When looking back over a term’s events, I’m always amazed at how much we achieve as a school. Of course, our achievements are possible only because of the key groups within our community: boys, staff, parents, alumni, parishioners and friends, all of whom play such important roles.

We depend on these groups for our continued success, especially now, as we begin an important recruitment campaign. To that end, with input and guidance from our new Director of Music, Daniel Hyde, and our new director of admissions, Loraine Enlow, we’ve been reviewing and revising our printed materials, expanding the website, planning recruitment tours and initiating further contacts in the world of choral music.

Not surprisingly then, a significant portion of this newsletter is devoted to recruitment. To quote from an article within, “Like any good recommendation, word-of-mouth is best.” As you enjoy reading stories of our life and work at Saint Thomas Choir School, please join us in promoting this opportunity of a lifetime by sharing them with others.

–Charles F. Wallace, Headmaster
December saw two performances of Handel’s Messiah – as the New York Times put it, “with the new guy.” Messiah was completely sold out and drew over two thousand people to Saint Thomas to hear and be enchanted by this centerpiece of Christmas celebration. On December 15, the choir gave its traditional A Ceremony of Carols concert, and then came the array of carol services and Christmas liturgies. This year, we had an orchestra at midnight mass (Mozart’s “Sparrow Mass”), and across the services, Mr. Hyde chose a vibrant collection of carols, some well known to us – such as John Scott’s arrangement of “Silent Night” and Gerre Hancock’s “Infant Holy” – and others new to our repertoire, such as the splendid, optimistic carol “People Look East.” This last, in fact, featured in the new CD that came out in November featuring Mr. Hyde’s former choir at Magdalen College. Although Mr. Hyde is not one to publicize himself or his past choirs, we can enthusiastically commend it to your ears. On Christmas Night is a stirring collection of well-known carols set to lesser-known arrangements.

“The Saint Thomas Choir of Men and Boys represents the very best of Anglican-American music making; there are few choirs its equal here or in England.... Meticulous discipline – specialized training and extensive practice, the careful development of intellectual clarity, the unsentimental nurturing of respect for a very particular musical heritage – is critical. The Saint Thomas Choir is so shaped by this discipline that the choristers’ skills transcend mere accuracy and take up residence in expressivity and meaning.”

–Theaterscene.net
Amidst such a crowded fall, the choir squeezed in some appearances around town: on November 10, they sang at the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine for the annual Episcopal Charities fundraiser, and on December 1 they trooped downtown to sing at the New York Stock Exchange’s Christmas tree lighting. When we spoke to Mr. Hyde about the upcoming spring schedule, he looked more than a little relieved to have “business as usual” for a couple of months before Lent.

PRESS

If you follow the church and Choir School on social media, you will have seen some very nice press this past fall. The New York Times did a charming piece on Mr. Hyde and the school, “The New Wizard Teaching at the Hogwarts for Choir” (November 18, 2016). Among those interviewed was the boys’ vocal coach, Stephanie Tennill, who provided the pull-quote of the year when asked how she explains the school to outsiders: “I say it’s like Hogwarts, but with choir instead of magic.”


Even more pertinent, the Choir School launched its newly redesigned website (same address, different look www.choirschool.org). New content and functions are being added over the spring, so check back frequently, and send friends there, too.
SPREAD THE WORD & BUILD THE CHOIR

Admissions Director Loraine Enlow has been working closely with Mr. Hyde on expanding and ramping up recruitment for the Choir School. They, along with Father Wallace, understand what a deep and far-reaching project successful recruitment is. Mrs. Enlow tells us "we need to reach boys and parents, certainly, but we need to reach way beyond parents to bring boys to the choir school. Behind every boy is a complex support network: his school, parish, music director, private music teachers, relatives, neighbors, and friends. Admissions is as much about forging new relationships, strengthening old ties, fostering goodwill and raising awareness within those extended circles for a potential boy as it is simply finding that boy and his family. Oftentimes, seeds are planted years in advance, long before the person who refers a boy to us even knows a boy who loves to sing."

This fall we have been working to spread the word within the Saint Thomas community, starting with our alumni and parishioners. Our own Saint Thomas family knows what a life-changing opportunity the Choir School is for a boy, and, like any good recommendation, word-of-mouth is best. During Advent Mr. Hyde spoke during services about what the school has to offer students. Additionally, we have been busy updating and refreshing our materials. Our new website, launched last fall, will continue to be updated and expanded in the coming months. We are preparing new print materials as well, which should be ready shortly.

Here in town, we hold various local events, both at the Choir School (tours and chorister-for-a-day events), and around the city. For wider audiences, we have recruitment tours, and we are putting together another tour to Boston in late March. Additionally, throughout the year Mrs. Enlow travels to conventions and conferences to reach church and musician audiences. In November, for example, she brought the Choir School exhibit to diocesan conventions in New York and Chicago. Already in 2017, she has attended the Dallas Choristers Guild Convention (Jan.13-14), a recruitment afternoon in the Tampa area (Jan. 19), the Newark Diocesan Convention (Jan. 27-28), and will attend the American Choral Directors Association Convention in Minneapolis (March 8-11) with Father Wallace. See the back page of the newsletter for more events, including our upcoming Chorister-for-a-Day on March 19 for boys in grades 2-4 and their families. Are we coming to an event near you? Come and see us! Would you like some materials to share? Contact us. Amidst this, Mr. Hyde stresses the importance of getting potential parents to come and see the school for themselves. "We need to get your average parents through the door, and then they see what it is and what’s available. Once parents come through the door and visit, it’s revolutionary." We need every hand and voice to help spread the word and build the choir – please add yours!

