John Gavin Scott (1956-2015)

This edition of the Choir School News is in thanksgiving for the life and witness of John Scott. Here, alumni, parents, colleagues and friends share memories and reflections of his extraordinary impact on this community. Through John’s gifts, people not only experienced music of the highest caliber, but were also drawn deeper into the mystery of God.

For all of us, John’s death was a terrible shock. It has caused us to reflect on how fragile life can be. Even as we have moved forward at the Choir School, we continue to miss him and entrust him to God’s care and protection.

I invite you to share in our common life through these pages.

–Charles F. Wallace, Headmaster
I first met John Scott as the leader, twice, of Saint Thomas’s Choirmasters’ Conference, annual spring events in which a great choirmaster was invited for several days to lead our boy choristers, with the men as well, to demonstrate his methods to dozens of visiting choirmasters.

John Scott was already the best trainer of choirboys in his generation. He began his vocation in church music as a choirboy in Wakefield. He understood the daily life and challenges of Saint Thomas’s residential boys’ choir school. John was also acclaimed as one of the world’s supreme recital organists. Above and in and through it all he was a believer and a churchman. He loved user-friendly hymns and knew how they should be played – it was a special thrill to watch John take over the console for the final hymn of a Choral Eucharist. And there was the care he took and his precision with the singing of the psalms and his Anglican chant psalter at St. Paul’s Cathedral London with John’s language-sensitive pointing of the texts – the classic “Coverdale” texts of the psalms in the old Book of Common Prayer. John had recorded all 150 psalms in a 12-volume CD series while at St. Paul’s, and he re-introduced and re-published his book as The Anglican Psalter after he came to Saint Thomas. For these and many other reasons, I admired – as they say in sailing – the cut of John’s jib.

When the time came to find a new Director of Music for Saint Thomas, I went to London in the spring of 2003 and met John at his favorite restaurant near St. Paul’s after Evensong and a recital of Buxtehude. I asked John, who was then forty-seven but had been at St. Paul’s since his mid-twenties, would he be interested in coming to Saint Thomas? He would be interested, he replied, but that if I would please understand he would like not to have to apply. Very well; would he give me his resume? Yes, he would. This was pure John.

As John prepared to leave St. Paul’s, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth made him a Lieutenant of the Victorian Order (LVO) for his distinguished services to the Crown at London’s great cathedral, where John led the music for many royal and state occasions – not to mention the daily round of choral evensongs and other liturgies.

John gave Saint Thomas’s mission a new lease on life, and Saint Thomas gave John’s career a new lease on life. He gave me as his Rector the most rewarding decade of my ministry. It was heartwarming to hear from John’s British friends how happy he was working at Saint Thomas. John elevated Saint Thomas to a new level in its choral foundation, which is at the heart of its mission; and it wasn’t long before Maestro Scott was warmly appreciated in New York and around the country.

John appreciated all the eras of sacred music. He sponsored, supported, and premiered up-to-the-minute new compositions by such as John Tavener and Nico Muhly. He also introduced into the Saint Thomas repertoire “new” and unheard compositions from centuries ago, especially from his beloved Elizabethan-Jacobean-Caroline era of high Anglicanism. And he composed a Mass we commissioned for Easter Day, the charming Missa Dies Resurrectionis, based on melodies of Easter carols.

Then there was the Saint Thomas concert series. Who was not amazed to see Maestro Scott leading the Choir of Men and Boys, the guest soloists, and the orchestra, while at the same time playing his harpsichord, sometimes with one hand while conducting with the other! Who was not thrilled by his concert of Mozart’s orchestration of Handel’s Messiah, and by the superb recording that followed it? And the concert and recording of Henry Purcell, John’s famous seventeenth century predecessor at St. Paul’s. And Rachmaninoff’s Vespers, and Herbert Howells... John, by means of all these, and his recitals, and his tours with the choir in America and abroad was one of Saint Thomas’s best evangelists. He brought many, including people of no faith at all, close to the divine mystery that inspired everything he did.
Maestro Scott did have what he termed his occasional “ginger moments.” One of the few flares he had at me in my presence involved the rare coincidence of Monday in Holy Week with Saint Patrick’s Day. I wanted to continue our practice of closing the church while the parade was going past. John wanted to go ahead with the service despite the parade. No, I said. He stormed out of my office yelling, “It’s Holy Week! It’s the Opus Dei!” It was a great ginger moment, and I loved him for it. I decided to surrender. John’s belief that God was the author and giver of all his gifts was the basis of his combined confidence and humility. This knowledge made him the Christian gentleman he was. One aspect of John’s genius, shaped by that living faith, was his ability to enter into the spirit of the composer whose work he was performing; and one of the privileges of sitting in the Rector’s stall was the close-up view of John conducting, sometimes with eyes closed, as though he were swimming in the spirit of the composer. It was a form of prayer, beautiful to watch.

In John’s death the Lord took to his unveiled presence a soul with genuine faith, a faith that permeated and inhabited John’s work like an atmosphere. The fair beauty of the Lord that so inspired John since his childhood is now immediately visible and audible to him. I imagine he will be welcomed by Buxtehude and Bach, and perhaps by William Byrd and Orlando Gibbons, and Henry Purcell, walking with them to St. Peter’s Gate and then, led by St. Cecilia (the patroness of musicians) to our Lady Saint Mary, on towards the vision of Jesus Christ himself – and then transported, raptured, into the life of the Holy Trinity.

You may have asked the Lord, Why have you done this, taking John away like this? For me it has helped to widen the question: Lord, why did you give John to us in the first place; why was there a John Scott at all? This provides room for gratitude within our grief. For what a privilege it is to have heard, seen, and known John Scott! Thank God for him! May he rest in the peace of Christ and rise with the Lord in glory.

