

# Choir School NEWS

A NEWSLETTER FOR ALUMNI & FRIENDS OF SAINT THOMAS CHOIR SCHOOL

SAINT THOMAS  
CHOIR SCHOOL



OCTOBER 2022

## A New Beginning

From the  
Head of  
School

CHRISTOPHER SEELEY

We have lived through unprecedented times in these last few years, and while we have endured much, we begin again at the start of the one hundred fourth year of our school.

In profound ways we have remained the same school over these many years; in significant ways, we are different. Certainly, the last several years has left us—and all school—with no choice but to adapt, adjust, prioritize, and pivot. Physical distancing—note that I refuse to call it social

distancing—remote learning, and interrupted programs have compromised the core of many school experiences. But we have found a way to maintain the essence of who we are and to persevere in the face of significant challenge. As we return to school this year, things seem a bit more normal and routine, but we return to things “just as they were at our own peril. We still face challenge, but we face them with new ideas, new traditions, and a renewed commitment to ensuring the enduring legacy and relevance of Saint Thomas Choir School.

 Opening Day 2022-2023

*continued* >>

We do, in fact, begin again. We have started the year with a renewed focus on community, learning from, with, and about each other. We know that at the heart of Choir School is its small and intimate community, and we strive to make this school one where everyone has a genuine sense of belonging. Of course, the fact that we are a fully residential school makes this and many more things possible, and through the trying times of the last several years, our students and faculty took great comfort in knowing that our school provided a real oasis and refuge in otherwise turbulent times. Still, we are part of the larger world, and we share all that is powerful and compelling about our

community with others. The boys are back at it, enjoying a full academic and interscholastic athletic program, and, of course, their amazing work and talent enhance the liturgy in church five times each week. This fall, we'll travel to the Midwest, with stops in Chicago and Madison, to sing and to explore, and we have a full schedule of concerts throughout the year.

We'll make new friends and invite more talented boys to join our school as the year unfolds, and we hope that you, our closest friends and supporters, will find ways to reconnect either in New York City or at some other spot where the choir might be.

## Girl Chorister Course 2022

The **Saint Thomas Girl Chorister Course** returned this summer after a two-year hiatus due to the pandemic. We were thrilled to welcome 29 girls aged 13 to 17, hailing from 12 different states and the District of Columbia, for nine days of music making, learning, and fun. Working with Guest Music Director Katherine Dienes-Williams as well as our own Organist and Director of Music Jeremy Filsell, the choristers sang five services—three weekday Evensongs and both the morning Eucharist and Evensong on the final Sunday of the course. It was especially exciting that the Gentlemen of the Choir were able to join the girl choristers for four of those services. The repertoire encompassed a wide range of periods and styles, with a particular emphasis on contemporary female composers including Cecilia McDowall, Judith Weir, and Caroline Shaw.

When not singing, the girls took classes in music theory, music history, and theology, as well as private voice and organ lessons. There was plenty of time for fun and relaxation too: on Tuesday evening we took a picnic dinner to the High Line, and



 Girl choristers on the High Line, NYC

on Friday evening we took in a performance of the Broadway show *Come From Away*. Activities closer to home included yoga and zumba classes, movie night, and cookie decorating with our guest chefs Heidi Thomas and Bess Abraham.

We are pleased to be able to announce that the dates for next year's course will be July 22–30, 2023. The course is open to girls ages 11–18 with some choral experience.

Email [girlscourse@choirschool.org](mailto:girlscourse@choirschool.org) to request more information or sign up to be notified when applications are open.

## Welcome to New Faculty and Students

Four students begin their choir school adventure this fall. Third grade students are **Zack** from New Jersey and **Julian** from Massachusetts. The fourth grade also welcomed two new students with **Ian** from New Jersey and **Arthur** from the District of Columbia.

We welcome two new faculty members to our community this year. **Ms. Belinda (Bebe) Morrissey** has joined us as assistant head of school for teaching and learning and English teacher. Ms. Morrissey comes with a wealth of classroom, administrative, and consulting experience. Over the course of her career, she has been a teacher, a teacher of teachers, an educational consultant, and a mentor in public, charter, and independent (day and boarding) schools throughout New York City and our Tri-State area.

