

San Diego Children's Choir gives youth an opportunity to develop their musical interests



The San Diego Children's Choir helps give all youth an opportunity to develop their musical talents.

By Karen Billing
Staff Writer

San Diego Children's Choir has been providing artistic and personal growth through music education for the last 20 years.

The group has successfully united San Diego children in song across 130 school districts in the county, offering five rehearsal locations throughout San Diego (Del Mar, Rancho Bernardo, Mira Mesa, Hillcrest and Allied Gardens) with children coming together for performances.

"Kids from all over San Diego, from all different socioeconomic levels, meet doing something they really love," said Sandra Timmons, president of the SDCC Board of Directors.

Additionally, SDCC has Neighborhood Choirs, fully supported by donations in under-served communities such as City Heights, Shelltown (southwest San Diego) and Nestor.

The Neighborhood Choirs aim to serve children who don't have music in their schools and whose families may not be able to afford instruments or lessons.

"Choral music gives children access to music education with fewer barriers," said Timmons. "You don't need an instrument or lessons. Your instrument is your voice."

As schools everywhere face budget crunches, music education doesn't always make the cut. "(Music) seems to be one of the first things schools make the tough decision of eliminating," said Donna Icenhower, executive director. "SDCC gives children who are artistically or musically inclined an opportunity to grow their talent and their gift...It's very important that children are exposed to the arts at a young age."

Timmons has been involved with SDCC for 16 years, since her daughter Allison joined the choir as soon as she was old enough. She tears up when she speaks about what the choir can mean to children as she's watched them sing and grow.

"It just showed me how inspirational something like this can be for kids. It's transformative," said Timmons. "It can take a shy kid and turn them into someone who's comfortable speaking or singing in front of a group of people. It can take a kid who lacks motivation, who's struggling in school and give them the motivation and confidence to succeed."

San Diego Children's Choir was founded in 1990 by Polly Campbell, with just 10 kids in a treble choir. As their voices changed and the children grew, more groups were added to SDCC: The Preparatory Ensemble for choristers in first and second grade; Intermediate Ensemble for grades 3-5; Concert

Ensemble for grades 6-9; and Youth Ensemble for high school singers. The largest choir is the Intermediate level, which had 87 kids signed up last year.

Auditions are held for the Intermediate, Concert and Youth Ensembles to ensure children can match pitch and remember musical phrases. By the time choristers leave SDCC, it is the goal that they can read music and sight-sing, meaning be able to sing a piece just by looking at the notes.

The choirs receive classical training and the music performed represents the diversity of San Diego, from Mexican lullabies to Jewish celebration songs. SDCC is especially looking forward to putting on its first opera this spring.

Timmons said that like all arts organizations, SDCC struggles in fundraising efforts. Choir tuition covers less than two-thirds of the cost of offering music education. Their two yearly concerts have to be underwritten and they never turn away a student who cannot pay — scholarships account for 10 percent of their budget.

They are always looking for community support of their organization. To learn more or donate, visit sdchoir.org or call them at (858) 587-1087. Their headquarters are located at 6635 Flanders Dr., Suite H, San Diego, 92121.

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