– The Reverend Andrew C. Mead, Rector Emeritus

For more information about the life of John Scott, please visit saintthomaschurch.org/about/news/342/john-scott-1956-2015
MEMORIES OF JOHN SCOTT FROM THE CHOIR SCHOOL COMMUNITY

WHEN THE CHOIR WAS TRAVELING IN THE UK in summer 2007, I was a recently-graduated eighth grader, no longer singing in the choir. Luckily we were still able to tag along on this trip. I remember one time when Mr. Scott gave me and my brother, Nathan, a pamphlet he had found in a shop in Edinburgh, as an impromptu gift. This pamphlet contained the history of the Fletcher family in Scotland – little did I know that the English name Fletcher also had Scottish connections (most notably with Clan MacGregor). We still have that little pamphlet at home, as a fitting reminder of Mr. Scott's generosity. – Zachary Fletcher, class of 2007

I WAS FORTUNATE ENOUGH to get a chance to catch up and have one last hurrah with John just a few days before he died, when I auditioned for a spot on the sub list at Saint Thomas. (It feels strange to call him John, since I always knew him as Mr. Scott, but I’ll do it anyway.) We had a ball going through a bunch of music. While I only expected him to ask me for one or two selections, he just kept on going, reading through everything in my folder: “On the Street Where You Live” from My Fair Lady, “Je me lamenté” by Leguerney, “Her Temple” by Finzi, “Love arms himself in Celia's eyes” by Purcell, and “Unvergänglichkeit” by Korngold. These are pieces that will carry great significance in my life since they’re the ones that John and I shared that afternoon.

A couple of them I’m sure he had never seen before, but he played through everything flawlessly, effortlessly and with such refined style. At one point, when I indulged in a cheesy, prolonged fermata that was not marked in the score, he momentarily kept playing and paused to apologize, self-deprecatingly lamenting his own “horrible accompanying.” He had always been a perfectionist, and this little moment reminded me how high his standards were, and how humble he was despite his awesome abilities.

After we finished going through my folder, he said, “Well I suppose I should give you some reading...” and picked up the Gloria from Josquin’s Missa Pange lingua, which was on the piano. He was absolutely on fire with love for this piece, and he shook his head in amazement once we were done reading through it, saying, “Such fantastic music...” I pointed out some “choirboy graffiti” in my score, which quoted John as having at some point referred to the Gloria as “groovy.” We laughed about it, but it’s a totally accurate adjective. I’m sure that the music library at Saint Thomas is full of similar “graffiti” which attests to John's sense of humor and his depth of wisdom in describing the music to the choir during rehearsals.

It was bewildering to witness such skill as he accompanied me, but at the same time his radiance of warmth and joy in music-making put me totally at ease, and even in the moment I felt that this was one of the very most enjoyable performing experiences of my life. It was a great day.

Having worked under his direction at Saint Thomas during my last two years in the choir (2004-2006) was a monumentally formative experience that has shaped my life as a musician and a person. Even after I graduated from the Choir School, he influenced my development as a composer by giving me words of encouragement. I’m so fortunate to have had the opportunity to have been mentored by John. – Nathan Fletcher, class of 2007
I SINCERELY WAS AMAZED AT HIS ABILITIES AS A MUSICIAN, and that sense of reverence only grew as I got older, especially after leaving the Choir School – that’s when I really began to see that, man, I might never get to work with someone so talented ever again. Take for instance, during a Sunday organ postlude, when I witnessed him play the parts for both hands with just his left, while he grabbed his glasses out of the pocket in his robes with his right hand – so he could see the music more clearly, I guess! Or one moment near the beginning of a Messiah rehearsal: we’d sung halfway through “And the Glory of the Lord” when Mr. Scott suddenly stopped us, meekly apologized for accidentally playing everything in the written key, then proceeded to play the entire thing from the start – including the SATB lines – in baroque pitch, a half-step down. Of course, as a choir boy, I took that completely for granted – how was I supposed to know how difficult that is to do? These days, my lack of surprise remains for an entirely different reason: of course, he could just go and do that. He was John Scott. Of course he knew the Messiah better than the back of his own hand. Of course he could play virtually any piece down or up a step without blinking. But maybe on a rare occasion, he’d need his glasses. –Danny Castellanos, class of 2009

IT BECAME A TRADITION for Andrew Yow (’14) and me, lingering in the ambulatory after the Easter Day masses and listening to Dr. Scott and the Brass thunder away at Gigout’s “Grand Chœur Dialogué.” Already enraptured by his arrangement of “He is Risen” (and the billows of processional incense that so delighted our Anglo-Catholic tendencies), Andrew and I would watch Dr. Scott dart from his position at the conductor’s stand, and we’d smile at each other, anticipating the glory that was to come. There was something fascinating about the piece to us – perhaps it was Dr. Scott’s supreme confidence at the console, or how effortless his playing looked, or how the Queen had once reprimanded his use of the Royal Trumpets during a performance at St. Paul’s Cathedral… or maybe it was that we aspired to achieve the level of greatness that this teacher and mentor of ours never failed to uphold.

This Christmas, as my comrades were filling Saint Thomas Church with Sweelinck, Rutter, and Darke, I was opening presents beneath my Christmas tree at home. Tucked between two boxes lay a thin, yellowed booklet, all the way from Paris, with Durand Editions Musicales printed across its front. It was a score of the “Grand Chœur Dialogué” by Eugène Gigout. Now it is my turn to play the masterwork on the organ, and the memory of Dr. Scott’s passion, dedication, and their goal – the glory of God – must live on in my heart (and voice, and fingers) forever.

Thank you, Sir, for everything. –Luca Cantone, class of 2015

STERN BUT WARM-HEARTED, HARD-WORKING BUT FUN, dedicated as well as devoted and faithful beyond all measure, these are just a few words and phrases that describe John Scott, the man who touched everyone with his passion in faith and music. Dr. Scott never doubted what his choir could accomplish. He would always say that his goal as a conductor was to paint a picture for the audience of his interpretation of a piece, so that they had the opportunity to hear and even visualize what he heard and visualized in the music.