A REBUILDING YEAR

When we popped in to Daniel Hyde’s office to see how his first term had gone, we found him fully “dug in” with both church and school. Nevertheless, he took time to chat with us about what he’s been doing to sustain and invigorate the choir. “Given last year’s upheaval,” he said, “this year is inevitably a rebuilding year.” On the recruitment front, he and Loraine Enlow have begun their outreach with anyone who knows the school (that’s you, reader) because the best ambassadors of a Choir School education are those who have actually experienced it. Their efforts have already begun to bear fruit. The fall recruitment concert, cancelled because of Hurricane Matthew, took place at the end of January and was a great success.

Beyond recruitment, there have been some adjustments due to staffing (Mr. Buzard was
WHY BOARDING?

Saint Thomas Choir School is the only church affiliated all-boarding all-choir school in the United States, and one of only three in the world. We know that when the Choir School was founded, boarding was more common, but we wondered why it is still boarding today, and whether it needs to be. To help us understand this exceptional facet of school life, we reached out to alumni, staff, parents of alumni, and current parents to hear their perspectives on the boarding structure and its impact on the overall experience. We received many insights, but without exception, everyone agreed that the boarding component was indispensable.

Richard Jarrett (class of 2005 and current faculty) told us that “boarding isn’t part of the experience; it is the experience. What trumps the music, what trumps whatever a boy actually accomplishes is the strong sense of community that is established here.” Richard went to public high school after Saint Thomas and then spent a final year at Trinity Pawling School. Boarding at Trinity Pawling was nothing compared to the Choir School, he said. “There, in a half day-student, half boarding-student setting, you don’t establish the same kinds of connections. Here, we’re all bundled up together, eating every meal together, doing everything together. It establishes the belief that I’ve got his back. And whatever happens to me, he’s got my back. This goes way past roommates. If one person goes down, everyone else is there to pick him up. At my other schools, it was a you-versus-me thing. Here, it’s caring for other people and not putting yourself first all the time. It’s a brotherhood, a way of life. You don’t get that anywhere else.”

When we asked Aaron Primero (class of 2005, former gap student, and current alumni Board Member) if the Choir School had to be boarding, he said, “Absolutely. You need a housemother to wake you up in the morning!” But more seriously, Aaron explained that “what we do here as students is more than school. It’s a way of living and celebrating. It demands that service starting right when you get out of bed in the morning. We’re not just singing pretty music. What we do – at school, at church – is worship; it’s a celebration of the holy mysteries.” Aaron attended Groton after the Choir School, and while he loved his time at Groton, he described it as “something like a summer camp where kids go to try to adopt a more muscular Christianity.” By contrast, the Choir School “is about service, and the privilege of service.”

Susan Moore Hill is both Alumni Director and mother of two alumni (Wick ’97 and Rowland ’98). She, too, spoke of boarding as indispensable to the school’s sense of community. “They’re always together, competing as well as being together as brothers. Looking through some old photographs, I was struck by all the boys with their arms around each other. You could just see the brotherhood from living it day to day, the good, the bad, the stressful, helping each other through the good times and the challenges.”

If you’ve noticed a pattern here – that alumni and parents tend to return to the school and adopt other roles – we noticed it, too. But these returnees are not Kool-Aid-drinking
cheerleaders; they are informed, transformed people whose lives and work testify to the Choir School experience.

We asked Mrs. Wentling (housemother, and parent of alum Calvin ’10) if it wouldn’t be possible to have all this community in a small day school with singing as its focus. As much as Mrs. Wentling understood the sacrifices parents make to allow their sons to board, having made them herself, she quickly disabused us of our fantasy: “Sundays would be really hard. When they get up on Sunday, they all get dressed together, all get in the elevator together, they’re already bonding, already acting as a team long before they get to church. Everyone is helping each other get ready: Do you have your music? Do you have your duffel on? Do you have whatever else you need? That dynamic is important to creating a real working group, which produces the sound we hear in church. They really know each other, little things about each other – I saw you left your sweater on the floor in the corner – they know.”

Beyond Sundays, there is the weekday schedule, which Mrs. Wentling pointed out is also very full for the boys. “If, after a weekday evensong, they had to travel home, eat dinner, do homework, go back and forth, it would be too much – too much for anyone but especially children. They’d use up precious study time or playing time commuting. It’s more relaxing for them to stay here. They would be much more tired because they’d have to be dealing with things at home after their long day. Here, it’s a little cocoon.”

