

A black and white photograph of maple leaves on a branch, partially obscured by a dark blue diagonal shape in the bottom-left corner.

CHARITY SPOTLIGHT SERIES

LYNX INVESTMENT ADVISORY

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CHARITY SPOTLIGHT SERIES:

CHILDREN'S CHORUS OF WASHINGTON, D.C.

Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination and life to everything.” — Plato

Music. It is all around us. From the syncopated rhythm of a train rolling past to the call of the robin heralding spring.

Ever since humankind discovered the ability to produce harmonic sounds, it has become an integral part of every facet of how we live and communicate.

Music has been shown to have the power to transform individuals and communities—boosting moods, reducing stress, improving memories and, in some cases, decreasing the perception of pain during cancer and other medical treatments. The collective experience of producing music together helps to overcome physical and cultural distances and transcends borders.

Studies show that young people who take the time to study music develop more than just their musical skills. They are also developing soft skills that can be helpful throughout their adult life, such as collaborating to achieve a (musical) goal and developing strong time management and problem-solving skills. Ninety percent of educators believe that participation in a music ensemble keeps students more engaged in school, and they are twice as likely to graduate high school, especially in lower-income school districts.

Ensembles often require an instrument, be they strings, brass, woodwind, percussion or keyboards. But with choral music, all you need is your voice.

Washington, D.C. is known as a chorus town, with one of the highest number of choruses per capita in the country. However, youth choruses are often given less weight in the choral landscape or considered to be merely training opportunities intended to produce capable adult singers.

The Children's Chorus of Washington (CCW) was founded in 1995 by Joan Gregoryk to address that gap by providing music education and choral performance opportunities for children through high school, regardless of background, economic status or prior experience. From just forty students that first year, CCW has grown to over 250 students in the Greater Washington area. It is now being led by Artistic Director, Margaret Nomura Clark, who joined CCW in 2016 from the San Francisco Boys Chorus (SFBC), where she served as Associate Artistic Director, and Executive Director, Robbie Jacobs.

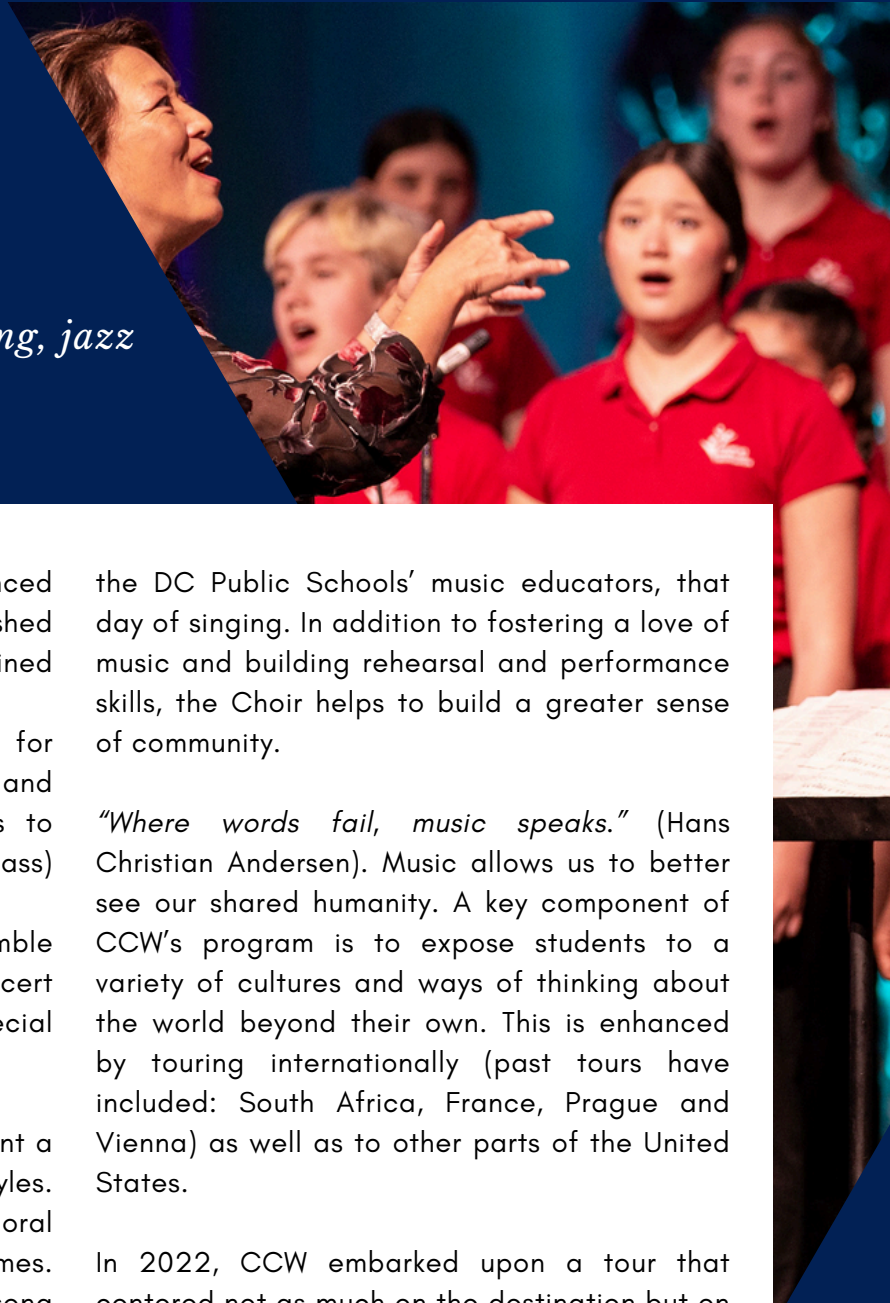
It is CCW's belief that everyone is capable of singing, especially if they begin at an early age. Classes and ensembles have been structured with that in mind.

