

“Stand Proud. Sing Well.”



In a tradition stretching back 35 years, the Ottawa Children's Choir brought the clear, strong voice of youth to the Remembrance Day ceremony.

As they formed ranks to make their way to the Cenotaph, Chamber Director Robert Fillion told them: “*You are the youth of our country, each of you representing a thousand children, paying respect to our troops and our fallen in war.*”

“Stand proud. Sing well.”

And with grace and bearing beyond their years, they shrugged off rain and cold to sing before a crowd of 25,000 and national TV. They sang *In Flanders Fields* as their patron the Governor General laid a wreath for the Government of Canada. And as other wreaths were laid they sang hymns – *Eternal Father Strong to Save*, *Ils sont houbreaux les bienheureux*, and *O Valiant Hearts*:

*O valiant hearts who to your glory came
Through dust of conflict and through battle flame
Tranquil you lie, your knightly virtue proved
Your memory hallowed in the land you loved. . . .*

Veterans stopped by the choir to express their appreciation. After the ceremony, Robert Fillion, Concert Choir Director Allison Prowse and Choir managers, mothers and volunteers messaged their congratulations:

“On Saturday you represented the children of Canada. It was our privilege to stand with you. Your focus at the sound check, your behavior at the Conference Centre and, in particular, your performance at the service was exemplary. We know how cold and wet you were. We know how difficult it was but you raised your heads high and sang from your hearts. Be very proud of yourselves. - you deserve to be.”

John and Wendy Owens expressed the thoughts of choir parents when they wrote:

“You are all to be congratulated. You have done a wonderful job, not only of producing a wonderful sounding choir, but also of impressing upon the choristers how important their job is and what an honour it is for them to sing at this service and its significance. At bed time last night Jennie told us that ‘I will remember today for as long as I live’.”



Deanna Singh and Zachary Cheevers lay a wreath at the cenotaph on behalf of the Ottawa Children's Choir.

More than just a concert

BY STACEY SEYMOUR

Standing out there in this freezing November rain, we are singing our hearts out, singing these songs we've rehearsed for weeks. The weather is really bad and we are freezing cold. Now *that* is dedication.



This is my first year with the Ottawa Children's Choir and I look around and see all these kids who know their words and who have done this concert for many years, who look at this as the Remembrance Day Show. But the first time at this concert, it's different. There is such a responsibility placed upon you and when you look out you see the faces of the veterans and it's so much to them.

It's hard to put it into perspective, coming from a place and in a time where we aren't being shipped off to fight. It's hard to understand what they have gone through. I can't imagine what it must feel like to see children singing about going through all that. You went through war.

Knowing how much one concert can mean to someone sets this concert apart. Sure it's uncomfortable to stand for that long. Sure it's not the greatest weather but it doesn't really matter. We are going to sing these songs come hell or high water! We sing them because they can mean so much to others. We sing these songs to remember their sacrifice.

An honour and a privilege

BY OWEN SAAR

After two months of preparations and rehearsals, on November 11 the Concert and Chamber choirs braved the cold and rain to sing at the Cenotaph in downtown Ottawa. Despite the dreary weather this year, there was a very large turn out of spectators – about 25,000 according to the media. There were veterans and dignitaries including Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Governor General Michaëlle Jean.

We boarded our buses at McNabb bright and early on Saturday morning, bundled up in our winter clothes and red K-ways. After the sound check at the Cenotaph we were invited into the Conference Centre to warm up. We were served fruit, muffins and hot chocolate. The workers at the Conference Centre were very friendly to all of us. Highlights for me during the ceremony were the flypast and the cannon salute.



Every year, the choir manager suggests that we all wear winter jackets, boots and winter pants, and every year I always protest to my parents that I don't want to wear all the layers. This year, like all the other years, I was very thankful for my warm clothes!

Even though the weather wasn't the best, I am still proud of my accomplishment. I continue to enjoy the experience of singing on November 11 at the Cenotaph and consider it an honour and a privilege.

A day to remember

BY JENNA MacCAULL

The Ottawa Children's Choir practised for many weeks before the national Remembrance Day ceremony. On the last week, there was a practice with a full military band at the Uplands base. It was helpful to get a sense of what was going to happen.



