Although we are deep in Lent as this issue goes to print, Christmas is still very much on my mind. The winter holidays found me rereading Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol*, and what struck me most about this extraordinary story was the collapsing of past, present, and future into one day that offered Scrooge rebirth and renewed fellowship.

For us, 2019 brings the rare opportunity to celebrate our Choir School in retrospect and in prospect. I was moved by the many of you who showed up to Founders’ Day on March 3, and the bounty of goodwill and memories you brought. I look forward to feeling this same energy and support during our Lenten alumni preaching and recital series, as well as at Graduation in June and Reunion Weekend starting November 8. I encourage you to come to one or more of these events, to share your memories and share in a more complete vision of Saint Thomas Choir School – past, present, and future. Come, as Dickens would have it, with open, laughing hearts, meditating on what the Choir School has given us and continues to give others after one hundred years.

– Aaron Primero ’05
HEARD AROUND THE LUNCH TABLES

We always enjoy catching up with faculty, staff, and boys over a weekday lunch. When we visited recently, we stopped by the table headed by Mr. Appleton (Math) to see how the new Singapore math program was going (profiled in Summer/Fall 2018 newsletter). The boys reported positively. Those working in the most advanced books are particularly enjoying the fact that when they ask other faculty members or their parents for help, the adults are at sea and the boys are forced to explain the material to them. As Mr. Appleton remarked, “They don’t realize the high level they’re working at.”

We got the low-down on the winter ski trip from Ms. Francisco (English). Because the trip had not been possible the last couple of years, there were many more new skiers than previously. The boys were eager to learn, however, and after one Sunday evensong in January, they piled onto the bus to drive to the Crystal Springs Resort and Mountain Creek ski area in New Jersey. The boys loved the hotel, which had an indoor pool, a heated outdoor pool, and a hot tub. Monday they spent on the slopes, either taking lessons or skiing on their own. Ms. Francisco reports that by the end of day, all of the new skiers were able to ski down the bunny hill, if not go down green trails. The boys returned to school Tuesday – with zero injuries, which might well be a record!

Mr. Jarrett (PE) reported on the fall soccer season while dishing out pasta: “There were only a few games this year, but the boys were able to show off their talents nonetheless. The Lower School finished with a 1-1 record, losing to Browning 6-0 and beating Rodeph Sholom 2-0. The Upper School lost their only game to Windward 3-1 with fifth grader Max Sauberg scoring their lone goal.” Congratulations to both teams for their accomplishments.

We also heard about the annual Pinewood Derby, a boxcar racing competition that took place in February. Having labored for weeks building their own pinewood boxcars (under the guidance of art teacher David Eppley), the boys hit the “track” to test them out. Congratulations to this year’s winners!

MIND THE GAPS

We welcomed two new gap students this term, Eduard Delgado, from Montserrat, Spain, and Alasdair (Ali) Austin, from England. When Ali was the age of our boys, he was singing as a chorister under Mr. Hyde at Jesus College, Cambridge. This fall he will return to Cambridge to take up his undergraduate studies and sing in the choir of St. John’s College.

Although the boys must “mind” the gap students as they would mind any adult, they always enjoy horsing around with these young men as they learn about their lives abroad.
ADMISSIONS

This year, we have welcomed seven new boys into grades 3, 4, and 5 – an excellent result for admissions and a sign of the choir’s future health. The Housemothers report that the new boys are all doing well. Those who came in the fall have fully adjusted to life at the school, and more recent arrivals are happily settling in.

Many have asked about how the school has been coping with the challenges of recruiting young boys for a boarding school setting, given the way the boarding school landscape has changed over the past fifteen years. By the numbers of new boys and by Father Wallace’s account, the school seems to be succeeding. The combined efforts of Father Wallace, the faculty, the music staff, and particularly the passionate and articulate evangelism for the school offered by Mr. Hyde and admissions director Loraine Enlow have all begun to bear fruit. As the Choir School looks to its second century, we are grateful for a generous gift Dr. Tuohy has made for recruitment purposes. (This gift is separate from the choristership that Dr. Tuohy endowed last year). These funds will be used to hire a full time admissions director to begin work in the fall. Mrs. Enlow, who has so tirelessly directed admissions on a part-time basis for the last three years, had already indicated to Father Wallace that this would be her last year with us as she will be returning to choral directing full time. We will bid a grateful farewell to Mrs. Enlow in the summer, and by then the search for a new admissions director will be complete.

ACCREDITATION

Like all New York private schools, the Choir School must be accredited every ten years by the New York State Association of Independent Schools (NYSAIS) in a rigorous process that requires STCS to produce over 100 pages detailing the status, goals, and challenges of every aspect of the institution, from governance and finance to curriculum and culture. A team of educators from other schools makes a multi-day visit and then issues an extensive evaluation with its accreditation. In 2014, the Choir School had its ten-year evaluation, and this March, the NYSAIS team returned for the more brief five-year follow up; they learned how their previous recommendations were being implemented and heard about the present state of the school. The visit was successful, and the team was welcomed with pride by boys and staff alike.