- **Prep Ensemble** introduces students in kindergarten to second grade to the basics of choral singing.
- **Treble Ensemble** is the entry-level performing ensemble where students in grades three to five work on their singing skills and begin to learn musicianship theory.
- **Bel Canto** continues to refine students' skills and musicianship, including singing in multiple languages and developing performance skills.

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"Music is life itself." ~ Louis Armstrong, jazz trumpeter (1901-1971)



- **Concert Choir** is CCW's advanced ensemble for singers that have established good vocal technique and refined musicianship.
- **Young Men's Ensemble (YME)** is for advanced singers with changed voices and collaborates with the Concert Chorus to perform SATB (Soprano Alto Tenor Bass) pieces.
- **Chamber Ensemble** is a small ensemble selected via audition from the Concert Chorus and YME that performs at special events throughout the season.

Performance material is selected to represent a broad range of experiences and musical styles. To provide continuity throughout the choral season, music is chosen around specific themes. In 2023, pieces such as the Malaysian folk song "Wau Bulan" by Tracy Wong were performed around Giving. Next year, the choir's theme is Lineage with music focused on intergenerational connections. As part of its repertoire, CCW will be partnering with the adult chorus, Choralis, to commission a new work entitled "Rainbows" by renowned British choral composer, Bob Chilcott.

One of CCW's core principles is to uplift the value of every voice, regardless of demographic or means. They are currently in the process of rolling-out their program more broadly, especially into areas where there are no after school programs.

This year marks the sixth anniversary of the All City Choir, a collaboration between CCW and