When the day arrived, it was cloudy, rainy, and a little cold for our sound check, but I found going to the Conference Centre after got everyone excited to perform. Lucky for us, the rain did eventually stop. I think the rehearsals paid off. We had a few mistakes in our songs during practices and had struggled a bit *with Ils sont nombreux les bienheureux*, but our words and sound seemed pretty good during the ceremony. It was fascinating to be able to see all the veterans and hear speakers right where all the action was happening. I think that all soldiers were well remembered and I was honoured to be a part of that ceremony, representing the kids of Canada.

Everyone had an amazing experience to be part of such a well-known ceremony broadcast on television. We will remember this experience forever. Lest we forget. N'oublions pas.





How can my child be a better chorister?

How can I be an effective chorister parent?

BY LYNN WILSON

These are the questions put recently to Ottawa Children's Chamber Choir conductor Robert Filion. It turns out a lot of the advice is the same our mothers gave us ... eat properly, get plenty of sleep, and put on a hat when you go out in cold weather!

There is of course more to it but I have to say --- as a mother of teenagers with perpetually rolling eyeballs -- this was gratifying affirmation!

Perhaps the next most heartening information is that, as the parent of a chorister, you don't need to be musically talented, or even musically literate, to help your child be the best chorister they can be. For example, you can help your child memorize the words to a new piece, by listening to your child repeat the lyrics, or finding the piece on a CD to learn by listening, or getting them to write down the words, whatever works best for your child.

If you do have some musical knowledge, you can help with learning notes and rhythms. As a chorister progresses, parents could consider acquiring a keyboard, which allows further exploration of a piece, with the added bonus that they can sing along as they play. A small electronic keyboard, the kind readily available at electronics shops, is fine. (A full eighty-eight keys is not necessary, just 1-1/2 octaves would do).

And just how often should these kids practise at home? Robert recommends short, but concentrated, sessions, *every day*. If your child *spends just ten minutes* concentrating on "fixing" *one thing per day* --- say, mastering a musical phrase, nailing down a rhythm, or memorizing one verse --- then at the end of the week they'll have accomplished seven things! Thirty things by the end of the month! The increased frequency means less ground lost between practice sessions, and less time spent catching up at the beginning of each session. Breaking up larger tasks into several smaller ones is a well-known antidote to avoiding the procrastination brought on by an otherwise daunting project. So just like a daily vitamin (which Robert, like Mom, also suggests), daily practice is also recommended.

But why practise at all? Aren't rehearsals twice a week enough? Practice is important so that the choristers learn the music quickly, master it sooner, and are better able to carry their own weight in the choir. The choir is only as good as each individual, and each chorister owes it to their fellow musicians to know their stuff. The choir has a lot of music to learn, and if choristers spend time on their own mastering notes and words, more time can be spent during group rehearsals on the musicality of the repertoire --- musical phrasing, dynamics, and style.

Make it fun

When it comes to the younger children, Viva and Concert Choir Director Allison Prowse, who is also a professional educator with 20 years of experience teaching younger children ages 4 to 12, stresses making home practice fun, short, and tailored to your child's age and personality. Start off with one home practice a week. Even if it's just for five or ten minutes, it will be time well spent. If your child tends to be shy, find a private place to practise; if they need an audience, pull up a chair and settle in. Or call Grandma in Saskatoon for a long-distance practice session.

Like Robert, Allison also suggests keeping each session focused ---say, on a particular verse that needs to be memorized, or a new rhythm to learn. Make a game out of it --- your child says the first line of the verse, you say the next one; or your child claps a rhythm and you clap it back.

Ask your child what they think is a reasonable schedule, and get them to keep track of it (a calendar and stickers of their choice helps here). Discuss whether they prefer to practise in the morning or afternoon, or maybe while riding in the car. The idea is to get your chorister to take ownership of their activities --- as a parent you can help them set up a structure that works for them, but then let them control it. Take an interest but don't take over.

When a child does take the time to practise outside of rehearsal time, it does make a difference, enough that Allison can tell who's been practising. These may seem like small efforts but they add up, and it pays off in increased self-esteem for the chorister, and a choir that progresses much more quickly.

