

Choir School NEWS

A NEWSLETTER FOR ALUMNI & FRIENDS OF SAINT THOMAS CHOIR SCHOOL

SAINT THOMAS
CHOIR SCHOOL



FALL 2023

The Music Issue

DR. JEREMY FILSELL,
ORGANIST AND
DIRECTOR OF MUSIC

It has been gratifying for the choristers, and indeed the choir as a whole, to have returned to its regular liturgical and artistic life during the 2022–23 school year with pandemic-induced singing restrictions hearteningly in the rear-view mirror. The choir/school recruitment was challenged by COVID lockdowns, as was every other church music

program, and many institutions simply lost a foothold with children not returning to the musical activities in which they previously participated. However, this year we have a wonderfully strong 8th grade class to lead the way, and a goodly number of younger boys now showing great promise; the future does look bright. The silver lining to our pandemic

continued >>

 The Choir of Men and Boys performs Handel's *Messiah* in December 2022.



cloud was the church's ability to livestream all our services and concerts, and viewers continue to tune in from around the world.

While we commissioned and premiered two major new works for the choir last season, consolidating our core repertoire will remain a priority in this one as we mark the church's bicentennial. The bicentennial represents an important milestone in the life of the parish, which was founded in 1823 in the heart of Manhattan to be a beacon of Anglicanism within the increasingly busy metropolis. Saint Thomas has, since that

time, become a focus for the dignity of its worship, and the beauty of the liturgico-musical offerings within it; something worth celebrating, we hope. As we know, the parish's choir school, now the last of its kind in North America, allows the preservation of a musical standard rarely found elsewhere nowadays. Choir schools are elite (but not elitist) educational environments, but they foster transformational experiences, not only for youngsters who sing, but also for all those who hear and absorb the music they produce. Long may ours continue to flourish.

RECORDINGS

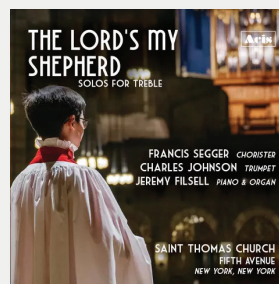
In 2021, we released the choir's first commercial recording for seven long years; an album of choral music by Gerre Hancock, marking a particularly important Saint Thomas heritage (Hancock's music will also feature in our first concert this year). Last summer, the choir made further recordings which are to be released this Fall. The first constituted the Sacred Music of William Byrd, marking the 400th anniversary of his death in 1623. This is a recreation of the *Catholic Mass for the Feast of Corpus Christi* (Dies Sanctissimi Corporis et Sanguinis Domini Iesu Christi), with Byrd's *Mass and Motets* sung in Latin. We digitized a recording originally released in analogue form on LP of the choir from the years of Gerre Hancock's leadership. It is thus fascinating to make a comparison, not only of the two sides of Byrd's extraordinary musical coin, but also with the choir today and that of forty years ago. At the time we recorded Byrd, we also set down an album of Christmas music, to be released this coming December. Next February, we plan to record music by New York composer Calvin Hampton (1938–1984), and by Englishman Kenneth Leighton (1929–1988). Of noteworthy mention here is also the commercial recording made of last year's Head Chorister, Frankie Segger, before his voice inevitably changed. It is rare that we experience a boy treble who sings with a musical maturity belying his years, yet once in a while, we do.



Bach Clavier-Übung III—Jeremy Filsell, The Organs and Choir of Saint Thomas Church, Fifth Avenue, New York. Signum Classics, 2022.
signumrecords.com



Byrd Sacred Works The Saint Thomas Choir of Men and Boys, Jeremy Filsell, Gerre Hancock. Signum Classics, available 12/2023.
signumrecords.com



The Lord's My Shepherd: Solos for Treble Francis Segger, Charles Johnson, Jeremy Filsell. Acis, 2023.
music.amazon.com

CONCERTS

By the time this newsletter reaches you, the full choir will have finished a tour in the US for the first time in six years. We look forward to sharing highlights of our time in Sarasota, Nashville and Atlanta in future issues. This year, for our *Christmas on Fifth* concert, the choristers will collaborate for the first time with the Juilliard Music Advancement Program Ensemble, an organization which nurtures young instrumentalists in the New York area who demonstrate a commitment to musical excellence. MAP provides full-tuition scholarships to its students and maintains a rigorous curriculum, performance opportunities, and guidance from an accomplished faculty. As we mirror such attributes at Saint Thomas Choir School, the time is ripe for us to collaborate with artistic institutions such as this in this great city. In March, we will develop another new artistic partnership with conductor Justin Bischof and his Modus Operandi Orchestra, in a concert of Rachmaninoff's *Third Piano Concerto* and Francis Poulenc's sublime setting of the *Stabat Mater* sung by the choir in the second half. Then in May, we will celebrate the centenary of the birth of Peter Hallock in a concert featuring his music. Hallock was a hugely important figure in Episcopal church music who initiated the great Compline tradition during his tenure at St. Mark's Cathedral, Seattle, WA. Hallock's intensely spiritual music is unusual, often otherworldly, and during his lifetime, he was thought of as the west coast counterpart to our own east coast Gerre Hancock at Saint Thomas. Hallock's music will be paired with some of the finest of Vaughan Williams, Randall Thompson, and Richard Strauss.