I miss running down the flights of stairs after eating breakfast every morning, to prepare for that week’s music in the gymnasium. I thought of Dr. Scott as a father figure. He treated me with the same respectfulness, responsibility, faithfulness, truthfulness, kindness, helpfulness and love as a father would for his son. He was the one person who really understood everything that a choir boy undergoes throughout his experience at such an extraordinary school. Without Dr. Scott, I would not be where I am today both as an individual and as a musician. Hopefully, when I establish my musical career, I will be able to accomplish and perform at least some of the things that John Scott has.
His loss has not been easy for anyone to accept. I am truly envious of God to have such a masterful musician in his midst. I am also envious of Dr. Scott for finally having the chance to see the great musicians who inspired him. I mean this with all my heart when I say, the world will never know a better choirmaster. –Richard Pittsinger, class of 2013

MR. SCOTT ARRIVED MY LAST YEAR. After our first rehearsal, he met with each of us in a Choir School practice room to learn our names, stories, voices. That was good and all, except it wasn't. See, that past summer (my twelfth) had nudged my voice down a clef – and so our meeting, I anticipated, would be my eulogy.

He welcomed me into a coffin of a practice room. Handshake, smiles, scales. He tested my upper register. I tested his inner ear and his composure. But not a wince from him. More scales, more smiles.

He kept me as a treble until our November concert, my last and his first on Fifth Avenue. We sang Mozart's Requiem and Haydn's Nelson Mass. How fitting a soundtrack to my end and everyone else's triumph!

Keeping me was no mere British nicety, for Mr. Scott was all encouragement and trust. He appointed me head chorister, and assuming I had perfect pitch (I don't), would sometimes ask me to hum an A before an anthem in the same key. Such reliance astounded me, and I'd shrug my shoulders and kick Danny Castellanos's shin. And when I became an acolyte, he made sure I got voice lessons and bade me sing baritone in the choir – which was unheard of before.

I remember sitting next to Mr. Scott at a concert at Saint Thomas, not sung by our choir but by St. Paul's Cathedral, his old crocodile of choir boys. They sang so well it was annoying. After one sentimentally English anthem, he turned to me, now a wilted voice:

“Did you find that last cadence a bit flat?”

Did I?

“Oh, uh, definitely,” I heard myself say, my upper half a bobblehead.

The moment passed and the St. Paul's boys resumed stealing our thunder. But there was something in that ditty of a question, a tone absurd in proposing my musical judgment mattered and humble for affirming we had both drunk from the same fountains. I sang under Mr. Scott for only three months. Still, he was instrumental in my retuning and everyone's in our ruffed fraternity.

–Aaron Primero, class of 2005
MR. SCOTT WOULD ALWAYS COME DOWN TO REHEARSAL HOLDING A CUP OF TEA and scanning the choir to make sure everyone was doing what they should be doing. No matter how skilled a chorister was, he always looked for improvement in every individual. “It was okay,” he said to a boy who sang a solo after Evensong, “but the breath control could have been better.” Even though he always expected the best from everyone, he could still be tender-hearted, making sure that the rehearsal had a bit of humor to it. In the midst of all this, he always reminded us that whatever we performed was for the glory of God alone. Whether it was a psalm or Handel’s Messiah, everything must be as close to perfection as possible. I am grateful for the lasting impact he made on my life. – Augie Segger, class of 2015

THERE ARE SO MANY FOND MEMORIES I have from working with John almost every day in the Choir School together for over six years, but this one I think perfectly captures the essence of John as a musician and human being: Occasionally, the boys would give performances during meals at the Choir School, whether on piano, on other instruments, or as a voice recital. I remember John once accompanying the boys singing in one of these performances. You could tell by the care he took playing the accompaniments, as well as the interest he took in each boy singing, that this small in-house recital was every bit as important to him as the work he did in the church and the world. John always took music seriously, no matter the context, and his investment in the daily life of the boys was always apparent. – Fred Teardo, Associate Organist, 2006–2012

HEADING OUT OF SCHOOL ONE MORNING, I chanced to hear the boys rehearsing my new piece “Spires” down in the gym, several floors below. As their sound floated up through the stairwell, I lingered at the street level landing, catching faint sounds.

At one tricky section, the boys made a mistake. Instantly the singing stopped, and I could hear John speaking, though indistinctly. Like the adult characters in the television cartoon Peanuts, whose speech is represented by a trombone, John could not be heard in words, only in cadence. He was pointing out the error, but his voice never rose above an even purl (“mmm mmm mmm...”). Singing resumed, the troubling passage was correctly executed, and then... another mistake. Again the instant stoppage; again the purl (“mmm mmm mmm...”). The rehearsal proceeded smoothly, until – heaven forfend – our beloved
choristers made the same mistake twice. John's change of tone expressed a world of feeling: “mmm mmm MMM MMM!!!” I laughed out loud. Happily, the boys fixed the problem, and a few young lives were spared.

I loved that John was a perfectionist. He should have been; he knew instantly when something wasn't as good as it could be. But in John's hands, perfectionism never compromised soulfulness; it was used to communicate soulfulness. Unlike the stereotype of a gifted musician who offers note-perfect performances devoid of feeling, John was a gifted musician who offered note-perfect performances overflowing with feeling. He possessed more musical ability than anyone I've ever known, coupled with an engaging, humorous, life-affirming personality. –Scott Eyerly, Music Theory Faculty, 1988-2014

I REMEMBER ONE TIME, as we boys prepared to go to the service, Dr. Scott stood at the top of the stairs, waiting for everyone to be quiet. Perhaps it was his charisma which stopped even the smallest sounds of ruffling, but everything was still. His face was solemn, as if waiting for somebody to dare speak. Nobody did. Then, in a soft but projected voice, he asked, “What is the most important service we sing?” One of the boys said Sunday, and another said Christmas. With a shake of his head, he said, “It's the next one we sing.” Then we went up to sing the most important service. –Sehjin, class of 2016

IT WAS A CHILLY MORNING IN OCTOBER of my seventh grade. The wind nipped at my face and sent chills down my body as I walked through the gravel towards Bryn-Mawr Church, our final stop on our Virginia-Maryland tour. I met Mrs. Scott and Dr. Scott standing by a nearby tree and decided to engage in some conversation. As I walked closer, I noticed something very peculiar: Dr. Scott had on a normal fancy suit, which was expected, but with sneakers.