So after all this practise, practise, practise, what about getting ready for a performance?

Rest and routine

Parents can be effective here too. Make sure there is enough time for your child to get a good night's rest the night before a concert. If it is an evening concert, allow for a nap, or at least some down time, in the afternoon. Choristers should avoid screaming (always a good thing), and coughing (Robert suggests swallowing instead). Avoid major physical exertion on the same day as a concert --- save 10-K run for another day --- but don't otherwise change the chorister's usual routine of meals and activity. The last thing you want is to force the body to adapt to change, and divert energy away from singing. The more stability in routine before a performance, the better.

Is there a special pre-performance diet regimen? It's pretty basic. Two to three hours before show time a meal of protein and complex carbohydrates --- pasta, meat, vegetables --- is recommended. Avoid sugar, and the associated energy roller coaster. Also to be avoided are dairy foods (milk, ice cream) and dark liquids such as coffee, tea or cola. And twenty-four hours before a performance, choristers should start drinking plenty of liquids. It takes several hours to hydrate the body, and besides, you don't want half the choir rushing to the bathroom just before the curtain rises.

Also easing the pre-curtain jitters is getting your chorister backstage on time. This avoids rushing or, heaven forbid, running. Not only is running unseemly (especially in uniform!), it can lead to accidents. If circumstances prevail that a chorister finds him or herself in a hurry backstage, remember, the audience is not going to leave en masse if there is a delay of a minute or two. So better for choristers to slow down, remain calm, and save their energy for on stage.

And once the choir is on stage? What is the answer to parents' dilemma of whether to wave at their child or not?

The answer to that is a firm “no waving,” by either parents or choristers. And no smiling by choristers either --- it changes the sound of the notes. Concentrate instead on “sparkly” eyes --- the way a person’s eyes look when they receive a gift, or when they want to smile or laugh but know they shouldn’t. For instance, imagine Mr. Filion conducting in short pants.

If a mistake occurs on stage --- and they will --- just carry on. The less fuss that is made, the less distracting the awkward moment will be to fellow choristers, the less noticeable it will be to the audience, and the sooner it will be forgotten. Everyone makes mistakes, but on stage, it’s how you recover that counts.

And what about once it’s all over and the choristers are milling about with their adoring fans? When someone complements your child on the performance, all that is required is a simple “Thank you,” or “I’m so glad you could be here.” Choristers should not point out mistakes that may have occurred. This not only draws attention to something that may have otherwise gone unnoticed, and defeats any onstage effort to recover from the error, it might also make the person they’re speaking with feel embarrassed for not having noticed the musical misstep in the first place. Modesty is a good thing, but this is a time to just enjoy the adoration. By this point the choristers have earned it!

Now that we’re in November and the snow has started flying are there any cold-weather precautions that Robert advises? Besides a healthy diet, and plenty of sleep, he suggests avoiding spending extended periods of time outdoors just before a concert. Always have a hat, mitts and scarf at the ready, and if you’re cold, wear them (thank you Robert!). You won’t get sick from being too hot, but you will from getting too cold!

Really, aren’t these all good life lessons? Singing successfully in a choir is so much more than just the quality of voice or performance. It is also about commitment, discipline, a healthy lifestyle, teamwork, and doing your best. Just like Mom always said.

Allison’s Top 10 Ways to be a Better Choir Parent

1. The *Handbook for Choristers and Parents* is your best friend --- nine out of ten questions parents ask the choir managers are answered in the *Handbook*! So please read it (it only takes about 20 minutes), then read it again! You’ll find it in your child’s music binder.
2. Make sure your chorister gets to rehearsal no later than 4:10 p.m., so they have time to collect their music and settle in --- 4:15 *sharp* is when rehearsal begins, *not* when choristers should be trickling in.
3. Attend at least one rehearsal during the year (if you can’t make it on a week day, a few are held on weekends) and you’ll have a better understanding of what it’s all about.
4. Share e-mails from the Choir Manager with your child --- empower them with the information!
5. Get the pieces of the uniform together at the beginning of the year, not the night before a performance. The last-minute stress is not worth it, and takes away from the chorister’s energy!
6. Have the whole family practise enunciation every day. Exaggerate the articulation of words to increase awareness of how different sounds are made.
7. Check the choir Web site for updates and announcements. (OK, so the Web site isn’t quite set up for that, but when it is, it will be your next best friend after the handbook!)
8. Be a most excellent parent by volunteering to contribute to the Web site.
9. Take an interest in all choir activities --- it will make a difference to your chorister and to the choir!
10. Oh yes, and please read the *Handbook for Choristers and Parents*.