**Ms. Claire Thomas** joins us as school nurse and housemother. Miss Thomas is no stranger to the choir school, having been a chorister and faculty intern in the Girl Chorister Course. She has longed for a chance to return to the choir school, and she feels that she has landed her dream job. We're fortunate to have a skilled school nurse, who has also served in hospital and residential facilities. She will add much to our residential program, and she will keep watch on the health and safety of everyone in our community.



🕯 Clockwise, left to right: Third grade student Zack; Third grade student Julian; Fourth grade student Ian; New 4th grade student, Arthur, from Washington, D.C., with his parents and brother



🕯 Bebe and Claire

An additional change in the faculty involves a shift in responsibility for **Mr. Calvin Wentling**, who has transitioned from his post in athletics and will teach history. Following his passion for history, and his desire to work closely with students on a daily basis, Mr. Wentling has been at work preparing for his students in grades six through eight. Of course, he already knows the boys well, and he will guide their study as the year unfolds. **Mr. Maks Adach**, the assistant organist and associate for musical studies, will take the reins in music theory.

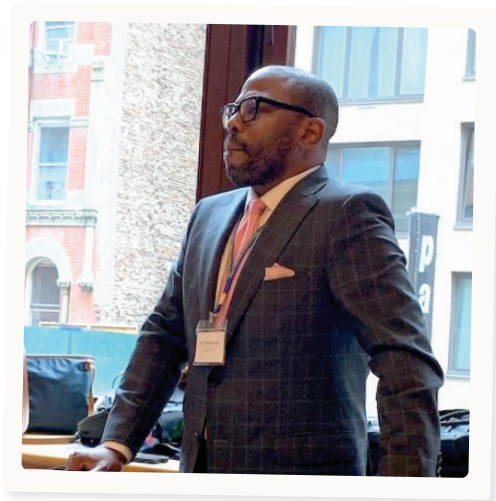
Mr. Adach and Mr. Wentling worked together in music theory last spring, and Mr. Adach has done much this summer to augment the curriculum for all levels.

Our searches for an art teacher and athletic director continue, and we look forward to rounding out the faculty ranks with two more strong educators.

# Welcome to the Choir School

Choristers and their families, new and returning, enjoyed a weekend together as the choir school launched a new academic year the weekend of September 10 and 11. Returning boys arrived mid-week to rehearse for the Sunday services, and new families followed on Saturday. After a day of unpacking and orientation meetings, everyone gathered in the apartment of Christopher Seeley, head of school, to enjoy an afternoon tea. Laughter, smiles, and children playing were all part of the mix as the community enjoyed in-person social events for the first time in three years.

The Choir of Men and Boys sang the morning service, and Evensong was a celebratory Convocation including the faculty in procession. After Evensong, parents and their sons said “good-bye” at the school door and a delicious dinner was enjoyed by the students and faculty.



Head of School Christopher Seeley welcomes families to a new school year

## SATURDAY WELCOME



Math teacher Lissy Hodge with mom of Will, 7th grade, from Grosse Pointe, Michigan



English teacher Bebe Morrissey with some of her new students



Director of Music Jeremy Filsell, Head of School Christopher Seeley with family of Christian, 7th grade from Houston, Texas



Saint Tommy mommies

SUNDAY SERVICES AND LUNCH



Dr. Filsell rehearses the choir



The three organists check the details



Ready for eighth grade. Frankie, from Connecticut, and David from New York



Faculty stop for a selfie before the Convocation Evensong

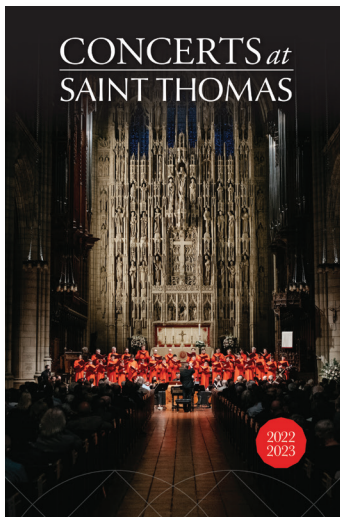


Faculty boys and parents enjoy lunch together



Daniel, from New York

# Saint Thomas Concert Series Welcomes Families of Choristers



Concerts at Saint Thomas is thrilled to invite Saint Thomas Choir School parents, families, and alumni to join us throughout the 2022–2023 concert series. 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 alumni discount code, with a limit of 2 discounted tickets per concert. Finally, we are happy to offer a discount of 20% off to all current members of the American Guild of Organists for in-person tickets or digital livestreams using AGO’s unique discount code. 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 2022-2023 season go on sale September 6 at [www.saintthomaschurch.org/music/concerts/](http://www.saintthomaschurch.org/music/concerts/).