MISSION STATEMENT

In response to a recommendation from the NYSAIS 2014 Accreditation, the school embarked in the spring of 2017 on revising its mission statement. This process, which began with the faculty and the Headmaster – and included ratification by the Director of Music, the Choir School Committee, and the Vestry – sought to update the existing mission in order to bring it more into line with the values, ideals, and lived experience of the school community today. The revised mission statement, which was made official this past fall, is:

The Saint Thomas Choir School houses, nurtures, and educates the boy choristers of Saint Thomas Church, Fifth Avenue. We work together to cultivate a love of learning through challenging academic study and professional musical training rooted in the Anglican choral tradition. Our unique, familial environment fosters self-reliance and personal growth, preparing students to contribute productively to their communities.

The statement begins with the basic premise that the school “houses, nurtures, and educates the boy choristers,” which remains virtually unchanged from the previous mission statement because the faculty agreed that these core acts lay the foundation for everything else the school does. The next sentence focuses on the Choir School’s unique blend of academic rigor and musical excellence, two concepts to which the faculty felt it was necessary to give special emphasis. Given the rich history of choir schools, and the role the school sees itself playing as one of the only remaining schools of its kind anywhere in the world, we also wanted to emphasize the school’s roots in the “Anglican choral tradition,” and the way those longstanding practices continue to impact the school today. Finally, in the last sentence, the school identifies its goals for its graduates: independence, growth as a person, and preparation for the world beyond Saint Thomas’s walls.

With the recent kickoff of the school’s centennial year on Founders’ Day, it has been particularly gratifying to see so many alumni return to campus and to hear them tell their stories. While this mission statement was only ratified in the last few months, listening to the alumni talk about their time at Saint Thomas and its long-term impact on their lives is a testament to the ways in which Saint Thomas has been living out this mission since its founding almost exactly one hundred years ago.

– Amy Francisco, English Teacher and Director of Studies
The central music event of the fall was, of course, the debut of the long-awaited Miller-Scott organ. On October 18, the choir opened its concert series with *At a Solemn Musick: the Miller-Scott Organ in concert*. In addition to the organ offerings, the choir gave the new instrument an outing with Parry’s "Blest Pair of Sirens" and Bernstein’s *Chichester Psalms*.

December saw the first *Messiah* with the new organ. Paul Pelkonen of *Superconductor* wrote: "The real heroes [of the concert] were the red-vestmented choristers. The altos were especially astounding, producing a loud and convincing upper range to the famous *Hallelujah Chorus*. The final fugue, chorus and Amen was supported further by the presence of the recently restored Saint Thomas Church organ, a muscular interloper that made this *Messiah* end in a unique, forceful but entirely successful manner." The traditional *Ceremony of Carols* took place December 13, and on December 17, NY1 produced a feature on the Choir School, including interviews with choristers. You can access the video on the Choir School website: Music, Watch Videos. [choirschool.org/videos.html]

On December 21, the choristers appeared on the *Today Show* and managed to sing “We Wish you a Merry Christmas” even though they’d had to get up before dawn to make it to the studio.

In February, there were a few treble concerts nearby, such as the one in Darien, CT on February 8, and in March, the full choir went on a week-long domestic tour, giving concerts and singing services at Church of the Incarnation in Dallas, TX; First Presbyterian Church in Tyler, TX; St. Mark’s Episcopal Cathedral in Shreveport, LA; and Christ Episcopal Church in Little Rock, AR.
MESSIAH FROM THE BACK ROW

This year we had the unusual, and lovely, experience of seeing three Choir School alumni – Richard Jarrett ’05, Nathan Fletcher ’07, and Calvin Wentling ’10 – return to sing Messiah in the “back row.” Mr. Jarrett, who has sung intermittently with the choir since joining the school’s faculty, told us that he appreciated being able to span so many eras with the choir. “I sang for Gerre, I sang for John, I sang for Ben and Stephen. With Dan, I sang for his audition, his first service, his Messiah. Each time I get to sing Messiah, I feel like I’m learning it all over again since each conductor has his own style.” Mr. Jarrett also told us how much he enjoyed singing with his students, and how important it was for them to see him in the context of the choir. “They know me as the guy who makes them run in the gym, but in the choir, they get to see another side of me, one where we’re all under the direction of someone else. It brings us closer together.”