Chorister's Corner

Hitting the high notes

BY SIERRA SCHUMANN

My experience in the Viva Choir has been amazing. We have fun warm up exercises like *A big black beetle bit a brown baby bear*. I think we should do one that goes *Scooby dooby dooby, scooby dooby doo*. We practise many songs. My favorite is *You're a Mean One, Mr. Grinch*. Mrs. Prowse taught us how to hit the notes without wandering off.



By coming to choir I have met lots of nice new friends. I am looking forward to singing at the Mayor's Christmas Party. It happens to be on my 9th birthday.

Totally Awesome

BY CHARLOTTE FERDERBER

I think Viva Choir is totally awesome. Every Thursday I get picked up from school and get driven to choir. On the way my mom and I warm up our voices (even though she does not sing). I would say my favorite things about choir are the warmups because I enjoy exercising my voice. My favorite song so far is *You're A Mean One Mr. Grinch*. I like this song because the piano parts are so awesome.



I am definitely having the best time in the Viva Choir.

Tired but happy

BY NAOMI MERA

My experience at Viva Choir makes me feel tired but happy. At choir I must learn to take responsibility and I must always remember to bring my binder. I like choir so much because of the songs. I really like singing them whether it's fast or slow. I think choir is a good hobby and it helps me talk more clearly. Sometimes I find myself singing in the car with my parents because it makes everyone feel happy and also this is a great choral experience.



In a regular practice we have a few minutes to talk to friends and set up chairs. Sometimes there will be a new piece of music waiting for us. Then Mrs. Prowse gives a signal and then we do our exercises and then sing our actual songs.

I think the Viva Choir is educational in a creative way.

Stretches are fun

BY TITANIA DIXON-LUNENBURG

I think Viva Choir is really fun because we sing lots of songs. I can't wait till our Christmas party. I'm sure it will be lots of fun. I like doing the stretches because Mrs. Prowse always makes them really fun. I like it when we sing the same song but start at the same time. The pizza party was really fun. I met eight people!



I think I've improved in my singing. Mrs. Prowse makes choir really great.



The Chamber Choir sang O Canada to open a meeting of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives at the National Gallery September 25. Thomas d'Aquino, Chief Executive and President, wrote in appreciation: "You and your entire organization are to be congratulated for promoting choral excellence among our youth and for enriching the artistic life of Canada's national capital."

Tentative Schedule

Date	Event	Location	Choir
Dec 15, 2006	Mayor's Christmas Party	Drill Hall	Concert-Viva
Dec 16, 2006 Afternoon	Christmas Concert Technical Rehearsal	Dominion Chalmers	All Choristers
Dec 17, 2006 4:00pm	Christmas Concert Choir Call TBC	Dominion Chalmers	All Choristers
Dec 18, 2006	Community Carol Sing	St. Barnabas	Chamber
Mar 4, 2007 2:00pm	OCC & OCCDSB Choir	St. Francis Assisi	Concert
Mar 25, 2007	Kingsway United	Kingsway	Concert
Mar / Apr 2007	School Visits		Chamber-Concert
April 2007	Kiwanis Music Festival		Chamber-Concert
April 28-29 2007	Carmina Burana – Chouer Classique	St. Francis Assisi	Chamber
May 6, 2007	Battle of the Atlantic	Cenotaph	Concert-Viva
May 17 2007	Spring Concert		All Choristers
July 2007	Unisong	NAC	Chamber-Concert

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December 2006 Issue

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... and thanks to Allison Prowse, Robert Filion, Laura Paquette,
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