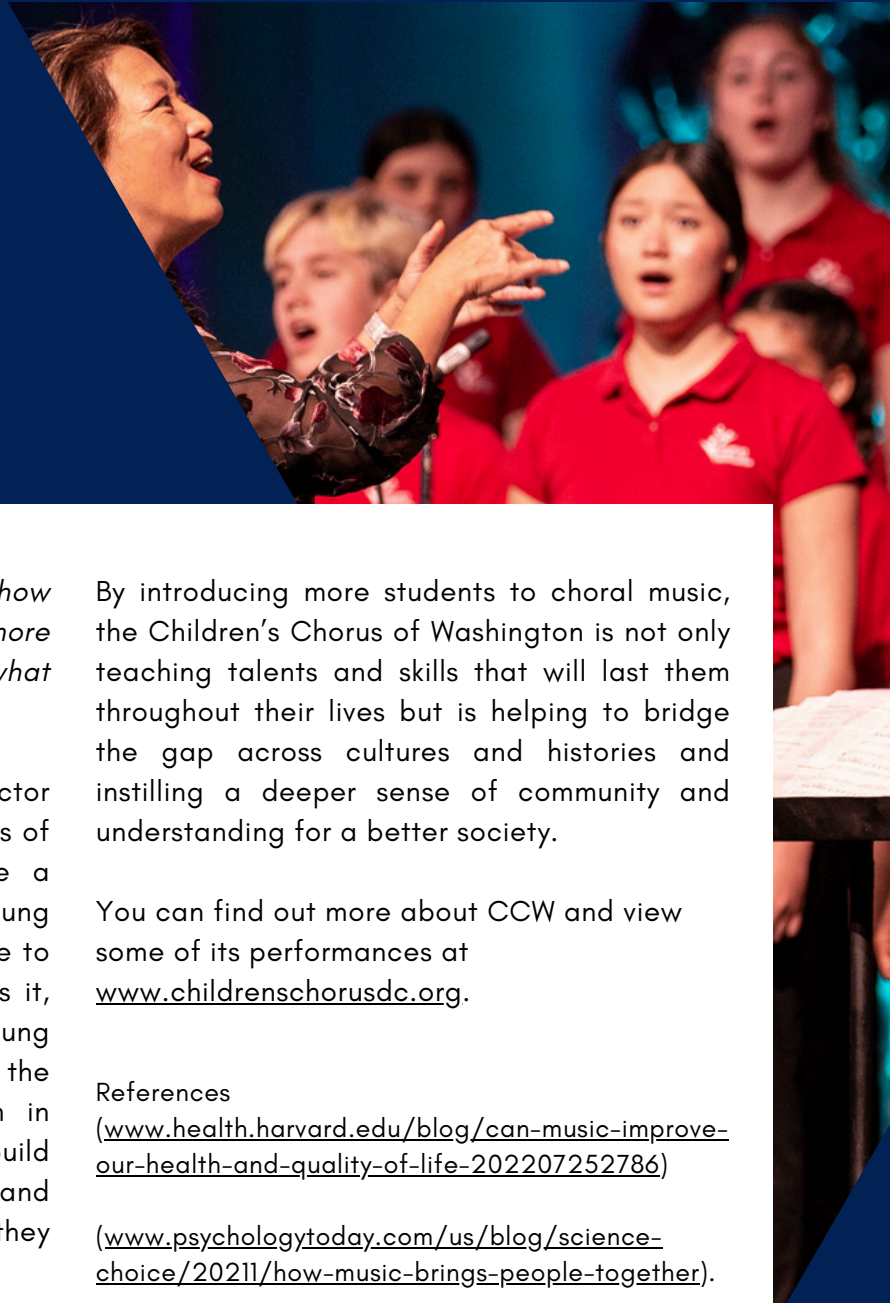
the DC Public Schools' music educators, that day of singing. In addition to fostering a love of music and building rehearsal and performance skills, the Choir helps to build a greater sense of community.

"Where words fail, music speaks." (Hans Christian Andersen). Music allows us to better see our shared humanity. A key component of CCW's program is to expose students to a variety of cultures and ways of thinking about the world beyond their own. This is enhanced by touring internationally (past tours have included: South Africa, France, Prague and Vienna) as well as to other parts of the United States.

In 2022, CCW embarked upon a tour that centered not as much on the destination but on the musical history of the Black American spirituals. In partnership with the Choir School of Delaware and singing alongside youth choirs in Bethlehem, PA and Philadelphia, PA, and the St. Thomas Gospel Choir in Philadelphia, the **Stand up: Harriet Tubman Tour** explored the Underground Railroad through song—learning about the historic role music had in helping those who were enslaved to escape to freedom.

Following the tour, a CCW chorister wrote: *"Music is just about as close as one can get to real magic - a magic that connects us to our collective history and heritage as human beings. ... With every haunting and emotional work of the spiritual, I felt more connected to*

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my Black ancestors, like a melody and somehow tethered me to them and I was finally and more fully able to understand just a fraction of what they experienced."

As Robbie Jacobs, CCW's Executive Director said during our interview: "Children's Chorus of Washington believes that singing can be a transformative experience in the life of a young person. Our goal is to offer that experience to any young person in Washington who wants it, irrespective of their ability to pay. Once young people are in our program, we offer them the chance to challenge themselves, perform in some of the city's most prestigious venues, build a community of likeminded singing friends and develop their musical skills further than they could have imagined."

By introducing more students to choral music, the Children's Chorus of Washington is not only teaching talents and skills that will last them throughout their lives but is helping to bridge the gap across cultures and histories and instilling a deeper sense of community and understanding for a better society.

You can find out more about CCW and view some of its performances at www.childrenschorusdc.org.

References

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