In June, our choir year is slated to end with a tour to the UK (the first visit across the pond since 2006), and we are currently due to sing at Canterbury Cathedral, York Minster, Westminster Abbey and St. George's Chapel Windsor. Details about our trip abroad will be available in a future issue.



It will be a busy musical year for the boys and they no doubt deserve a little leisure time in between their music making and academic pursuits. So, as an avid squash player, I am delighted to learn that for the first time, the Saint Thomas boys will have the chance to learn and play squash this coming year!

The planning and developing of our artistic life at Saint Thomas is only made possible through the support of our *Friends of Music*, and if you are not yet a *Friend of Music*, do please consider becoming one.



You can find more information here: www.saintthomaschurch.org/music/concerts/friends-of-music/

CONCERTS AT SAINT THOMAS

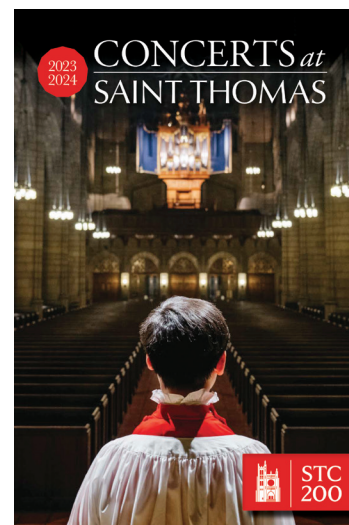
is thrilled to invite Saint Thomas Choir School parents, families, and alumni to join us throughout this special 2023-24 concert series, marking the bicentennial of Saint Thomas Church. We are excited to share these exclusive discounts and benefits with the members of our Saint Thomas Choir School community.

Choir parents and families are offered 2 tickets at half-price for each concert at which the Boys of the Saint Thomas Choir are performing, as well as exclusive access to the first two rows of seating. Family members who cannot attend live and in-person can also be granted access to concerts digitally via our *Concerts on Demand* service by request.

For our Choir School alumni, we are offering tickets at half-price for all concerts throughout the season using an exclusive alumni discount code, with a limit of 2 discounted tickets per concert. We hope you will join Concerts at Saint Thomas for another season of world-class performances, centered around the Saint Thomas Choir of Men and Boys.

TICKETS for the 2023-24 season are available at www.saintthomaschurch.org/music/concerts/.

For questions about benefits and access to discount codes, please contact us at concerts@saintthomaschurch.org.



Saint Thomas Girl Chorister Course

REBECCA KELLERMAN-FILSELL & MARGARET WHITE, CO-DIRECTORS



Girl Chorister Course participants enjoyed hearing from Jessica French, Composer in Residence.

This summer the Saint Thomas Girl Chorister Course welcomed 31 girls aged 11 to 18, hailing from 13 different states, the District of Columbia, and Toronto, Canada, for nine days of music making, learning, and fellowship. Working with Guest Music Director Jared Johnson of Grace Episcopal Cathedral in San Francisco and our world class team of music and residential life staff, the choristers sang five choral services throughout the week—a weekday eucharist for the feast of St. James, two weekday evensongs, and both eucharist and evensong on the final Sunday of the course.

This year's repertoire encompassed a range of periods and styles, with a particular emphasis on the works of Jessica French, whom we were thrilled to welcome as Composer in Residence this year. The



choristers had the honor of presenting the world premiere of Ms. French's anthem "At Heaven's Proclamation," a joint commission by Saint Thomas Church and Trinity Cathedral, Columbia, South Carolina. Ms. French attended rehearsals throughout the week to support and encourage the choristers and led the choristers in a descant writing class which culminated in a completed descant that the choristers sang at their final Choral Evensong service on Sunday. STCS alumnus Trevor Weston stopped by the Choir School on Tuesday during the course to speak to the choristers about his time at the Choir School and his career as a composer. The Choristers sang his anthem "Rivers of Living Water" during the Sunday morning Eucharist Service on July 30th. The choristers enjoyed singing the music of composers they had met and learned from during the course.