Mr. Fletcher is both a composer and a full-time Gentleman of the Choir, and he told us about how his perspective has changed since his days as a chorister: “I don’t have any memory of having noticed or cared what the composition of the orchestra was when I was a kid. Back then, I was entirely focused on singing my part, not on figuring out what the instruments were or analyzing Handel’s orchestration. I was aware that the audience was large and that the Messiah concerts were a major event in the musical life of the city, but at the same time, it was all built into the schedule, part of the regular rhythm of music-making that constituted the essential framework of our school life. After a while it began to seem like routine. Now, I come back to it with the knowledge that it’s not at all routine, but a remarkable tradition in which I am outrageously fortunate and grateful to participate.”
**Welcome to Jeremy Filsell**

We are pleased to welcome Jeremy Filsell, Saint Thomas’s next Director of Music, succeeding Daniel Hyde. Dr. Filsell hails originally from the UK, where he was an organ scholar at Keble College, Oxford, did his master’s at the Royal College of Music, received his PhD in musicology from Birmingham City University/Conservatoire, and was a lay clerk at Saint George’s Chapel, Windsor (overlapping with Father Wallace’s time there). Since 2008, he has been resident in the US (taking US citizenship in 2016), and when Mr. Hyde leaves us at Easter, Dr. Filsell will be thrown in at the deep end – in true Saint Thomas style – arriving just in time for the Choirmasters’ Conference.

We had a chance to connect with Dr. Filsell before the whirlwind hit, speaking with him just after Christmas in Washington, DC, where he was wearing several hats: Artist-in-Residence at the National Cathedral, Director of Music at St. Alban’s Episcopal Church, and Professor of Organ at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore. Clearly no stranger to juggling many responsibilities, Dr. Filsell was looking forward to the move to Saint Thomas. “Most of us within the music world are so aware of Saint Thomas and its tradition and legacy that having a chance to further that is a huge honor,” he told us. “It’s a great privilege to follow in the footsteps of Daniel Hyde, John Scott, and Gerre Hancock, who really formed the modern version of this choir, one that has been such a paradigm. Personally, I’ve had something of a maverick career as a pianist, organist, and choir director, but I’ve always been in and around the cathedral world since I was a chorister myself in Coventry. I got to know all the choral music and was inspired by it as an eight-or-nine year old, in the way that choristers are, and I’m looking forward to giving back that which I received as a boy. Coming to Saint Thomas will be a shift of focus for me musically; all my energies will be directed towards something very specific – the choir and organ – and at this stage in my career, it’s a welcome realignment.”

Having moved to the United States ten years ago, and having played concerts here for the last twenty-five years, Dr. Filsell has had time to become embedded in the American musical world and to understand Saint Thomas’s place both nationally and internationally. “There’s no doubt that Saint Thomas has always been a bastion of Anglicanism in terms of its profile and repertoire,” he told us, “yet I would love to see even more American music on the repertoire lists. In fact, I’ve always felt the American music ought to transfer back across the Atlantic. English music always comes here, but somehow the American doesn’t tend to find its way back there as much.”

Dr. Filsell would like to see American choral music receive more recognition abroad, and he sees Saint Thomas as the natural model for an American expression of Anglican Episcopal liturgical music. We asked Dr. Filsell if he had any particular American composers in mind that he’d felt had been underrepresented, and he mentioned Stephen Paulus, Gerald Near, Leo Sowerby, and also Nico Muhly and Julian Wachner ’83, who have links to Saint Thomas. “I’m a great fan of people writing for the institutions in which they work,” he said. “Of course, that’s historically what used to happen, going back to Byrd, Tallis, Palestrina and so forth. When you’re writing for a particular choir in a space that you know intimately, I think there’s an innate power to the music because of it.”

Composers – take note!

When we asked Dr. Filsell about his early days as a chorister and a musician, he said that he had been playing the piano since he could walk but that he started singing at age eight at the medieval church next door to Coventry Cathedral. “In those days,” he said, “the men and boys choir was arguably better at the parish church than it was at the cathedral, but after I started organ lessons at the cathedral – when my voice broke – I began singing with the cathedral choir.” His grandfather, who died just before Dr. Filsell was born, had been a pianist and organist and had left behind a cabinet full of sheet music of the core piano repertoire. “As a kid, nine or ten years old, I would just grab piles of music and put them on the bench next to me and sight-read my way through the Schubert and Beethoven late sonatas, not knowing that these were extraordinary works of somebody’s late years. It was my grandfather’s great legacy to me, this amazing collection of piano music, and I absorbed it at a young age just by playing through it. It fed a voracious appetite in me.” Dr. Filsell also spoke of the training he had as a boy chorister. “It was rigorous. The choirmaster at the church was a hugely exacting guy and so created this great boys’ choir. And that’s what Saint Thomas does, too – expose boys to incredible amounts of music
at a formative age. Whether or not you become a musician afterwards, you absorb this body of expression of the human psyche, and it never leaves you.”