“Sir,” I asked, “why are you, a British choir conductor, wearing sneakers?”

He replied jokingly, “Leif, as a British person, I am allowed to wear peculiar outfits.”

“Is this your new style sir?” I asked him.

“Yes, actually, I am thinking of creating a wardrobe of strange outfits.”

And from that moment on, he always wore sneakers with suits. –Leif, class of 2016

MR. SCOTT CAME DURING MY EIGHTH GRADE YEAR, and that spring he came to camp with us at Camp Incarnation, something Dr. Hancock had never been able to do. We were playing soccer when he arrived. He was wearing his collared shirt and slacks, as if he'd just come off the organ, plus a pair of white grandpa sneakers. He approached our game – to watch, we
thought – but then he started to play. He was rusty, which was about what we expected from grandpa sneakers, but pretty soon he started to play, and he was good – really really good.

Near the end, it looked like our side was going to lose, when out of nowhere, Mr. Scott leapt in the air and executed a perfect bicycle kick, whooshing the ball into the net and winning the game. He did a complete flip, perfect torque. I was a serious soccer player, and I couldn’t believe my eyes. This is my favorite memory of him.

–Richard Jarrett, class of 2005

ONE OF MY FAVORITE MEMORIES OF JOHN was from a Sunday evening in October 2014. John had just given a flawless recital after a heavy day of services at Saint Thomas. Lily was out of town for the weekend and asked if Ben and I would look after her husband that evening. Although John was initially only interested in a quick drink at the Modern next door, a restorative cocktail seemed to get him (and us) in the mood for a boys’ night on the town. Over the course of the evening, John regaled Ben and me with wonderful stories about accompanying for George Guest, directing at St. Paul’s, and playing recitals all over the world – all laced with his wicked sense of humor. I feel so privileged to have had that evening with him, to really get to know the man who could be so private and introverted. For all of John’s technical skill and artistic perfection, it was this humanity behind it that made his music-making so compelling.

–Stephen Buzard, Assistant Organist

THE LITTLEST CHORISTER

Father Mead’s mentor, Father Purnell, famously reversed the line from the burial service to declare: “In the midst of death, we are in life!” Such was case when, three weeks after John Scott’s death, his wife, Lily, gave birth to their son, Arthur John Gavin Scott. Lily and John had been eagerly expecting their first child and had decided to have a home birth so that the birth could be natural and peaceful without any unnecessary interventions. And so, on September 4, 2015, at 9pm, attended by a midwife as well as Lily’s mother and sister, little Arthur was born in the Scotts’ apartment – the first child born in the Choir School!

Lily writes: “John and I had talked about baby names many times during my pregnancy, but we wanted to wait until we met our child before we chose a name. We hadn’t found out the gender so we each came up with ten boys’ and ten girls’ names during our two weeks apart at the beginning of August. I had accompanied John on his summer concert tour as usual but came home two weeks before him because I was getting too far along to fly. We hadn’t talked about names on the 11th or 12th of August, but I found John’s list a week later. We both had Arthur as our first choice for a boy. Gavin is a Scott family name, and I wanted to honor John by including his full name.”

Father Spurlock baptized Arthur on Friday, September 11, and his Godparents are Charles Wallace and Aimée Spurlock.

On Halloween, Arthur made his debut as the littlest chorister. The family resemblance isn’t hard to see!
RECORDINGS

Fall 2015 saw the release of Dancing Day: Music for Christmas. This was the last album Mr. Scott recorded with the choir, and he had just put the finishing touches on the tracks a few weeks before he died. It includes the music for the yearly A Ceremony of Carols and Dancing Day concert, as well as some other pieces for Christmas, notably Mr. Scott’s gorgeous, joyful arrangement of “King Jesus Hath a Garden”. The recording made Album of the Week in The Sunday Times, which said that “the luminous textures and rhythmic vitality Scott elicits from his youthful charges matches that on Guest’s famous Argo recording of St. John’s Choir.”

The album was also the Christmas Choice for BBC Music Magazine, which writes: “The heart of the programme is a limpid, vernally fresh account of Britten’s A Ceremony of Carols, sung by boy trebles as the composer intended. The tinglingly evocative playing of harpist Sara Cutler impresses, and there is glowing solo work by choristers John Dominick Mignardi in ‘That yonge child’, Sehjin Jo in ‘Balulalow’ and others. And while there’s some gleamingly forthright singing in tutti passages, the abiding impression is one of intimacy, innocence and wonder.”

Gramophone said, “The choir is absolutely secure from trebles to basses and Saint Thomas’s organ is in fine voice, as demonstrated in the opening “Novo profusi gaudio” by the Oxford-based composer Matthew Martin. The two major works are Britten’s “A Ceremony of Carols” and Rutter’s piquant arrangements of traditional tunes, “Dancing Day”; kudos in both to the boys and to harpist Sara Cutler. (An alternative recording of the Britten is offered by the Mädchenchor Hannover – but the German girls can’t match the open-throated lustiness of the New York boys)... This disc has given most consistent pleasure.”

Dancing Day is available at music outlets, on the Saint Thomas website (www.saintthomaschurch.org/shop), and on iTunes.

CONCERTS

The 2015-16 concert series is offered in memory of John Scott, with each concert conducted by a different guest conductor.

The series opened on November 12, 2015 with the Mozart Requiem and Haydn Missa in Angustiis (Nelson Mass). Guest conducting was Mr. Scott’s friend Andrew Nethsingha, Director of Music at St. John’s College, Cambridge.

The New York Times said, “Mr. Nethsingha’s tempos were animated, and the orchestra played beautifully throughout. The work of the trumpets, trombones and timpani was especially notable in Haydn’s little militaristic outbursts, which were probably what somehow led the work to become associated, long after its 1798 completion, with the anti-Napoleonic exploits of Lord Nelson.”