Daniel Hyde echoed Mrs. Wentling’s view. Not only was Mr. Hyde a boarding chorister himself back in the day, but his previous post was Magdalen College, Oxford, where the boy choristers attend an attached day school. When we asked about arrangements there, Mr. Hyde told us, “Parents dropped off the kids at 7:30am for rehearsal, we walked them over to school at 9:00am, fetched them at 4:30pm from school, had rehearsal and evensong, and the parents picked them up at quarter to seven. Long day.” Mr. Hyde also pointed out that if our boys went home at night, we wouldn’t be able to have boys from outside the city, or even the outer boroughs. He is keenly aware of the unique advantages of boarding: “We’re all here working together on site. I can say to Father Wallace, The kids are tired. Can we give them a lie-in and rehearse later? We can make decisions in their best interests at any moment. It’s a calm, quiet, safe environment. The houseparents really know the kids. And then on a Friday, they have an evening off together, and they have Saturdays off, too.”

Robyn Rosenthal (School Counselor and parent of alumni Gerry ’94, Mitch ’00 and Hank ’05) explained that, “without boarding, they’d never have the amount of practice time they have now, and they’d never be able to sing the music they sing now. You’d have no Sunday if the boys commuted. The experience would be nowhere near as rich and full. Parents would be constantly chauffeuring, and the children would get no rest. As it is, families who live close enough come to the school once a week or more for Saturday afternoons, weekday evensongs, or Sunday lunch. Parents and siblings all come in. Sisters love coming to Sunday lunch, and little brothers do, too.” Having attended several Sunday lunches, we can confirm that they are popular, warm family gatherings.

As a school counselor, Mrs. Rosenthal drilled deeper into the contrasts between day school and boarding: “When boys go home, they have to navigate all these transitions – Did I remember my water? Do I have my snack? Let me play my video games! Time to go to my sports! Do my homework. Here all the transitions are managed for them – but not by Mom and Dad. The word individuate comes to mind, because at this age, especially around age ten, kids start realizing they are becoming independent. This can be scary for everyone! Most parents know this is a normal part of growing up and want to step back, but they worry about what their children are going to, and with good reason. Here, though, the boys are let go into a very protected environment.” Mrs. Wentling concurred, explaining, for example, how the boys are protected from the excesses of electronic life. Their computer time is supervised and very limited, their phones don’t have wifi, and they don’t keep their phones with them. “They read. They play a lot of boardgames. They do things that connect them with other people.” This surprisingly unplugged childhood is just one unadvertised benefit of the Choir School.

Boarding for middle school is unusual in America today, and the Choir School is more unusual still. These voices showed us not only how precious the boarding experience is to those who choose it, but also how worth defending. Don’t take our word for it, though – go ask alumni, staff, and students for yourself.
FIRST YEAR TO SECOND

Last issue, we spoke with the third and fourth graders about the process of becoming a chorister – what exactly does it take? In this issue, we look at what the faculty and staff do to help new boys adjust and what non-musical, non-academic things boys learn when they arrive.

“The first thing we do,” said housemother Karen Wentling, “is to try to make them feel safe and comfortable. Safe means that as adults we work to connect with them on a one-to-one basis, so they feel comfortable coming to us with any concern they have. Faculty are always aware when we have new boys, and we watch very carefully how the social dynamics are going at the beginning, and if there’s a potential problem, we cut it off.

“We’re thoughtful about roommate assignments. We talk about homesickness up front, that it’s normal to be homesick. We always tell them that we’re happy, in a way, that you’re homesick because that means you love your parents and you miss them and that’s a good thing. It means you have a happy home, you love your mom, you love your dad.

“Tie a bow around the end of dinner, we stand at the end of dinner, this person clears the plates, that person clears food. They learn how the dining hall works, how we take showers (keeping the towel around us in the bathroom), how and when we put our clothes in the laundry, how and when we strip our beds, how every night we put our clothes out for the next day. (We’re very big on that. It makes a big difference for the morning, avoids lots of problems.) At night we have our ritual of study hall followed by calling home (twice a week and on the weekend), then a snack, back upstairs, brush your teeth, get in bed, little lights (for reading), and finally lights out. That’s always the way we do it, and that helps because even if different people are putting you to bed, it’s the same routine. The other housemother (Mrs. Allman) and I try to be the ones who put them to bed. Of course we have helpers – gap students, faculty – but we try to make the rounds ourselves as housemothers.

“There’s also a points system, so boys can earn points doing various things. A lot of points have to do with being neat and being on time. Boys can use the points to buy things, such as a night out with another friend, rock climbing, paintball, soda for everyone at their table during camp, and so on. Camp is a huge bonding time for all the boys, especially new ones, even though it’s at the end of the year. They’re together all the time and they’re playing. It’s all playing.”

When asked what specific life skills boys had to learn, Mrs. Wentling told us, “You’d be surprised how many boys can’t tie their shoes.” Housemothers teach that. A traditional first-year lesson is tying the necktie. “We also teach them table manners, general etiquette, thinking of others before yourself, being organized, and while they don’t manage their time themselves, they learn time management because it gets embedded. They learn a lot of self-discipline, and they learn how not to be the most important person. This is a team sport, and they have to figure out how to be part of the team, because that’s their happiest place.”

Surprisingly, Mrs. Wentling said that homesickness “isn’t really a big deal. A lot of times, parents are having a harder time than the kids.”

Now, fact checking is important to us here at the Choir School News, so we trundled downstairs to consult this year’s fourth graders (whom readers may remember as last year’s new boys just learning to sing). We can report that these boys are no longer tiny! And with their larger stature has come a wealth of confidence and chattiness. We began by asking them about homesickness and whether they had all been homesick when they first arrived.

