusiasm of the choirs. Their knowledge of different types of music is expanded and they are exposed to widely-varied singing opportunities, while at the same time learning to be ambassadors and representatives of the musical community. Thirty-five children of the Concert Choir and their adult leaders spent twelve days this past summer on tour in Japan. On July 24th, amid much fanfare and local news coverage, these musical ambassadors left on a tour that took them to Tokyo, Kyoto, and Suwa, St. Louis's Sister City. During a three-day stay in Tokyo, the children performed both American and Japanese classical and folk music. A concert was given at the Tokyo Baptist Church. Numerous other impromptu concerts were given before enthusiastic audiences. On July 27th, the children



The St. Louis Children's Choir on stage in the Kyoto Children's Cultural Center, Kyoto, Japan, where they sang with the 300-voice Kyoto City Children's Choir.

were guests at the Imperial Hotel where they performed for Japanese dignitaries.

On July 28 the choir travelled by Shinkansen (bullet train) to the cultural center of Kyoto, Japan. There they visited castles, shrines, a textile-kimono center, and a Japanese movie site. Finally they arrived at the Utano Youth Hostel where they spent the night and took part in more impromptu singing. The next day the children took part in a joint concert with the Kyoto's Children's Choirs, sponsored by the Kyoto Youth Cultural Center. Six hundred and three beautiful children's voices filled the auditorium during the three hour performance. Following the concert, the SLCC children spent the night in Japanese homes, providing a view of Japanese home life.

Next the SLCC group traveled to Suwa, Japan, where the mayor and other dignitaries greeted the choir at the Suwa Youth Center. The children were paired with homestay families, with whom they spent three days. On August 1, a joint concert with five Suwa children's choirs provided the last opportunity for the SLCC to perform with Japanese children. SLCC sang Japanese and American songs and were joined by the Japanese children for a medley of American songs. The group returned to St. Louis on August 4, bringing unforgettable musical and cultural experiences back with them to share with their families, friends and the St. Louis community.

The choir is currently under the direction of Ethelyn Sparfeld. Mrs. Sparfeld has been a teacher of children in musical education for sixteen years, working with students from kindergarten to college age. She is also a clinician for music specialists. She received a Kodály certificate from KMTI. Her dedication and genuine love for children and music is obvious from the accomplishments of the choir.

Mrs. Sparfeld is assisted by an accompanist and by Assistant Director Christine Pierce, lyric soprano and opera performer with experience in both performing and directing student musical and theatre groups. The choir also has a nine-member board of directors elected annually and consisting of community leaders and parents. An advisory Board from various areas of musical expertise offers practical advice and assistance in developing policy and direction for the choir. Members of this advisory board include Dr. Alan Larson, Chairman, Department of Music, Webster University; Dr. Leonard VanCamp, Director of Choral Activities, S.I.U., Edwardsville; Dr. Bruce Vantine, Choral Director, UMSL; Walter DeLear, bass soloist; and Susie Shepherd, pianist. Parent support and participation have been key elements in the success of the choir. Parent contributions of time,

dedication and enthusiasm in fund raising efforts, or behind the scene activities such as ushering or sewing, make parents an active part of the children's musical experience.

The choir is supported by a balanced mix of financial sources. Tuition for choir members is based upon level. A limited number of scholarships are available. Performance ticket sales also provide a basic source of funds. This base is then supplemented by contributions from local businesses and individuals with a serious interest in the music excellence and value the Choir provides to the community. Finally, fund raising through candy sales and other projects undertaken by the choir members themselves provide additional income while at the same time promoting group spirit and a sense of achievement. SLCC is a non-profit organization and a non-funded member of the Arts and Education Council of Greater St. Louis.

Any child six years through high school age is welcome to audition for the choirs. SLCC teaches music theory and reading as well as vocal techniques, and accepts inexperienced as well as experienced voices. Individuals with international backgrounds, cultures and expectations are members of the choir and enable the children to enjoy rich experiences in their relationships with one another.

Inquiries may be sent to:

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