Mr. Nethsingha will be bringing the St. John’s Choir to Saint Thomas for a concert on April 5, and he will also be leading the 2016 Choirmasters’ Conference at Saint Thomas in May.
APPEARANCES

This year, the boys had the honor of performing the “Coventry Carol” with legendary rock and pop star Sting on December 2, 2015 during the NBC regional telecast of the Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree Lighting. The boys had a great evening and it was a wonderful experience for all. Leif was excited to get Sting’s autograph, and Bobby ranked the evening tops in his year: “It was my favorite because I met Sting and he was my dad’s favorite singer.”

“I really enjoyed singing with Sting at the Tree Lighting in Rockefeller Center because Sting is very famous. Later in my life, I can say I performed with a very famous person.”

– Carl

On December 23, choristers in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades were invited to the New York Stock Exchange, where they got to ring the closing bell and sing “We Wish You A Merry Christmas.” Several boys ranked this as their favorite experience of the season, not only singing, but seeing themselves on television afterwards!

LUNCHTIME CONCERTS

Beginning in 2006, Father Wallace and the music department decided to strengthen the school’s instrumental music program by following the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music curriculum and exam system. The ABRSM is an internationally recognized music standard, and its exams include a performance portion. To give the boys performance practice, the music faculty organized a series of instrumental recitals at Sunday lunches, when many parents are present.

Once that program was successfully underway, Stephanie Tennill, the boys’ vocal coach, was asked about adding vocal music. Since there are a variety of set pieces for voice (more than thirty per module), Ms. Tennill thought the ABRSM curriculum would offer valuable experience without being too limiting. Currently all the boys follow the ABRSM curriculum in their private singing lessons. To practice for these exams, Ms. Tennill and the music faculty hold weekday concerts, with several boys per week giving solo recitals at lunch. Ms. Tennill says the recitals are a huge boost to confidence. Boys who may not be ready to sing a solo in choir can take this step at lunch, and afterwards, they are much more likely to raise their hand to try a solo in choir rehearsal. Moreover, boys who have become acolytes have a chance to sing in these recitals as they continue their private training through their voice change.
CHRISTMASTIME AT THE CHOIR SCHOOL

Christmas is one of the most memorable times of the year at Saint Thomas Church. Who can forget the intimate mystery of the choir singing John Scott’s arrangement of “Silent Night” or the buoyant solos in “I Saw Three Ships Come Sailing In”? To sing these services, boys of the choir remain at school manning their posts until the end of the Solemn Eucharist of the Nativity on Christmas Day. We caught up with the boys, faculty, and house mothers to find out what life is like at the Choir School over Christmas. Turns out, it’s a lot of fun!

The Christmas season begins in earnest the first Friday in Advent with tree decorating in the library. Heidi, the school chef, makes her special cookies, everyone drinks hot chocolate and eggnog, and the boys organize their own musical offerings. Elyot says this is his favorite Christmas tradition: “It is something we can all participate in (even though the tree always looks wacky.)”

There is a second Christmas tree in the dining room, and this one has magic powers. If good behavior in the school is lacking, the tree grows only pine needles, but when the boys have been good, it grows candy canes! Father Wallace remains a true and faithful custodian of this blessed tree, and when candy canes appear, he distributes them to boys who can answer his Christmas trivia questions, or boys who have distinguished themselves that week in academics, sport, music, or citizenship.

A newer tradition is making gingerbread houses. Miss Francisco leads the construction with boys who choose to stay behind on a Saturday. She has always loved baking with her family, so much so that that she wanted to share that tradition with the boys. Each boy makes his own gingerbread house, and then there is a contest, judged by faculty and staff. Award categories this year were Most Traditional, Most Festive, Best Use of Materials, and Most Creative. The prize was a trip to – you guessed it – the candy store with Miss Francisco.

In the run-up to Christmas, Mrs. Morgan organizes Secret Santa. The spending limit is a strict $10, and most boys do their shopping online to avoid the insanity which is holiday shopping in New York on weekends.

December 23 begins with a big cooked breakfast with all the building staff, faculty, and clergy. Boys open their stockings at breakfast, and then everyone goes over to the church for the creche service at 12:10pm. That afternoon, the school bids farewell to the third graders, who leave for vacation, and that evening, there is a party at the Rectory at which Father Turner has been known to join enthusiastically in games.

Christmas Eve is the busiest day of the season. Boys have rehearsal in the morning, followed by showers, lunch, and more rehearsal at the church. At 4pm they sing the demanding Nine Lessons and Carols, after which they come back to the school and go to their rooms for a rest. In the evening, an English Tea is served on the fifth floor, then it’s back to church for more practice and the Christmas Eve Mass at 11:00pm. Says Dylan, “I like Midnight Mass. There is such great music that I almost always doze off.” By the time the boys see their beds again around 1am, they are ready for their nightcaps and visions of sugar plums.

Christmas morning brings a speedy breakfast in the library around the tree. Boys get gifts from their Secret Santas and from their advisors. Alex says, “It seems like people are running all over the place, always busy. In the end, it’s worth it, and you see your friend’s face light up when he gets his present.” Before rushing off to church for the final service, the boys indulge in one last tradition: “We make paper airplanes,” Darin tells us, “and throw them into the tree.”
IN THE HISTORY CLASSROOMS
The history curriculum at the Choir School spans the great civilizations and gives the boys a broad and experiential grounding in world history, with an emphasis on Western civilization. This year, for example, the third and fourth grades have been studying the world of Bach during their history lessons. Mr. McDowell reports that “these boys tend to tune out ‘talking heads’ in any videos they watch, but as soon as someone starts to sing or play the harpsichord, they zap to attention. There’s a harpsichordist in one video whose face alters as soon as she begins to play. The boys really get this.”

Mr. Carpenter teaches history to grades five through eight. The fifth grade are studying ancient civilizations, and during their unit on Mesopotamia, they made cuneiform/pictogram tablets. The sixth grade studied ancient Greece in the fall and is currently doing Rome. Mr. Carpenter tells us that the class took the time to do a month-long unit on Islam following some questions on ISIS. The seventh grade is focusing on pre-modern Europe, and the eighth graders spent the fall doing a research paper before turning in December to the study of colonial America.