Photo: Julia Gang

INSIDE THE CHOIR SCHOOL
“I was homesick when I first came last year, but then it started to change, and about mid-term it just stopped. I don’t know how.”

“I never was homesick.”

“If you are homesick, going to sleep is the best thing.”

When we asked what was different about the second year, we were told firmly that “it’s more better and fun.”

“Last year we went home on Fridays, but this year we stay at school and get to watch movies.”

“And get Tuck Shoppe.”

“And decorate the Christmas tree.”

“This year I can get along with other kids better because I know them more and it’s more fun.”

“Last year I didn’t have a lot of confidence. I gave up a lot. But this year I got better.”

“Last year I was unconfident, too, in my math, and I started to work at it and started to get good at it.”

“We get to learn more this year because last year we could only get so high.”

Soon, the discussion turned to classwork, and the music history unit featured on the wall of their classroom.

“I think it’s actually a little fun.”

“For once, I agree with Christopher, but it’s still difficult because we have music history terms and quizzes.”

“We don’t do easy things, do we?” said their teacher, Mr. McDowell. He explained that although they know a lot about music theory, singing, and repertoire, they have a lot to learn about the history of music and the history of church services.

“I’m pretty sure Mr. Hyde was the one who made Mr. McDowell do it.”

“They were shocked to learn that, no, Mr. Hyde had nothing to do with designing their history curriculum, and that they had actually begun to study music history last year with Bach.

“What I like about this classroom is we learn a lot of stuff, stuff we didn’t learn last year.”

“I like to go on adventure to find out the history of music, but I like more the medieval times, like castles.”

“And the plague.”

“Since we’re learning about Canterbury Cathedral, I would love to go there.”

Father Wallace, take note!

THE VOICE CHANGE

It’s every chorister’s nightmare, or at least every choirmaster’s nightmare: the voice change. It seems to come earlier and earlier, which is one reason today’s Choir School admits third graders rather than simply beginning in fifth, as it used to less than a generation ago. Though the topic is not much discussed, we wondered: is the voice change really such a tragedy? We decided to go to the source and spoke with several of our squeaky young men; they revealed that, actually, the opposite is true. Rather than mark the end of a boy’s singing career, the voice change opens a door to a host of new experiences.

“My voice began to change, first early signs of it, around Easter last year,” said Bobby, a current seventh grader. “Towards the end of the school year it became obvious, then over the summer when I came back, it was just….” Bobby went on to explain what happens once a boy is no longer able to sing with the choir. First, he becomes an acolyte, a longstanding rite of passage that requires training, and even in some cases muscle-building. The vergers and experienced acolytes instruct new acolytes in procession; in carrying torches, banners,
A little known feature of the Choir School is the gap year program. Father Wallace interviews young people in their gap year (a voluntary pause in studies, taken either between high school and college, or within/after college itself), to come spend up to three months at the school, where they assist faculty and staff, and serve as big brother after a fashion to the boys. Most gap students have choral backgrounds, and some end up auditioning for the choir and singing with the Gentlemen while they are here. The program is a great way to support these young men, not only through work experience but also through access to New York. It also gives the boys exposure to older students from around the world. We asked James Gallimore, a recent gap student from England who wound up staying two terms, to tell us more about the program and his experience:

As I clambered out of the taxi, bleary eyed after my flight, and entered Saint Thomas's magnificent school building for the first time, I'll admit I was nervous. I was then a postgraduate law student from the north of England who had never lived abroad.
and had no experience of teaching whatsoever. So many questions were racing through my mind when I rang the doorbell: Where will I be staying? Will I enjoy the work? Most importantly, will the boys like me? Looking back now, I’m thrilled to say that my anxiety was misplaced. By a bizarre set of circumstances, I ended up extending my agreed time at the school from three to six months and I’m forever grateful the Headmaster, Father Wallace, allowed me to do so. It was the experience of a lifetime and I firmly believe that any young person with a love of music should leap at this chance to be part of the Saint Thomas Choir School community.

My first great memory of my time at the school occurred the next morning. After being warmly welcomed by both the boys and the wonderful faculty, I took a group of older boys on a bicycle ride around Central Park (located more or less opposite the school) in glorious autumnal sunshine. From that moment, I threw myself into the experience and never looked back. A trip to New England shortly followed that included visiting Vermont, New Hampshire and Massachusetts: all before I’d been in America for a month! If this wasn’t enough, I would also later travel with the boys to their summer camp in Connecticut as well as accompany a smaller group to Washington, DC. I ended my Saint Thomas experience in spectacular fashion by singing with the Choir of Men and Boys at a packed Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Houston, Texas.

Traveling aside, the main role of a gap student is to help in any way you can. I loved how no two days were the same. I might, for example, start a day taking the probationers for their rehearsal, followed by supervising practice periods or covering lessons, then later in the day proctoring study hall and reading them a bedtime story. For a sport enthusiast such as myself, it was also fun to lead sport sessions in the gym as well as going to their football and basketball games. I’ll admit there were times where the boys could drive a person mad, but overall they were a pleasure and a privilege to be around.