Dr. Filsell recounted some of the residential RSCM courses he went on as a boy. “They were such important experiences. I can remember 1975 at Lincoln Cathedral, under Martin How, a remarkably charismatic choirmaster, singing Parry’s ‘Blest Pair of Sirens’ at the end of this course, after making new friendships through singing in this extraordinary building. There’s one moment towards the end when Parry moves everything to a G major7 chord, the long B-flat pedal point becomes a B natural, and it’s the most ecstatic musical moment. I can remember dissolving into a pool of tears at that moment; I couldn’t sing the last page, and of course at the age of eleven, I had no idea why. In hindsight, though, I think that was probably the moment I knew I had to be a musician.”

THE ORGAN, SIX MONTHS ON
In January we caught up with organist Benjamin Sheen and asked him for his impressions, four months on, of the Miller-Scott organ. He explained the way the instrument supports the choir, and its effect on the boys. “There’s a greater palette of sounds, from the very softest to the very loudest. It surrounds the choir with sound and carries that sound down the church. One result is that they feel more supported physically. Also, because there is more air moving around the stalls because the pipes are on two sides now, they hear it much more clearly than they used to. It doesn’t drown them out, but it encourages them to bounce off it.” When we asked if he noticed a change in the boys’ singing, he said, “Oh, absolutely. As a singer, you don’t feel that you’re exposed. The organ sits underneath you, so you can sing very quietly and still be firmly rooted in the sound, as opposed to floating on top of it. It makes the boys bolder because the organ replicates their sound. It breathes with a dynamic range and encourages them to do the same. When the organ is playing something pictorial in the psalms, like running water, floating angels or whatever, they hear it in the organ where they didn’t before, and something in their subconscious mind is just switched on. This goes for the gents as well. There’s a warmth that the old organ never had.”

On Founders’ Day we spoke with Dylan Cranston ’17, one of the young alumni giving the organ recital at evensong. Since Dylan had also performed on the old organ, as a precocious eighth grader, we asked his impressions of the new instrument: “It has a lot more stops and whistles,” Dylan said. “One of my favorite parts is the boxes; they’re very versatile. You can slam it open and slam it shut, and it will still sound very subtle. I remember playing the old organ, and it didn’t have everything together. Some things didn’t work, and it would go in and out. I still love the space most of all.”

If you wish to support the Choir School or any of its designated funds – such as the Girl Chorister Fund, the Camp Fund, the Learning Assistance Fund – please visit our website (www.choirschool.org) and click the Giving tab.
THE CHOIR SCHOOL TURNS 100

THIS YEAR OUR BELOVED CHOIR SCHOOL REACHES A MILESTONE OF 100 YEARS IN EXISTENCE. That makes us one year older than the National Football League, founded in 1920, and the same age as a certain hotel chain started by Conrad Hilton, founded in 1919. Over the past century, other churches in New York have attempted to establish a school based on the English cathedral model which exclusively houses boy choristers. Amongst these are Grace Church, Broadway, which ultimately incorporated day pupils due to financial constraints in 1934; and the Cathedral of St John the Divine, which eliminated its boarding programme in 1964. Yet we’re still here. What makes us different?

Perhaps the difference is commitment – a sense of purpose from the very start. That sense originated from T. Tertius Noble. He came to America in April 1913 as a pioneer, not to clear wilderness, but to transform the musical life of Saint Thomas. Noble arrived to find a boy choir already in existence, yet lacking structure: the boys lived locally, and their participation was sporadic. The Church yearned for a level of musical excellence which would equal the grandeur of its new building on Fifth Avenue. In 1919, Noble answered their need by founding our Choir School. Fittingly, in this centennial year, we honour him by introducing the T. Tertius Noble Choristership.

The commitment demonstrated by Noble has continued under those who succeeded him as Choirmaster. Likewise it may be found in our faculty; in our staff; in the parents who entrust their sons to us; and in our friends and benefactors. Housing, educating and training choirboys is a task both virtuous and costly. Your assistance allows the boys to excel musically and academically, living together in an environment of Christian fellowship.

Looking forward to the next one hundred years, we endeavour to stay the course and keep up the good fight. May our commitment be such that future generations will speak well of us at the Choir School’s bicentennial in 2119. – Charles Wallace, Headmaster

FOUNDERS’ DAY

On March 3, one hundred years after the Choir School’s official opening, we celebrated Founders’ Day for the first time. Readers will note the plural possessive apostrophe, and indeed on this day we honored the three men long considered the “founders” of the school: T. Tertius Noble (1867-1953), Choirmaster; the Reverend Ernest Millmore Stires (1866-1951), Rector; and Charles Steele (1858-1939), vestryman whose philanthropy endowed the school. We will be profiling our founders in this newsletter, Noble in this issue (see page 12), and Steele and Stires in the fall.

Founders’ Day 2019 began in the church with a Solemn Eucharist at 11am. The Reverend David Cobb PA ‘01, ’03 was our guest preacher, and he spoke movingly of the school’s history, its vocation, and of the link between our Centenary celebrations and the Transfiguration. (See page 10 for highlights.) After Mass, alumni made the familiar walk back to the Choir School for lunch. Before sampling Heidi’s cooking, however, everyone gathered in the library, in part to let the boys eat first and in part to catch up with each other before posing for pictures by decade (see page 11). Readers may not be surprised to learn that the 1970s graduates, marching to their own drummer, had to be photographed three times before their full complement arrived.