A VISIT FROM PHILIP MOORE
Dr. Philip Moore, organist and composer, visited the Choir School this fall. He shares many ties with us at Saint Thomas, including holding the post of Organist and Master of the Music at York Minster (as did our founder T. Tertius Noble) until his retirement in 2008.

THE SAINT THOMAS GIRLS’ COURSE
This summer, the Saint Thomas Girls’ Course will welcome a new musical director to their roster, Katherine Dienes-Williams. Since January 2008, Katherine has held the post of Organist and Master of the Choristers at Guildford Cathedral and for six years previously was the Director of Music at the Collegiate Church of St. Mary, Warwick.

The 2016 course begins on Saturday, July 30 and concludes on Sunday, August 7 following the 11am Sunday Eucharist at Saint Thomas Church. The choristers sing two treble Evensongs during the course, on Tuesday and Thursday and with the Gentlemen of the Choir on Sunday morning. Further information and applications may be found on the website.

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.
STAFF & FACULTY NEWS

New Faces in New Places

**Susan Moore Hill** is our new Director of Alumni Relations. Mrs. Hill holds a B.A. in history from Hollins College and attended The New York Botanical Garden School of Professional Horticulture. She has a long association with the Choir School, beginning with her sons’ attendance, *Wick ‘97* and *Rowland ‘98*. She was co-chair of the 75th and 80th Choir School Gala Celebrations and continued her involvement with Choir School fundraising events and the Alumni Association Board. While living in New York, Mrs. Hill worked at Bloomingdale’s before enjoying a long career with Joan & David. Mrs. Hill enjoys working at the Choir School and seeing the energy and enthusiasm of the boys and faculty. She looks forward to continuing broadening alumni support and involvement.

**Joe McDowell** had been working as a tutor at the Choir School for seven years, when in December of 2014 he became head teacher for the third and fourth grades. Mr. McDowell has a B.A. in architecture, and he worked for many years as a Wall Street legal assistant. In 2003 he left Wall Street and began tutoring, at first in the New York school system, and then privately. It’s wonderful to have him teaching our youngest boys and building the foundation for their time in the school.

**Richard Jarrett** serves this year as a basketball coach and as assistant teacher in the third and fourth grade classroom. Mr. Jarrett is an alum of the Choir School (class of 2005). He attended high school in Chappaqua and at Trinity Pawling before earning a degree in music from Hobart College. He stayed in touch with the Choir School after graduating, both by working at Camp Incarnation as a lifeguard when the Choir School boys are at camp, but also by singing with the gentlemen of the choir, something he continues to do this year. We are very happy to have him back.

**Sophia Bryant-Scott** moves into a new role this year as Office Manager. Everyone is grateful for this appointment, none more so than Father Wallace!

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Several teachers have been burning the midnight oil pursuing advanced degrees alongside their full-time responsibilities at the Choir School. Cait Morgan just completed a post-baccalaureate Certificate in Classics at Columbia. Amy Francisco is nearly finished with her masters program in English at Columbia, and Kevin Carpenter has begun his masters at Teachers’ College.

**WEDDING BELLS**

Saint Thomas Acting Organist Stephen Buzard married Lieve Hendren on September 4, 2015 at St. Francis Church in Louisville, Kentucky. Mr. and Mrs. Buzard first met when they were eleven years old at a Royal School of Church Music summer choir course in St. Louis and have been good friends ever since. The music director at that course was Bruce Neswick who, fittingly, played the organ for their wedding. Our own headmaster Charles Wallace officiated the marriage ceremony, a rite he does not often perform given the average age of his usual parochial charges. A beautiful reception followed at the Hendren family house in Goshen, featuring live music, fireworks, a hat contest, and a bourbon tasting station. Mrs. Buzard is settling into the Choir School very nicely and is grateful for the warm welcome the community has extended her. The couple plans to honeymoon in Europe at the end of the academic year.
ALUMNI REUNION 2015

The tenth annual alumni reunion in October was a great success. Several decades were represented: 1940s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, as well as some of the most recent graduates. We were thrilled to have Mr. Tom Carroll representing the 1940s! He attended with his son, Dr. Tom Carroll, who graduated in 1988 and is our current President of the Alumni Association. Tom Carroll ’45 spent some time looking over our archival photos and identified some of his classmates.

On Saturday, October 10, 2015, the Alumni Association’s Board of Directors met for its annual open meeting. We viewed Lindsay Lindenbaum’s video The Choir School and the Legacy of T. Tertius Noble. The film traces the vision and legacy of T. Tertius Noble through the memories of a number of former choristers who sang under his direction, as well as memories of more recent Choir School graduates. Those interviewed include Bill Weigle ’38, Peter Bierrie ’43, Richard Aiken ’44, Jon Papps ’44, Tom Carroll ’45, Brent Fisher ’53, Donald Werner Jr. ’72, the Rev. Gregory Gresko ’85, and Karl Boulware ’93. The film is narrated by John Scott.

In the photo (upper right), Mr. Tom Carroll ’45 and Dr. Tom Carroll ’88, father and son, stand beneath the photo of T. Tertius Noble. Mr. Carroll was what we kindly refer to as “one of the Noble Boys” because he sang under T. Tertius Noble, the founding Organist and Choirmaster. It was his 60th reunion! What an honor to have them both!

Saturday afternoon featured the much-anticipated basketball game: alumni vs. grades seven and eight. It was action-packed and competitive. This year the boys had some support from Mr. Jarrett ’05, who is on the faculty and switched sides to play with the boys for the second half of the game.

The evening’s Headmaster’s reception is always a highlight, a time for fellowship, renewing old friendships and meeting new alumni. This year two long serving and much beloved faculty members attended the Headmaster’s reception: Mr. Scott Eyerly, who taught Music Theory, and Mr. Joel Flashman, who taught French and Latin.

On Sunday, October 11, alumni enjoyed lunch with the choristers after the 11am service. They then joined the choir to sing Evensong, always a favorite event. During this Evensong, two probationers, Samuel and Eduardo, were admitted to the choir.