For any singer, auditioning for the Saint Thomas Choir of Men and Boys is a must. The Assistant Organist very kindly allowed me to audition in my first week, which led to singing in the back row – another brilliant experience. The choir is one of the finest in the United States, and I had the opportunity to sing with world-class voices on a daily basis. The Gentlemen made me feel very welcome, and they have a wealth of experience to share with anyone interested in pursuing music professionally. They were always happy to answer any questions I had and to offer guidance. Singing the Christmas services in the stunning church and participating in the sold-out concert series are memories that I will always treasure.

Saint Thomas Choir School is a special place – one of only three schools of its kind in the world. In the build-up to its centenary, I can only hope that more people are made aware of it and discover what a remarkable place it is for boys to learn and grow up. I wouldn’t hesitate to recommend the gap year program to anyone who is interested – you won’t regret it.

CLASSROOM NEWS

History teacher Kevin Carpenter introduced a new feature to the curriculum this term: “Geo Bee.” If that sounds like a spelling bee, it’s not accidental. Distressed by a recent study that claimed one in ten American students couldn’t identify the United States on a map, and 50% could not identify New York, Mr. Carpenter took matters into his own hands and began an extracurricular geography challenge. Boys who wish to learn more geography prepare for a series of quizzes, studying on their own time; scores are cumulative, and there will be prizes at the end of the year. Never let it be said that Saint Thomas Choir School does not produce informed citizens, not to mention drivers of tomorrow ready for their first road trip.

Congratulations to Mr. Appleton (Math), who is engaged to be married, to “the future Mrs. Appleton.” We are promised details for the next issue.

The fondest news, perhaps, for Father Wallace is the long-awaited completion of the office renovations and the arrival of the new furniture. Come look next time you are at the school – they are beautiful. The flood may have given our Headmaster some new gray hairs, but the Lord, as promised, has brought good from ill.
ART, ART, AND MORE ART

A person strolling through the corridors could be forgiven for mistaking Saint Thomas for a studio school of art and design. The walls brim with the boys’ projects both large and small, all carefully curated by art teacher David Eppley. A quick tour this December took us past contour line portraits, scratch drawings, papier-mâché masks, stained glass windows, and more. Here are some highlights:

Blind Contour Drawing: *Draw a face from life while not looking at your paper and not lifting your marker.* Objective: to expose the inner hand/eye coordination that is available without sight. Students will learn by not being able to look while they draw that their own evaluations are only part of the process of drawing from life.

Mask Making: *Create a mask that contrasts your role as a choir boy at Saint Thomas.* To identify traits and characteristics of identity through the process of disguise, and to learn the process of papier-mâché and mold making.

Stained glass windows: Boys made designs based on photographs of themselves and turned them into this. Look out, Whitefriars!

OUR MISSION

The Saint Thomas Choir School houses, nurtures, and educates the boy choristers of the world-renowned choir of Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue. Through rigorous musical training and highly individualized classroom instruction in a familial, Christian environment, the school instills in its students the intellectual skills and ethical values that will enable them to embrace life with confidence, responsibility, and joy.
FOCUS ON ENGLISH

Having heard what great readers Saint Thomas boys are, we decided to sit down with Amy Francisco, who teaches English to all boys in grades five through eight. The Choir School’s English program encompasses literature, writing, and grammar; it’s one thing to read a curriculum outline on a website or brochure, but the classroom experience came alive when Miss Francisco talked to us about each grade, their reading, their writing, and their adventures in language and literature.

All boys read independently, in addition to reading books together for class. Miss Francisco creates suggested reading lists for each grade, and at minimum boys read one book each term from their grade’s list, or higher. (Miss Francisco tells us they they read “tons of other books as well.”) At the end of each term, the boy who has read the most pages gets a prize or treat; at the end of the year, the class that has read the most pages gets a special treat at camp. In the meantime, there are plenty of badges and stickers for encouragement.

In their English classes this fall, the fifth grade read Natalie Babbitt’s Tuck Everlasting and focused on descriptive writing skills. They then dove into persuasive and analytical writing, beginning to develop the ability to read text closely and think about it analytically, to use quotations, and to identify similes, metaphors, and symbols. In December they prepared for debates: Should reading after lights-out be permitted? Should Winnie in Tuck Everlasting have drunk the water, becoming immortal? After the immortality debate, each boy wrote a paragraph, with topic sentence, arguing his point and defending it with evidence from the novel. Next up for the Fifth: Lois Lowry’s The Giver and an adaptation of The Odyssey.

The sixth grade began the year with Mildred Taylor’s powerful novel Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry. Building from their skills in the fifth grade, the boys focused on analytical writing, digging deeply into quotations and learning to tie them back to their thesis. It was important to Miss Francisco that the boys could also think about the novel in terms of the real world, talking about race in the United States, the novel’s historical background, and when appropriate, some current events. There were several options for a final project, for example, writing a story that places a character from the novel in a different time period, and writing a soundtrack for the novel, including an original composition for one chapter. The spring term will include mythology, the play The Miracle Worker, writing drama, and writing autobiography.