Lunch in the dining hall followed, and there was much reminiscing and reconnecting, with many seeming to discover or rediscover over the meal just how powerful were the bonds with brothers not seen in years or even decades.

After dessert, some alumni dashed for trains and buses (a winter storm was on its way), while the majority walked together (though not in crocodile and capes) back to the church to rehearse for evensong. Mrs. Hill, alumni director, transported everyone back to their chorister days by scolding latecomers, but Mr. Hyde managed to knock them into shape quickly, helped by the old chestnuts chosen for the occasions, the Hancock responses, Noble in B minor setting, and Elgar’s “Give Unto the Lord”. The day concluded with an organ recital by four young alumni – Dylan Cranston ’17, Augustine Segger ’15, Luca Cantone ’15 and Samuel Long ’13 – and a reception in Andrew Hall.
FROM THE ALUMNI DIRECTOR

Our inaugural Founders’ Day on March 3 was a success that far exceeded our expectations! Since then we’ve heard from so many of you who were able to attend, and it’s clear that everyone – alumni, parents, and extended Choir School Family – had a wonderful time reconnecting, performing with, and simply spending time together.

Some attendees hadn’t seen each other for over 25 years, and yet it was clear that, once in each others’ company, it felt as if no time had passed at all. We saw strong representation from the 1960s forward, and while many wrote with regrets that they were unable to attend Founders’ Day, they made it clear that they’re looking forward to coming to other events in the year. Indeed, the one thing we didn’t anticipate about the day was the overwhelming response we received. We were heartbroken to have to turn people away from the lunch because of space limitations. There are more events coming up, though, so please mark your calendars for Saturday, June 8th, Prize Day. There will be a reception in Andrew Hall following the service, where conversations and catching up can continue! Our Centennial Celebrations will conclude in November at Alumni Reunion Weekend, which will run from Thursday November 8th through Sunday November 10th. Information and details about Alumni Weekend will be on our website shortly.

If you were unable to attend Founders’ Day evensong, you can listen now on the church website and hear forty alumni singing from the back row. Our thanks to Mr. Hyde for his magic fitting everyone in. For those who were with us March 3, please feel free to share pictures, stories, or other remembrances you have from your times at school and of Founders’ Day! Email to alumni@choirschool.org and please send photos in the largest file size possible. If you caption your photos, we’ll be sure to post them on our Facebook and Instagram pages, and who knows - maybe one of your classmates who wasn’t able to attend will be inspired to join us for our upcoming events and you can reconnect then! Please let us know if we may use your photos on the school website.

We’re also collecting personal memories of the school and school life, the more specific and individual the better, not only from alumni, but also from our wider Choir School family and friends. Please send them to editor@choirschool.org by August 31.

Thank you to all who attended, and special gratitude to the alumni, parents, and school staff who worked to make this a most special day!

– Susan Hill, Alumni Director
WE HAVE HEARD GLORY

We were fortunate on Founders’ Day to have the Reverend David C. Cobb, DMin, as our guest preacher at the 11am Eucharist. It was the last Sunday after Epiphany, and Father Cobb preached on the Transfiguration while reflecting on the events of the school’s foundation and the blessings that have flowed to it and from it for the last hundred years. You can read the full version on the church website by looking in the sermon archive, but here are some highlights:

At one hundred years, an institution, a school or parish, is likely to have resources and capacity that the founders could not have imagined, just as founders had a zeal and ingenuity that astound us and an ability to accomplish much with what we would think of as far too little. Founders and sustainers face different tasks with different resources. Anniversaries offer a time to recognize demands that were met and the challenges that remain.

The school’s founding took something that was and reached forward towards something better. The choir was here, and boys were being trained for this work, but in an unsuitable manner. Canon Wright’s history* reports T. Tertius Noble rehearsing boys individually. There was little opportunity to have them in one place at one time, focused on one task. If doctors making house calls seems inefficient, ponder Dr. Noble traveling out to boys in random schools and homes across the region to rehearse each one in next Sunday’s music.

There were other choir schools then, and though they are no longer with us, they provided examples and maybe even a sense of competition that this parish and this school answered. A residential school made the choir that existed infinitely more efficient and, more crucially, broader in its mission. The boys now sang not just Sunday’s music, but received a week’s worth of education and formation, of music making and character building.

In Canon Wright’s history, we hear the founding Choirmaster and Rector report on the boys’ enthusiasm. Rehearsals were not seen as tasks but as a delight; the daily services were not duty but reward. As the father of former choirboys, I will leave the question unasked, but succeeding classes and generations might not have found practise and the routine of daily prayer quite so constant a joy.