For questions about benefits and access to discount codes, please contact us at [Concerts@SaintThomasChurch.org](mailto:Concerts@SaintThomasChurch.org).

## Alumni Notes

### Frankie Halvey '20, Poet and Creator of "Pizzas in the Elevator"

The pizza poem came into being through the spirit of competition. Mr. Eppley, the art teacher at the time, loved to combine art and friendly competition. We did various things like the STCS annual Pinewood Derby, where each student would make a car, with two categories to win in, design or speed. I always chose the design, my 6th-grade year creating a tank, taking home first in the design awards (and finishing close to last in the speed category). Another thing Mr. Eppley did was called "Inktober" where every week in the month of October, students had the opportunity to submit a drawing that went along with a random word or theme he picked out of a hat each Monday. I also enjoyed doing that, and it helped me tap into my creative side and fulfill a boy's need to win. One year, we had a project where everyone created their own slice of pizza. Some people were wild and put different things on it, but I chose a simpler approach, decorating mine with pepperoni. At the end of the project, Mr. Eppley announced that the pizzas would be put in the elevator, but he also wanted something to go along with it. He held a competition for students to write a poem to go in the elevator. I decided to take a stab at it. For the next two weeks, I used my time before bed to attempt to write something poetic on pieces of notebook paper. I had never written a poem, but I tried my best and ended up winning. Whenever I visit the school, taking the "Pizza Elevator" always makes me smile and helps me reflect on my time at the school.



## Chorister for a Day and Open House

The Choir School welcomes boys and their parents who have an interest in visiting this unique school, instituted and sustained over the past century to educate the treble choristers of the Saint Thomas Choir of Men and Boys. The **Open House** will begin at 2 p.m. and continue until 3:30 p.m. when everyone is invited to attend Evensong at Saint Thomas Church, Fifth Avenue. Parents of our current choristers and faculty members will be available to serve as guides. Boys in grades 3–6 are invited to participate in the *Chorister-for-a-Day* program, and to experience rehearsing and singing Evensong alongside our current choristers. Prior music study is not

necessary, and any boy who simply enjoys singing is invited to attend. Visiting boys will join the choristers in walking to the church and then participating with them musically; experiences which will allow them a glimpse of a chorister's singing life. Registration is requested in order that music folders can be prepared for each participant.

For information and to register, please contact: Admission Office 212-247-3311, ext. 541 admissions@choirschool.org



## Calendar of Events

Events are at the choir school unless otherwise noted. Please contact the admission office if we will be visiting near you. We'd enjoy meeting and hearing of your time at the school.

**FRI. & SAT., OCTOBER 14 & 15**  
Choir School admission exhibit at the Diocesan Convention of South West Florida, Punta Gorda, FL

**SAT., OCTOBER 15**  
Choir School board of trustees meeting

**WED.-FRI., OCTOBER 19-21**  
Admission recruitment trip to Philadelphia

**SUN., OCTOBER 23 | 2-3:30 p.m.**  
Chorister for a Day and Open House

**THURS., OCTOBER 27 | 7:30 p.m.**  
Saint Thomas Choir of Men and Boys perform in the Concert Series

**FRI.-SUN., OCTOBER 28-30**  
Choir School admission exhibit at the Diocesan Convention of Massachusetts, Danvers, MA

**FRI. & SAT., NOVEMBER 11 & 12**  
Choir School admission exhibit at the Diocesan Convention of New York, Tarrytown, NY

**THURS.-SAT., NOVEMBER 17-19**  
Choir School admission exhibit at the Diocesan Convention of Virginia, Arlington, VA

**THURS.-SUN., NOVEMBER 17-20**  
Choir School admission exhibit at the National Association for Gifted Children convention, Indianapolis, IN