The seventh grade were plunged into American life with Sherman Alexie’s The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian, a fictionalized autobiography that tells the story of a Native American boy in Washington who decides to attend a white high school off the reservation. The boys loved Alexie’s strong authorial voice, his insight into character, and this glimpse of a part of contemporary life they have little access to. Their reading led to persuasive letter writing, as well as studies of style and voice. The winter and spring will bring them face-to-face with Steinbeck’s Of Mice and Men, followed by an introduction to formal poetry and, finally, Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream.

The eighth grade got down to business with Harper Lee’s To Kill a Mockingbird, which included two long analytical essays as well as imitation-style writings such as “My Home Town” and “Looking Back on a Childhood Memory.” Once high school application essays are behind them, the class will move on to advanced poetry, Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, short stories, and memoir writing. Busy times with Miss Francisco!

If you wish to support the Choir School or any of its designated funds – such as the Girl Chorister Fund, the Camp Fund, the Learning Assistance Fund – please visit our website (www.choirschool.org) and click the Giving tab.
CHRISTMASTIME
Advent is always busy at the Choir School, what with concerts, appearances, classwork, and sports, but the boys still managed to fit in some fun. The first weekend in Advent calls for the annual Christmas Tree decoration. This year, Mrs. Wentling tells us, the tree got decorated fairly quickly, after which the boys began an impromptu paper-airplane competition, hurling their creations from the library balcony into the tree, where they remained. During December, Father Wallace kept up his tradition of trivia questions at lunch – so long as the magic Christmas tree in the dining hall saw fit to produce candy canes. Another highlight, we are told, was the annual Christmas party, featuring a game (ritual? details closely guarded) that resulted in…Mr. Hyde’s ersatz mummification. Lazarus, come forth!
ALUMNI EVENTS

Many alumni turned out for the Simon Rattle benefit concert in September, and several attended Sunday lunch at the Choir School beforehand: the Rev. Lynde May IV ’47 and his wife Diane May; Dana Marsh ’79; David P. Willis ’80; Chad Newsome ’81 and P ’13; Trevor Weston ’81; Marshall Whinney ’82 and his mother Cecelia Sweeney; Dylan McKeon ’98; Aaron Primero ’05; Richard Jarrett ’05; and Nathan Fletcher ’07. Mrs. Judith Hancock also was in attendance. Dana Marsh commented that “this will be as important an event for the choir school as there has been in 30 years.”

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Alumni, Family and Friends,

2016 has proven a year of rebirth at the Choir School. A major renovation is completed inside the school on 58th St. after significant water damage last winter from a burst pipe, and with the addition of our new Director of Music, Daniel Hyde, the choir has a new sense of excitement and direction. A busy year is off and running! Notably in 2016, the Choir of Men and Boys was conducted by the world renowned Sir Simon Rattle in a benefit performance to support the John Scott Memorial Scholarship. Alumni weekend was well attended and it was great to see both familiar and new faces at the event. A highlight this year was the Saturday evening reception at the Rector’s apartment. For those boys who had the privilege of going there while students I can pass on that it looks as beautiful as ever but only feels smaller now that I am an adult! I truly encourage any and all alumni, family of alumni and friends to return to Saint Thomas this year for an event. It is the only way to truly reconnect with the school and a place that many of you called home for four years (or more now!). The school makes an incredible effort to host a post concert/post service dinner a few times throughout the year for alumni who attend. Susan Hill (Parent ’97 and ’98) is your official contact for Alumni Relations now so please reach out to her when you think you may be coming to the city or to an event. Finally, please consider a gift to the Choir School. There is currently an incompletely funded ‘Alumni’ award given out at Graduation which would truly benefit from your support, no matter what size. I am looking forward to another wonderful year of events at Saint Thomas and hope you will join your fellow Alumni for one or more!

Warmest Regards,

Tom Carroll ’88, President,
Saint Thomas Choir School Alumni Association
The Alumni Reunion took place the weekend of November 12 and 13. It began with the Alumni Association meeting, which elected three new Board members: Sean McFate ’84, Aaron Primero ’05 and Erik Suter P ’16. Congratulations to all, and thank you for agreeing to serve!

After the Alumni Association meeting, Father Wallace gave a tour of the newly renovated Choir School. Alumni enjoyed a lovely reception Saturday evening at the rectory, and Sunday brought everyone to church for the 11am service, followed by lunch at the Choir School and then evensong, when several alumni sang with the choir.

A host of recent graduates continued the tradition of returning to the Choir School for Thanksgiving, and in December, we were heartened to welcome back several for Britten’s A Ceremony of Carols, followed by dinner with the boys.

Thanks to those alumni who kindly send notes and updates while RSVPing for events. We love to hear from you!

ALUMNI BOARD: NEW MEMBERS

Dr. Sean McFate ’84 is an expert on national security, foreign policy and terrorism, and is a novelist. He is a Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council, a think tank, and a professor of strategy at the National Defense University and Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service. His career spans the public, private and non-profit sectors. He began as a paratrooper and officer in the U.S. Army’s 82nd Airborne Division, and later worked as a private military contractor. He has held management positions in firms and non-profits that work on international affairs, and he is a prolific writer. His novel Shadow War and non-fiction book The Modern Mercenary have both received acclaim. He is also an international public speaker. McFate holds a BA from Brown University, an MPP from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, and a PhD in international relations from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).