And why should they? Our lives and our music, our athletic or academic pursuits, all hold promise that is unanswered without disciplined and determined effort. It all flourishes under the guidance of mentor and teacher, coach and conductor. And each of us finds our best utterly transformed when it meets that in another. The school creates far better music than was possible with scattered and random rehearsals. And because they learn, live, pray, work, and play together, the school opens the possibility of far better lives for generations of boys and young men. All of us – students, adults, the youngest and those whose memories hold more than half this school’s story – all of us are called to make ever better and more fruitful use of the lives and talents, the minds and the hearts that God has given.

We are not to build tabernacles on the Mount of Transfiguration, but we build lives, and communities that support those lives. Memory and history helps us see and hear the call to faith, ready for deeper thought and more costly enactment. The Transfiguration leads on towards Jerusalem and all that will be accomplished there. We see Christ’s glory, and are called to a life of determined, patient, and committed discipleship.

Founders have their work, and so do those who sustain and continue institutions and communities. We look back with gratitude at the last 100 years and realize that all of that determines the fate of boys who will arrive next September, or perhaps some student taking organ lessons for the first time this year, boys who may in decades to come find a calling and vocation. And yet the school is here for this moment – standing within the history of what has been – and pointed towards lives of purpose, excellence, and godliness that will bring light and hope in a future we cannot yet see. In this moment, Christ can be known, and in knowing Christ, we come to know ourselves and the high calling he holds out to us. In this moment, the Choir School asks boys to learn and achieve, to grow despite or from failure. It holds before them the most profound words and compelling music that the Church has to offer, and it teaches them to write and think, to live and to sing in their own voice and in their own time.

These boys sing – and this building stands – so that we might hear Christ call us forward. The School’s opening, just as this day, was the Sunday before Lent, standing between a beginning and a glorious future, the brilliance of Christmas and Epiphany with Easter and Pentecost beyond the horizon. And it sends us down the mountain to respond to broken lives and those who need healing. It sends us back into the routine of class and rehearsal, of work and play, life at school and home.

At a hundred years, we can bask in the glory of what the school has accomplished, the music these boys have made, and the lives built on what they learned and experienced here. There is gratitude to be offered for founders and for sustainers, for faces on class photos in the halls, and for faculty whose work shaped minds and imaginations. Because of what has been done and given, we have seen and heard glory. Then let us live so that Christ’s voice is heard, and so that the glory we encounter here gives light and purpose, meaning and hope across our all days, and for years and generations for choirs and congregations still to come.

*J. Robert Wright’s Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue, Eerdmans, 2001.
ALUMNI – OUR NEXT 100 YEARS

On Sunday March 3, the yearlong celebration marking the Centennial Celebration of the Saint Thomas Choir School began with Founders’ Day. A full day of events, both at the school and the church, engaged over 95 members of the alumni family and framed our appreciation for our Founders - the Reverend Ernest Stires, Dr. T. Tertius Noble and Mr. Charles Steele. This kick-off event was a resounding success, with many of the alumni remarking how much they enjoyed themselves. It should not be lost on anyone that the rich and vibrant history of our beloved school cannot only rely on the efforts of those in our past, but rather, we must look to the future by building on their hard work.

There are three primary goals for any school’s alumni family. Simply stated, the alumni must remain engaged with the school, help in recruitment efforts for future generations, and give generously to sustain the financial health of the school. These three pillars can help us move from honoring and celebrating our Founders into building and securing a new and stronger foundation for the next 100 years.

The idea and practice of engagement is vitally important to the health of a school. The unique choral heritage of the Saint Thomas Choir School further underscores the need for a vibrant and engaged alumni body. One of the biggest hurdles faced by STCS is the age at which we attended the school. After leaving the school around age fourteen, we move on to our high schools, our colleges, our further educational paths, and then, finally, the workforce and “real life”. All of those steps after graduation can cause us to forget the strong and indelible mark that our time as choristers made on our lives. However, without fail, every fellow alumnus that I speak with is passionate about how the school impacted his life. It is this sentiment that I hope will motivate you to become an active participant, or foundational member, in securing our next 100 years.

Engagement with the school can take many forms. One of the hardest challenges today is finding new sources of applicants. No longer can we just rely on hope that the ranks – and choir stalls – will be filled easily. Recruitment efforts need to come in many different forms. True, the choir embarks on tours from time to time to raise awareness of the school. I would ask you to post recruitment posters at your local church. Maybe you know music teachers that may be able to offer referrals. Word of mouth, especially when conveyed by “old boys”, can be especially impactful. Active recruitment efforts need to be multifaceted and we must understand that no one plan will achieve success. As guardians of this special place, we must make every effort to be an integral part of its continued legacy.