It was a joy to see so many alumni. Saint Thomas will always be your home!

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.
LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

It is always a treat for me to return to the Choir School. I have been fortunate over the last five years to be reacquainted with what, to all of us, was our "home away from home" for many years of our childhood and to re-experience many of the magical moments we all experienced as choristers. You are all part of a wonderful Alumni Association that I am fortunate to be leading as president of your Board of Directors. The Board of Directors is comprised of former alumni and/or parents of alumni and dedicated to keeping our wonderful brotherhood intact and in touch. If you have been thinking about reconnecting with the Choir School, please do so and stay in touch. We would love to hear from you! Better yet, just come to the next concert or alumni event. Graduation is just around the corner and it is always a special day for the eighth grade boys moving on. Your support of the Choir School is both needed and appreciated by all who currently call the school their home. Our dedication to the school will afford a bright future to many young men and many more years of service to Saint Thomas Church and its congregation.

Warmest Regards,
Tom Carroll '88, President,
Saint Thomas Choir School Alumni Association
Board of Directors, thomaslcarroll@gmail.com

CHRISTMAS CONCERT

On Thursday, December 17, 2015, the choir performed its annual concert featuring Britten’s A Ceremony of Carols and Rutter’s Dancing Day, conducted by Acting Director of Music, Stephen Buzard. Alumni had special seating in the front pews together with the probationers, and afterwards, we walked back to school and enjoyed dinner with the choristers. A warm homecoming for Christmas.

ALUMNI LECTURE

On January 20, 2016, together with Noble Guild and Duffie Guild, we were honored to welcome Dr. Sean McFate '84 to give a very special alumni lecture in Andrew Hall at the church. Dr. McFate is currently a Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council, Associate Professor at the National Defense University and Adjunct Professor at Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service. His book The Modern Mercenary – Private Armies and What They Mean for World Order (Oxford University Press, July 2014) exposes the little understood yet crucially important world of private military contractors, and how private military force will change international relations. The book is based on real-world experience and four years of research.

The lecture was packed – we ran out of chairs. Dr. McFate spoke powerfully about his years as a mercenary in Africa, and he discussed his recent foray into fiction with his debut novel, Shadow War, due out May 10, 2016 from William Morrow. To learn more about this multi-talented alum, visit www.seanmcfate.com.

FEELING NOSTALGIC FOR THOSE CHOIR SCHOOL DAYS?

Some of our clothing comes in adult sizes. If you’d like to purchase any of these items with the Choir School logo, please contact Sophia Bryant-Scott in the school office or via email sscott@choirschool.org.

The white, short-sleeved polo shirt ($25) comes in adult S, M, L, XL.

The navy v-neck sweater ($30) comes in Adult S, M, L, XL.

The school tie ($30) comes in six different lengths, for children to adult.
Luca Cantone '15 began his first term at Phillips Exeter Academy in September. He has since been designated a “French Organ Scholar,” and will be playing regularly at chapel services and events in addition to taking organ lessons each week. Luca is also a member of the Concert Choir and Choral Union, takes weekly voice lessons, and participates in the Music Theory Club and the Gilbert Opera Society.

Will Paris ’10 was inducted into the Naval Academy Class of 2019 last summer, beginning a journey that started with basic midshipman training as part of Plebe Summer. Approximately 1,200 candidates are selected each year for the Academy’s freshman class. During Plebe Summer, during which time candidates have no access to movies, television, the Internet or music, they are prepared for their first academic year at the Naval Academy and the four years of challenge that awaits them.

Andrew Cobb ’03 married Nora Divine-Carter on August 8, 2015, at Christ Church, Geneva, NY. Saint Thomas friends posed with the happy couple at the winery where the reception was held. Left to Right, Rich and Linda Stone (parents of Rob ’83), Katie and Ingrid Toothman (sister and mom to Henry ’03 and George ’02), Andrew and Nora, Ruth and David Cobb, and Jack Cobb ’01.

Rowland Hill ’98 married Angela Santos at the Providence Public Library on August 22, 2014. Reverend David Sellery, who was a curate at Saint Thomas Church and chaplain of the Choir School while Rowland was a chorister, officiated. Rowland and Angela live in West Roxbury, Massachusetts.

Tim Snavely ’89, his wife, Sara, and their son, Wiley, welcomed the birth of a new baby girl, Cecilia Mae, on January 12, 2016, in Atlanta, Georgia. Everyone is doing great!

Dr. Sean McFate ’84 married Jessica Deanne Lewis in 2014 in Washington DC. Dr. McFate writes, “For unto us a child is born! Jessica gave birth to Aidan Lewis McFate, a 9 pound boy on January 12, 2016. Mother and child are well, father learning a lot about diapers.”


David Willis ’80 and Ryan Newsome ’13, son of John C. Newsome ’81, sing together as members of the New Jersey Chamber Singers, a small choral ensemble based in Red Bank, New Jersey. David, a tenor, and Ryan, a baritone, recently performed in a series of NJCS Christmas concerts with the Philadelphia Handbell Ensemble, including a sold-out show at Grounds for Sculpture, in Hamilton, New Jersey.

Thomas Schreppler ’74 writes that his mother, Edith S. Schreppler, died in June 2015. She was pre-deceased by her husband George B. Schreppler, Jr., and survived by sons George III, John Joseph II, Thomas ’74 and James ’75, and grandson James ’09. Thomas writes that both his mother and father “loved the Choir School and enjoyed the mailers.” Thomas and fellow alumni Scott Stanard ’71, Scott Osborn ’73, Thomas’s brother, James Schreppler ’75 and Jerome Dames ’75 were in attendance at her funeral and sang Mozart’s “Ave Verum Corpus.”

Dr. John H. Wilson ’51 writes, “The Episcopal Church is the greatest gift my parents gave me” and that, coming from a tumultuous home, the Choir School gave him his life back with its three years of calm. Dr. Wilson writes to us from Dallas, where he attends St. Michael and All Angel: “When the music starts, I am back at Saint Thomas.”