Aaron Primero ’05 is an investment banking analyst at Goldman Sachs. He is a graduate of Columbia and Oxford, where he studied Classics and Financial Economics, respectively. A 2014 Fulbright Scholar, Aaron conducted research in the Philippines on the Trans-Pacific Partnership and its potential impact on the country. As a baritone, he has sung as part of the choirs of Groton School, Saint Paul’s, K Street, and Christ and Saint Stephen’s in New York. Aaron lives and works in downtown Manhattan.

Erik Wm. Suter, a native of Chicago, is a musician of international acclaim. For nearly 10 years, he served as Organist at Washington National Cathedral in Washington, DC. He holds degrees from Oberlin Conservatory and Yale University, where he studied with Haskell Thomson, Thomas Murray, and Gerre Hancock. Previously, he held positions at Trinity Church, Copley Square, and at the Parish of All Saints, both in Boston; and at Trinity Church-on-the-Green in New Haven, CT. Mr. Suter is a commercial pilot and flight instructor. Based at Washington National Airport, he is a captain on the Canadair Regional Jet flying for American Eagle. He lives in Gaithersburg, Maryland with his wife and son, Daniel ’16.
Lynde May IV ’47 wrote us to RSVP for the Simon Rattle concert, saying, “I haven't been back in decades.” The concert would be his first alumni event, he said. He told us that “as Head Boy in the class of ’47 I got to sit in the front row of the choir on the end nearest the congregation, sort of behind the pulpit. Dr. Candlyn was the Organist and Choirmaster and both of us arrived at Saint Thomas the same year. We were ‘rookies’ together. At graduation I won the first Candlyn Prize, given in memory of his son who was killed in the war.”

Gregory Guy ’62 writes that he and his wife Cherlynn have relocated to Davenport, FL, where she has been recruited as the Director of Nursing for all critical care services of Florida Regional Medical Center. They hope to come back to the school next year.

Sean Mullen ’81 celebrated two important anniversaries in 2016: the twentieth anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood in December, and at the end of November, the tenth anniversary of his election to serve as Rector of Saint Mark’s Church, Philadelphia.

Tom Carroll ’88 and Alumni Board Director sends us a photo of himself and his wife Kyle on the Great Wall of China outside Beijing. Tom was invited as a guest lecturer for The Fifth Annual Conference of the Wuhan Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Society of integrated Chinese and Western Medicine.

Shane O’Neill ’01 wrote to catch up: After graduating from Saint Thomas in 2001, Shane attended the Hotchkiss School and graduated in 2009 from the University of Miami (FL) in Coral Gables with a Bachelor of Music degree in Music Composition and a minor in Business Administration. After working in NYC for two years, he attended Georgetown University’s McDonough School of Business, graduating in 2014 with an MBA in international studies. In October 2015, Shane and Ryan were married at Christ Church Cathedral, Houston, TX. They have recently moved to Singapore, where Shane works for Capgemni Consulting and is on an 18 month assignment with an Oil and Gas Engineering Contractor, and where Ryan is Director of Admissions at the American School in Singapore. Shane and Ryan would love to hear from Saint Thomas alumni and welcome anyone who would like to visit them in Singapore.

Michael Miller ’08 married Anna Galtsova at the Naval Cathedral of Saint Nicholas in St. Petersburg, Russia on August 7, 2016. Congratulations Michael and Anna!

Andrew Jones ’12 continues at the University of Maryland, College Park, where he is majoring in Aerospace Engineering. The engineering department sent him to a leadership program last summer because of his work at Quest, an engineering honors society. He is also the vice-president of Phi Mu Alpha, a music fraternity, and sings in a community choral group during the summer.

Matthew Higgins ’13 has received early acceptance to Princeton and is proud to be a member of the class of 2021.

Daniel Suter ’16 sent us a picture of himself with his father, Alumni Board member Erik Suter, and Andrew Sheranian, Organist and Master of Choristers at All Saints, Ashmont, where Erik performed “The Complete Organ Works of Durufle” in October.

Adrian Alexander Castellanos ’16 joined the class of 2020 at Portsmouth Abbey School this Fall and is pleased to report that he was named to the Abbey Dean's List for the Fall Term.

Joel Flashman, Latin and French Faculty 1973-1997, reports that he has moved 50 miles north of Los Angeles to Leisure Village in Ventura County, California. His sister has lived in the community for six years, and he reports, "I have rented a cottage a mere twelve minute walk from her place. So quiet, surrounded by lush greenery and mountains. Looking forward to seeing everyone at the Centennial in 2019!"