**THURS., NOVEMBER 24 | 11 a.m.**  
Thanksgiving Day Eucharist

For news & events visit our website

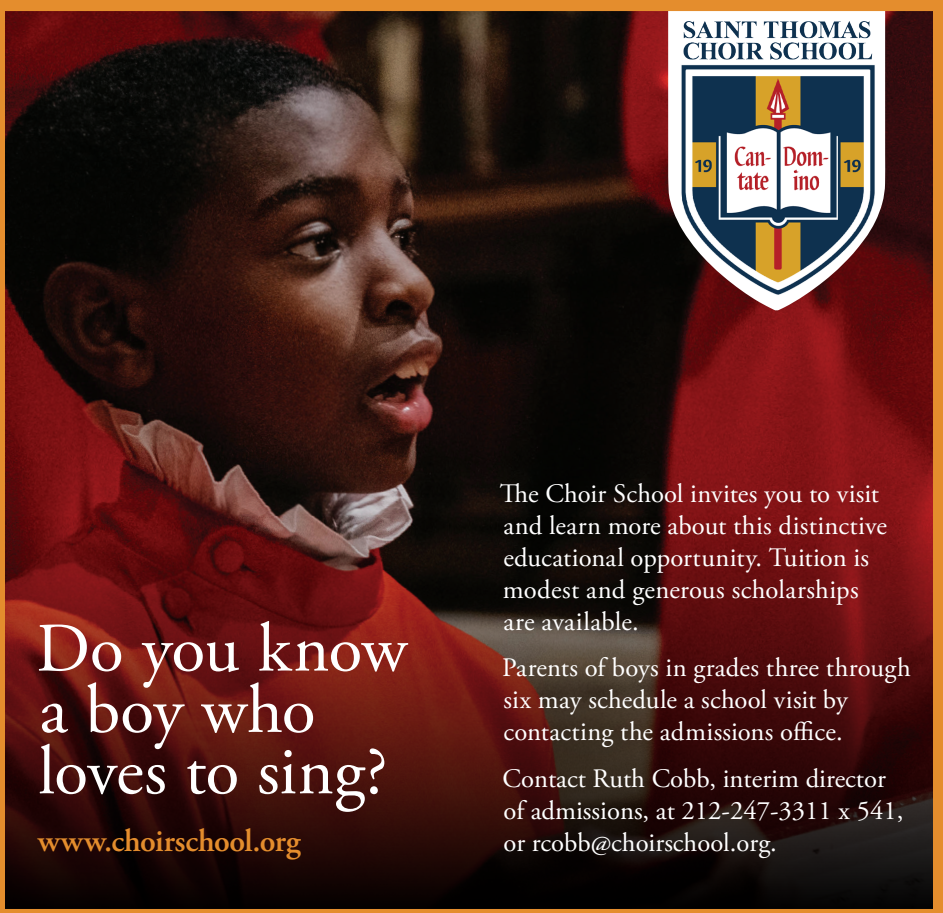
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>> admissions@choirschool.org | 212-247-3311, ext. 541 | www.choirschool.org

# 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.



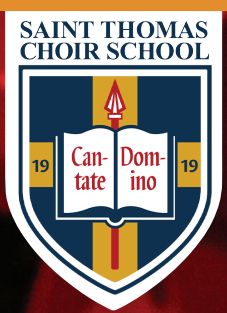
Do you know  
a boy who  
loves to sing?

[www.choirschool.org](http://www.choirschool.org)

The Choir School invites you to visit and learn more about this distinctive educational opportunity. Tuition is modest and generous scholarships are available.

Parents of boys in grades three through six may schedule a school visit by contacting the admissions office.

Contact Ruth Cobb, interim director of admissions, at 212-247-3311 x 541, or [rcobb@choirschool.org](mailto:rcobb@choirschool.org).



### Contact Us

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Christopher Seeley, *Head of School*  
Ruth S. Cobb, *Interim Director of Admission*

### Connect

Saint Thomas Choir School  
Tertius Noble

ChoirSchoolNYC

stcs\_girlscourse

Do you know a boy  
who loves to sing?  
[www.choirschool.org](http://www.choirschool.org)

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