When not singing, course participants took classes in music theory, music history, and theology, as well as private voice and organ lessons. Organist Janet Yieh from Church of the Heavenly Rest in Manhattan led our music theory classes, taught organ lessons to 16 of our choristers, and played several voluntaries for our services throughout the week. Dr. Jacqueline Horner-Kwiatk, currently

on faculty at Princeton University, returned as our vocal coach this year and also taught music history classes and directed our choristers in singing a choral introit by Hildegard von Bingen at Wednesday's treble-only evensong. Mother Alison Turner acted as course chaplain once again and not only taught our theology classes, but also led our nightly compline services by candlelight in the school library. A special highlight of this summer's course was singing compline in one of the small walking tunnels in Central Park. The choristers won over some new fans to compline with this "pop-up" service in the park!

There was plenty of time for fun and relaxation, too: on Monday evening Residential Life Coordinator (and former STGCC Chorister) Claire Griffin organized a scavenger hunt in the Choir School neighborhood for the choristers, with the winning team receiving elevator privileges for a day; on Tuesday evening we enjoyed a pizza party on the rooftop of the rectory; on Thursday we visited the Central Park Zoo; on Friday we saw a Broadway musical; and on Saturday we brought back a chorister-favorite outing from previous years, a visit to the Met Cloisters.

This year saw the implementation of a new Choral Scholar/Intern program. Four college age choristers joined us for the course this summer to assist with rehearsals, activities, and residential life. These students were selected after a rigorous application and interview process and received a small stipend, 2 voice lessons, and instruction in conducting during their 11 days at Saint Thomas. This summer's Choral Scholars/Interns were Becca Lipsky (Music Education major at Bucknell University), Kate Falvey (Music Education major at University of South Carolina), Alessandra Craig (recent graduate of AMDA), and Meredith Wallace (Music Education major at St. Olaf College). Ella Parker-Harley (Art major at Temple University) joined us as a junior intern. We look forward to continuing this new program next summer and aspire to include 1–2 Organ Scholars in addition to our Choral Scholars.

The STGCC would not be possible without the support of Saint Thomas Church and Choir School and our wonderful staff. Thank you to all the staff mentioned above and to Course Organist Nicolas Haigh, Course Nurse Jennifer Johnson, Housemother Karen Wentling, School Chef Glenn Trickel and his staff, our Choir School housekeeping and security staff, and special thanks to Organist and Director of Music Jeremy Filsell and Head of School Chris Seeley for their ongoing support of the STGCC. We are pleased to announce that the dates for next year's course will be July 20–28, 2024. The course is open to girls ages 12–18 with some choral experience.



Email girlscourse@choirschool.org to request more information or sign up to be notified when applications are open. Watch our website and our Instagram account for news regarding next summer's course including an upcoming announcement regarding next summer's Guest Music Director.

Musical Studies

MUSICAL STUDIES MAKS ADACH

This year, the practical skills the boys learn throughout their time in the rehearsal room will be complemented by activities in the Musical Studies classroom. The curriculum is three-pronged and seeks to give the boys a grounding in theory (including the building blocks of free composition), music history, and practical musicianship. As with last year, the 6th Grade will work on putting together the so-called “Magic Board of Fun,” a visual timeline that will display every single piece of music they will sing in choir during the academic year. The 8th Grade will also begin working on various exciting projects concerning the lives of important composers from the history of Western Music. For the practical musicianship portion of the curriculum, all the grades will be improving their sight-singing by working through collections of Renaissance motets which are perfectly suited to firming up their “interval instincts.” It is set to be a great year in Musical Studies!



Sarah Kwon, cello instructor, assists Dominic S. with proper technique.

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC DR. REGINA YUNG

Saint Thomas Choir School is a unique and special place. Being surrounded by a group of talented, energetic, and inquisitive boys makes teaching incredibly enjoyable. It is extremely encouraging to see the boys' enthusiasm for anything music-

related: starting a new piece, mastering a passage, collaborating in an instrumental ensemble, and more. Since joining the Choir School, I have been fortunate to witness the boys' musical development. Besides teaching weekly private piano lessons, I oversee the instrumental studies program. In my role, I supervise departmental activities like lesson scheduling, hosting and accompanying at lunchtime recitals, and organizing end-of-year ABRSM (Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music) practical exams. More recently, I've had the opportunity to monitor daily practice periods, allowing me to see firsthand the boys' motivation and commitment to taking their musicianship to a higher level. I aspire to provide each student with a solid foundation in keyboard skills, musically and technically; to guide him to become more self-reliant; and to nurture his ability to understand and create beautiful music. I strive to help all the boys at the Choir School reach their fullest potential. I look forward to



Dr. Yung teaches a piano lesson

continuing my work with those who are returning to Saint Thomas for another academic year and to getting to know those who are new to the Choir School this fall.