Many thanks to David Willis ’80 for helping compile these notes.
HUMPHREY THE CAT

News has reached us of one illustrious Choir School alum, Humphrey the Cat. Humphrey attended the school during GRA’s time and seems to have enjoyed at least seven lives so far. He came to us one Saturday morning on a downtown A-train. Having boarded at 181st street, he attracted the notice of Richard Lippold, a Gentleman of the choir on his way to church. Mr. Lippold made the fateful decision to scoop up the kitten and then brought him to the parish house, where he pressed GRA into kitty-sitting for the duration of choir practice. By the time Mr. Lippold returned for his kitten, the bond with GRA had been firmly established. GRA soon adopted the kitten and named him Humphrey. Everyone from GRA’s time remembers Humphrey, his tuxedo markings, and his sometimes wild personality. When, after surgery, GRA went to the Rectory to recuperate with the Meads, Humphrey came too. When GRA moved back to England, Humphrey deigned to lodge with Sue and Scott Eyerly until they could deliver him to GRA in the UK. And when GRA passed away last year, Humphrey landed on his feet once again, at King’s College Cambridge where he took up residence with Director of Music, Stephen Cleobury, and family. Emma Cleobury tells us that “the children of King’s College School love coming across a visiting cat exploring their playing fields.” Everyone finds it fitting that Humphrey chose the Cleobury family – having spent his formative years as a Choir School cat, Humphrey well understood the friendship between Saint Thomas and King’s. Still, fate works in strange ways, and even Humphrey could not have known (could he??) that just as he was arriving at King’s, Maestro Cleobury’s former organ scholar, Daniel Hyde, was winging his way to Saint Thomas. (We leave it to pundits to judge the fairness of that swap.)

Our thanks to Mr. Lippold, Dr. Emma Cleobury, and Father Mead for piecing together Humphrey’s known biography (thus far!).
SAINT THOMAS CHOIR SCHOOL

DONATIONS

GIFTS TO THE CHOIR SCHOOL

All of us at Saint Thomas Choir School are deeply appreciative of the many contributions received throughout the year from generous and thoughtful alumni, parents, alumni parents, parishioners and friends. These gifts are important to the school and enable the school to advance its mission. The list below should include everyone who has given to the school through the 2016 Every Member Canvass. Annual pledges provide for the ongoing expenses of the school through the General Operating Fund. Please note that gifts made directly to the Choir School that are designated for special funds are always used for the purpose intended by the donor. These gifts will be listed in the Summer/Fall Newsletter. We try very hard to make these lists as accurate as possible but if you have any questions, please contact Ann Hall Kaplan: akaplan@SaintThomasChurch.org or 212.757.7013.

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*Named after the founding Choirmaster of the Choir School, the T. Tertius Noble Guild recognizes those people who have remembered the Choir School in their estate planning.*

Dr. Judith Hancock, Honorary Chairperson of the Guild

Mr. K. E. Andrews†

The Reverend Canon John B. Birdsall ’40
THE JOHN SCOTT MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

In the past nine months, over $500,000 has been raised for the John Scott Memorial Scholarship. These funds will support the Choir School in its mission to accept outstanding boys, regardless of their ability to pay.

We give thanks to all the generous supporters who have made this possible. The list of donors will be printed in the Summer/Fall Newsletter.

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Mr. & Mrs. John C. Newsome ’81
Ms. Janice Parkinson-Tucker &
Mr. James S. Tucker
Mr. Richard W. Pendleton, Jr.
Mr. Andrew Pierre ’47
Mr. B. Franklin Reinauer III
Edmée B. Reit
Dr. Stephen G. Schaeffer ’61
Miss Susan E. Seaman
R. Stephen Seibt, MD
Sir George† & Eleanor,
Lady Shearing
Mr. & Mrs. Richard Slattery
Mr. Charles W. Soltis ’52
Mr. Robert G. Strachan
Mr. & Mrs. Neal Stuber
PA ’86
Mr. J. Stanley Tucker
The Reverend Charles
Wallace
Ms. Charlotte Wiggers
Mr. John R. Wilson, Jr.

Mr. † & Mrs. R. Craig Burlington ’84 & ’91
Dr. Barry John Capella
Mr. Ronald Ciavolino†
The Reverend & Mrs.
David C. Cobb ’01 & ’03
Ms. Janice L. Conzet†
Ms. Martha J. Dodge
Mr. Paul R. Emmons
The Honorable & Mrs. Thomas E. Engel
Mr. & Mrs. Bruce Englebrecht ’57
Mr. Donald H. Goodyear, Jr.
Dr. Gerre Hancock† & Dr. Judith Hancock
Mr. & Mrs. Stephen M. Jones ’10
Mrs. Esther Kamm
Mr. Christopher M. King
Mr. Kenneth F. Koen
Mr. Jeffrey Lawrence†
Mr. † & Mrs. Ogden N. Lewis
Ms. Elaine Liner
Mr. Sean Sapone McFate ’84
Ms. Karen Metcalf
Mr. † & Mrs. William R. Miller
Mr. † & Mrs. William Minshall ’41

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Ms. Charlotte Wiggers
Mr. John R. Wilson, Jr.
Notable Dates
WINTER/SPRING 2017

March 19
Chorister-for-a-Day
Please contact Loraine Enlow at lenlow@choirschool.org

March 28-30
Boston Tour
See website for further details.

April 30 - May 2
Choirmasters' Conference

April 12
Alumni Dinner
Join the choristers for dinner following the 5:30pm Tenebrae Service.
Please contact shill@choirschool.org or 646-569-6464 to register.

CONCERTS:
March 24 • 7:30pm
C.P.E. Bach's Saint John Passion, Haydn's Passion Symphony

May 11 • 7:30pm
Glory Be To Thee O Lord: Songs of Faith, Hope and Love

June 10 • 11am
Graduation and Prize Day

July 29-August 6
Girl Chorister Course

Please visit www.choirschool.org for more details on these and other events.