Many of us remember the years where asking for financial support, much less acknowledging the need for it, was not something openly entertained with the alumni. For a variety of reasons, it was considered almost inappropriate to ask for financial assistance. Those days are gone. As we heard during Founders’ Day, the school is currently trying to raise enough money to fund choristerships. As the living history of this special place, we need to be aiming for 100% participation by our alumni. The amount that you give should be representative of the importance of the Choir School in your life. Look into your heart. Is the “Experience of a Lifetime” worth your riches? I believe it is.

One hundred years ago, our founders had the vision to create a school that would, at some point, shape your life. Today, new boys embark on this 100-year-old tradition. The Saint Thomas Choir School’s continued success demands all of us to embrace our role in sustaining its future. Think of the warm memories, the special moments in your life, which you experienced as a young member of the Choir School community. This emotional attachment now must translate into your financial support for this special place. Engagement with, recruitment for, and generous financial support of the Choir School will perpetuate this living legacy and guarantee its ability to positively shape the lives for generations of new boys – just as it did for you.

— Chad Newsome ’81 PA ’13

T. TERTIUS NOBLE CHORISTERSHIP
To mark the school’s centennial in 2019, we are raising funds to endow a choristership in memory of our founder, T. Tertius Noble. Currently, the school awards four choristerships to four boys in recognition of their achievements and dedication; each choristership consists of an investment of $500,000 or more, whose proceeds underwrite a portion of a boy’s education each year during his tenure at the school, by covering tuition and a small stipend. The Ogden Northrop Lewis, Jr. Choristership was created in 2005 by longtime parishioners and Friends of Music Denny and Susan Lewis in memory of their son. The Lewis Chorister is chosen for his integrity, kindness, and leadership qualities – traits that were shared by the fund’s namesake. In 2006, parishioner Frances Falconer established a second choristership with a bequest. Her love of the Anglican choral tradition had brought her to Saint Thomas, where she remained a faithful parishioner for many years. The John Scott Memorial Choristership grew from the proceeds of a 2016 benefit concert in memory of our beloved organist and choirmaster and is awarded to a boy who displays excellence in academics and music. Last year, Dr. James Tuohy endowed a fourth choristership. The T. Tertius Noble Choristership will, when fully funded, support a deserving boy throughout his years at Saint Thomas. We are seeking contributions of any size to make this centennial choristership a reality. Please contact Ann Hall Kaplan, akaplan@saintthomaschurch.org or Father Wallace, headmaster@choirschool.org to discuss further.

NOBLE’S CHARITY BOYS
Thomas Tertius Noble is a legendary figure both in the world of Anglican music and the Choir School. Born in England in 1867, he spent the second half of his life in America. Organist and Choirmaster at Saint Thomas from 1913-1943, he died in 1953 and is buried at St. Mary’s Episcopal Church in Rockport, MA.

The go-to source for information about Noble, and indeed about all things Saint Thomas, is Canon Wright’s history, published in 2001 for the occasion of the church’s 175th anniversary.* Additionally, Dr. Joseph Causby, Organist and Director of Music of Chapel of the Cross, Chapel Hill, NC, wrote his dissertation on Noble, a document that was never published. Father Wallace has read it, however, and we sat down with him just before Founders’ Day to hear some of his impressions of our founding Choirmaster.

“Noble didn’t get ahead based on his background or family money,” Father Wallace explained. “He came from very ordinary circumstances, but he advanced – studying at the Royal College of Music in London and then serving as assistant organist at Trinity College, Cambridge under Stanford – because someone (or several someones) recognized his talent and took an interest in him; in a real way, then, we owe our gratitude to those unnamed patrons of the arts, those individuals who felt called to cultivate the arts and support raw talent. Certainly, such patronage was Noble’s focus once he arrived at Saint Thomas.

“When the Choir School began,” Father Wallace continued, “Noble’s interest was in what were called at the time, ‘charity boys,’ in other words, kids from the city, all local, who could never afford such a school on their own. He had inherited a choir, but they were a rag-tag bunch, lacking focus, and commitment. Since there was no school, there was only so much Noble could accomplish with the choristers. At that time, Saint Thomas was the ‘poor relation’ of the Manhattan parishes, musically speaking, whereas Grace Church and the Cathedral, both of which had choir schools, were the leaders. Saint Thomas had a wonderful new edifice on the corner of 53rd and Fifth, and they wanted a musical program to match it.” Noble, with the financial support of Steele and the encouragement of Stires, set out to accomplish that. In 1925 Charles Steele gave $275,000 to endow the school, a significant amount in those days, and by the time of his death in 1939, he had given over a million dollars to the endowment. “His support saved the school,” Father Wallace said, “from the fates of the other two New York choir schools, which eventually closed due to lack of funds.”

Today, only Saint Thomas retains its dedicated boarding school for choristers, which explains why the Saint Thomas Choir stands where it does amongst choirs of the world.