VOCAL MUSIC GIUSEPPE SPOLETINI

I am thrilled to be embarking upon my seventh year as the private vocal instructor for the remarkable students of the Saint Thomas Choir School. The choristers have an extremely demanding singing schedule and their young instruments require constant care and attention. Each week in their 30-minute lessons, I have the privilege of helping each of the choristers navigate the challenging twists and turns of their ever-evolving instruments. I also attend one choir rehearsal each week, leading warm-ups and sitting in on the rehearsal to support our wonderful Director of Music and demonstrate our unified approach to healthy, safe and beautiful vocal production. I also offer a Musical Theatre class for our acolytes, whose voices have changed, where we continue work on technical development as well as focus on showmanship and connection

to text. Watching the students grow in confidence and skill as both choristers and soloists is extremely fulfilling as an instructor. Additionally, witnessing their comradery and committed engagement to this familial community is truly like no other experience. I look forward to another rewarding year.



New 3rd grader Aiden P. has his first voice lesson with Mr. Spoletini

Welcome, new students and faculty!



Our newest students are acclimating well to life at Saint Thomas! 3rd graders Julian C. (Connecticut) and Aiden P. (New Jersey), 4th grader Emrys P. (Georgia), and 5th grader Enzo M. (New York) are learning what it means to be a Choir School student. We are proud of our older boys for helping their new classmates navigate all the aspects of chorister life.

New students Julian, Aiden, Enzo and Emrys

We welcome Ms. Serena Collins, new English teacher for Grades 5–8. We also welcome Mr. Casey Crowley, Director of Athletics, and Ms. Maggie Holland, Art teacher, who joined the Choir School faculty in the second semester of last school year.



Ms. Serena Collins,
English teacher



Mr. Casey Crowley,
Director of Athletics



Ms. Maggie Holland,
Art teacher

Convocation 2023

On Sunday, September 10, the Saint Thomas community celebrated the beginning of the new school year at the Convocation Evensong. During the service, Father Turner and Chris Seeley, Head of School, admitted Head and Deputy Head Choristers Elias J. and William L., and installed a new chorister, Royce J. Congratulations to Elias, William, Royce, and their families!



Faculty processed in their academic regalia— but not before taking a selfie!



Dr. Filsell, Deputy Head Chorister William, Head Chorister Elias, Mr. Seeley and Mo. Turner at Convocation.



New chorister Royce and his family.

Alumni News & Notes

ALUMNI! Send your news to alumni@choirschool.org for inclusion in a future issue of the *Choir School News*. Be sure to include your complete name and year of graduation or years attended.



ALUMNI
UPDATES
HERE



The Admissions office will represent Saint Thomas at the below Episcopal Diocesan conventions. If you are in the area and would like to connect, please reach out to us at admissions@choirschool.org.

We would love to see you!

NOVEMBER 2-4

Dallas; Virginia

NOVEMBER 9-11

Maryland; Long Island;
New York City

NOVEMBER 16-18

North Carolina

SAVE THE DATE

YOUNG ALUMNI Thanksgiving Celebration

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 21

5:30 pm Evensong
at Church

6:45 pm Dinner
at the Choir School

Recent STCS alumni who are currently attending high school are invited to join us; please monitor your email for more information.



Calendar of Events

All events take place at Saint Thomas Church. For complete information regarding the details of events and services, please refer to saintthomaschurch.org/events or choirschool.org.

TUESDAY, DEC. 5 | 7:30 p.m.
G.F. Handel: *Messiah*

THURSDAY, DEC. 7 | 7:30 p.m.
G.F. Handel: *Messiah*

THURSDAY, DEC. 14 | 5:30 p.m.
Christmas on Fifth Avenue

SUNDAY, DEC. 17 | 4 p.m.
A Festival of Nine Lessons & Carols

SUNDAY, DEC. 24 | 4 p.m.
A Festival of Nine Lessons & Carols

SUNDAY, DEC. 24 | 10:30 p.m.
Procession and Solemn Eucharist of the Nativity

MONDAY, DEC. 25 | 11 a.m.
Procession and Solemn Eucharist of the Nativity

For news & events, visit our website

Scan 



Contact Us

Saint Thomas Choir School
202 West 58th Street
New York, NY 10019

212.247.3311 | www.choirschool.org





Christopher Seeley, *Head of School*

Nora Thomson, *Director of Outreach and Enrollment*

Margaret White, *Assistant Director of Enrollment*

admissions@choirschool.org

Connect

-  Saint Thomas Choir School
-  ChoirSchoolNYC
-  stcs_girlscourse
-  Saint Thomas Choir School

Do you know a boy
who loves to sing?
www.choirschool.org

Saint Thomas Church
Saint Thomas Choir School
202 West 58th Street
New York, NY 10019
212.247.3311
www.choirschool.org