William L. Noble ’45 passed away on September 15, 2015. His daughter Penelope kindly forwarded a letter he had been working on describing his time at the Choir School (see next page).
A Memory of the Choir School in the 1940s

My name is William L. Noble. I am in my 83rd year. I was born in August 1932. I went to Saint Thomas Choir School from the fall of 1943 until the end of the school year in 1945, when my voice had begun to change.

In late 1942, I was taken by my grandfather, The Rev. Dr. Eugene Allen Noble, to see the organist and choirmaster, Dr. T. Tertius Noble, in his office at Saint Thomas Church. They knew each other well, and that is when I found out that they were distant cousins.

In the 1940s, the Choir School was located on 55th Street west of Sixth Avenue in two old residential buildings on the north side of the street. There was also a classroom building with a stage and auditorium, accessible from the south side of 56th Street, immediately north of the 55th Street buildings.

By the fall of 1943, when I came to the Choir School, there had been changes. The old rector was leaving and a new rector was coming. T. Tertius Noble was retiring and T. Frederick H. Candlyn was taking his place as organist and choirmaster. We had 40 boys in two dormitories, 20 boys in one and 20 boys in the other. The dormitories were one floor above the other and each was divided in the middle by the entrance, with 10 beds in one half and 10 beds in the other. In the 1940s, the choir boys wore black cassocks and Eton collars with metal collar buttons. I think it was not until John Andrew was rector that the cassocks changed from black to red.

After evensong on Sunday afternoon, we were allowed to go home, but we had to be back at school by 6pm on Monday.

Sunday afternoons, if I was going home, I might stop to pick up some of the altar flowers, walk up Fifth Avenue from 53rd Street to 66th Street, deliver the altar flowers to a housebound parishioner, then walk or take a bus home. Other times I might visit one of the other choir boys. One of my favorite memories was visiting William G. Mead in Brooklyn Heights. We went swimming on Monday at the St. George Hotel, which had a pool that was billed as the world’s largest salt water pool. We had a great time! Incidentally, Bill Mead’s father was George Mead, organist and choirmaster of Trinity Church on Wall Street. My grandfather and father were friends of George Mead, due to a connection with the Downtown Glee Club. In my day, another Saint Thomas choirboy was Ed Draffin, whose father was in the men’s choir. I thought of Mr. Draffin much later when my son, Nick, was in the choir school at the Cathedral, who was organist and choirmaster at the Cathedral in those days. It was almost like being young again.

Also at the Choir School in my time was Tom Mullan, who eventually married Rector Roelf Brooks’s granddaughter. I used to look at photographs from those days and I could match the faces with names immediately. Not so much anymore, because I recognize the faces, but my memory has lost many of the names.

My Choir School years were during World War II, and another thing I remember is a couple of men in uniform who came to visit the school. We had a teacher, Mr. Denslow, whose son came in a Navy uniform. Dr. Candlyn, our organist and choirmaster, had a son, Donald (for whom a prize was named), who came in an Army uniform. I remember how much a uniform can impress young boys.

Some years later, I went into The United States Marines Corps. My active duty years were 1952-1956, followed by four years of reserve time when I only worked on weekends. Monday through Friday, I went to Columbia University’s School of General Studies on the G.I. Bill. My discharge from the USMC is dated 1960. I then went to work as a draftsman, and later as a project manager for architects, for close to 30 years. And for about two years in between, I had two jobs in marketing and advertising. I have been retired for almost 17 years. I have helped to raise six children, and I have some grandchildren but no great grandchildren yet, and that is my story.

–William Noble, class of 1945

Mr. Noble passed away on September 15, 2015. His daughter Penelope found this note, which Mr. Noble had been writing to George Toothman at the Choir School. Penelope kindly typed up her father’s letter and sent it to us.
A NOTE ABOUT 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, parishioners and friends. These gifts are important to the school and our ability to advance our mission. The list below should include everyone who has made a gift to the school in the period of December 1, 2014 through December 31, 2015. Please note that Every Member Canvass gifts directed to the Choir School are not included in this list but will be shown in the summer/fall newsletter. If you wish to help the school support their annual operating expenses through a gift to the EMC, you can pledge online at www.saintthomaschurch.org/giving/canvass. If you have any questions, please contact Ann Hall Kaplan at akaplan@SaintThomasChurch.org.

THE SELF SOCIETY
Recognizes those donors who have contributed $1,000 or more in the current giving year.
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Recognizes alumni who contribute at least $100 each year until the school’s 2019 centennial.
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Mr. George O. Allaman II '67 2013
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Mr. Eric P. Bierrie '43 2008

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Mr. Karl Boulware '93 & Dr. Leotta W. Jones-Boulware 2013, 2015
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Dr. John H. Wilson ’51 2015
Mr. Justin Windholz ’93 2013
Mr. Robert M. Wohlfirth ’38 2008-13
Mr. John Yong ’95 2011

T. TERTIUS NOBLE GUILD

Acknowledges & thanks those who have remembered the Choir School in planning their estates.

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SPRING/SUMMER 2016

April 5, 2016 • 7:30pm
Concert by the St John's College, Cambridge
Conductor, Andrew Nethsingha
Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue

DOMESTIC TOUR

April 19, 2016 • 7pm
First United Methodist Church, Charlotte, NC

April 20, 2016 • 7pm
Greene Memorial United Methodist Church, Roanoke, VA

April 21, 2016 • 7:30pm
St. John's Episcopal Cathedral, Knoxville, TN

April 22, 2016 • 7pm
St. George's Episcopal Church, Nashville, TN

April 24, 2016 • 4pm
Cathedral Church of the Advent, Birmingham, AL

May 13, 2016 • 7:30pm
Spring Concert: Music of Bach and Handel
Guest conductor, Daniel Beckwith
Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue

June 11, 2016 • 11am
Graduation and Prize Day
Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue

June 12, 2016 • 11am
Sung Eucharist and Leaving Ceremony
Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue

July 30-August 7, 2016
Girl Chorister Course

September 8, 2016
98th Academic Year begins

November 11-12, 2016
Alumni Reunion Weekend

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