

St. Wilfrid of York Song School... Q&A



What is a 'Song School?'

A Song School is the name for the chorister training program associated with a parish or cathedral, particularly in the English choral tradition. It is a place where boys and girls receive substantial musical instruction, experience team work, learn discipline, take pride in leading the liturgy, and have fun!

Are there other programs like this in the United States?

There are many places within the American Episcopal Church that maintain this tradition. From major houses of worship like Washington National Cathedral and Grace Cathedral, to parish churches like All Saints Beverly Hills, and St. Thomas Fifth Avenue in NYC - over 400 Episcopal churches and cathedrals in the U.S. participate in child chorister training programs.

I'm not sure my child is musically gifted. What kind of students are you looking for?

Inquisitive, energetic, and curious children between the ages of 7-13, regardless of musical aptitude, are encouraged to take part. In fact, we'd prefer to teach brand new young musicians who have little or no training. We believe very firmly that there is no such thing as a child without musical ability, and our work is to empower all children to finely tune their God-given musical gifts. All children will be placed in a choir.

How is a child 'placed' in a choir?

Placement is a fun and a easy-going meeting between the choirmaster and the child with their parents/guardians. Children will be encouraged to sing a song - anything really, from Twinkle, twinkle little star to their favorite song off the radio...it doesn't really matter! All that counts is the child wants to participate, and most of all have fun! In this fun interaction the choirmaster will assess where the child should be placed so their musical education can begin with the strongest foundation and the greatest sense of enjoyment and fulfillment for the child.

What is the musical curriculum?

The musical instruction is taught from highly-successful curriculum created by the Royal School of Church Music in England (RSCM). Children learn aural skills and advanced musicianship, the ability to read music at sight, recognize hymns by name, chant the psalter, and refine their vocal talents as soloists and ensemble singers. As different achievement levels are mastered the successful child receives a colored ribbon and medal that is proudly worn at rehearsals and services. Striving for their next achievement level is the joy of every chorister!

What other guiding principles are the children taught?

Because musical instruction occurs within the tradition of the Anglican communion, children are also taught within the broad, accepting, and nurturing environment of the Episcopal Church - which is committed to respecting the dignity of all people. Graciousness, kindness, gentleness, and respect are all cornerstones of creating an environment where children are mentored and built-up for success.

Do you have to be an Episcopalian to participate?

No. The St. Wilfrid of York Song School is open to all children, ages 7-13, regardless of faith background, gender, sexual

orientation, family circumstance, or financial need. All choristers will participate in services of the Episcopal Church, and be taught from an Anglican world-view; however, the personal beliefs of a family do not exclude any willing child from participating.

Who will teach my child?

The most critical qualification for any adult associated with the Song School is to be dedicated to the care and nurture of children. Secondly, instructors are highly qualified professional Anglican musicians, with years of experience teaching RSCM curriculum. Many of them grew up as child choristers in this tradition themselves!

What is the time commitment?

Real music education is a serious commitment, and a child's success is directly related to the commitment their families make toward that end. Because we are committed to a robust and substantial music education for our children, there are no corners cut. Rehearsals occur once during the week on Thursdays from 4:45 - 6:15pm. One Saturday morning a month may be set aside for musicianship training. The choristers will lead all of the music for the 10.30am Sunday liturgy once every other month (second Sunday). The St. Wilfrid of York Song School is fully underwritten by scholarship, and participation is an honor. 100% attendance is required.

It sounds very serious. Do the children have fun?

Nurtured in a happy, fast-paced, and reward-centered environment, the children have enormous fun! Ask anyone who has ever studied as a child chorister and they will tell you it was some of the most invigorating and rewarding years of their life. Older, more accomplished children are taught leadership in their guidance of the younger choristers - who in turn strive to reach higher levels of achievement. There are physical activities, family dinners, and possible national and international touring.

Will my child be safe?

St. Wilfrid of York handles the care and safety of children very seriously. At least two unrelated adults are always present at all times with children, and all instructors and assistants pass rigorous background checks and complete training in safeguarding children. Children will never be left unattended, and must always be signed in and out of rehearsal by an authorized guardian.

How much does it cost?

Through generous underwriting, the Music Guild has ensured that every qualified child will be able to participate tuition free - valued at over \$1,500 per child, per year! There is a non-refundable commitment deposit fee of \$100 per single child, or \$180 for families with multiple children in order to ensure space. Scholarships are also available to cover this cost on a need-basis. No child will be turned away from St. Wilfrid of York Song School on the basis of financial need.

I'd like to learn more. Who can I speak to?

For more information, to volunteer in assisting, or to sign up your child for placement, please contact the Song School Director, Stephen Salts, at stephens@stwilfridschurch.org, or by calling (714) 962-7512. Space is limited, so please don't delay!