*N. Robert Wright’s Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue, Eerdmans, 2001.
RESTORING THE STEELES

Anyone who has been in the school dining room has seen the portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Steele – founder Charles and his wife, whose first name we're still trying to discover. Alumni from the class of 1988 and earlier will remember them hanging in the old dining hall and, before that, in the old school library. The paintings were noticeably missing on Founders’ Day, however, as they are currently undergoing cleaning and restoration.

We spoke with Jill Pratzon, head restorer at Pratzon Art Restoration, who has been discovering not only secrets beneath the varnish but also secrets of the portraits’ creation. “When I first came to the Choir School,” she told us, “I examined the paintings in the dining room, where they were hanging. The lighting was a bit dim, and I could see that the portraits needed cleaning, but beyond what I could see, there wasn't much information about the paintings.” It was thought that both portraits had been painted by the same artist, Harrington Mann (1864-1937), whose signature could be clearly seen on the portrait of Mrs. Steele. When Ms. Pratzon got the paintings back to her studio, however, she found a surprise. Having removed the backing from the frame of Mr. Steele's portrait, she found some notes painted on the back of the canvas, “Charles Steele, New York, 1905 by Ellen Emmet.” Ellen Emmet? Who was she? Wasn’t Harrington Mann the painter? Pratzon examined the signature, placed in the upper right corner, barely visible in black on dark brown paint; after being cleaned, the signature confirmed the notes: the painter was Ellen Emmet.

Ellen Emmet, later Ellen Emmet Rand, (1875-1941) was a hugely successful American painter, Pratzon explained. She painted over 800 portraits, mostly of powerful men, such as William and Henry James, FDR (she was the first female artist to paint a sitting President), and our own Charles Steele. Emmet lived in Manhattan, but she also had a home in Connecticut, where her husband and children stayed. With her painting, she supported herself, husband, and children as well as her mother and sister.

Interestingly, although Charles Steele selected Ellen Emmet to do his portrait, for his wife, he went with Harrington Mann, a Scottish portraitist who was born in Glasgow and died in New York. Why did Steele choose different artists for each portrait? When precisely was each painted? Before even making the discovery about Ellen Emmet, Pratzon had been researching Harrington Mann by digging into the archives of galleries and catalogs of the time. She had discovered that Mrs. Steele's portrait had been shown with other paintings by Mann at the Knoedler gallery in 1912. Pratzon found it puzzling that Mr. Steele's portrait had not been shown at the same time, but after uncovering "Ellen Emmet," she saw a possible explanation. Both Mann and Emmet studied with John Singer Sargent, Pratzon said, and they were all thinking about Rembrandt and about the effect of light in their work. Each portrait is meant to have its own light, designed to make important features pop out—something that will be more apparent after restoration.

Pratzon explained that restoration is a long, patient process. The first thing she did was test a small, inconspicuous patch of the paintings while they were still hanging at the school. Back her in studio, she tested them with more solvents, more combinations of solvents, different application times, and different pressures to try to remove the dust and dirt. Eventually, she will remove the old varnish and replace it with a conservation varnish that promises not to yellow for one hundred years (tested in labs but not yet by centuries). Mrs. Steele's portrait will need more work as it has a lot of flaking paint. When the restoration is complete, Pratzon says the whites will look white again, and the colors will look true. Once returned to the dining hall, they will be ready to keep watch for another hundred years. Let us hope that even when we are all gone, Mrs. Steele's portrait will still be supervising the table manners of boys to whom we will be just as much of a mystery as Mrs. Steele's Christian name.
One of our ambitions for this centenary year, here at the Choir School News, is to collect memories of the school and school life. We have assembled a few here to get the ball rolling, but we petition you, readers, to send us your own recollections. The specific is always better than the general, and although the memories here are from alumni, we would love to hear from family, friends, parishioners – anyone who has experienced Saint Thomas Choir School. Please send your pieces to editor@choirschool.org, and if you have a picture to accompany it, all the better (please send the largest file size possible). Don’t worry if yours isn’t polished – your editor is here to make you look good! Deadline, August 31. Please spread the word.

Note: the pieces marked with an * were originally written when the author was in eighth grade, as part of Ms. Francisco’s memoir writing project.

Julian Turner ’10 on Saturday outings. As a native Bostonian, I was fortunate during my time at the Choir School to have my parents visit more than most. Work brought my father to New York at least once a month, and my mom visited as well, presumably to assert her dominance as “Queen of the Mat Room.” Other alumni can attest to the funny thing that often happens when parents visit: they want to do fun New York City activities, while choirboys just want to relax after a long week. Though the New York activities have long faded from my memory, there was one weekend tradition that I will never forget: eating at an Indian restaurant. I was, at the time, so obsessed with Indian food that I started a card file for each Indian restaurant we tried. I would take a business card from the restaurant, write a short review about my three favorite dishes, and add it to the file. By the end of eighth grade, I had filled nearly two books! I would bring my fellow classmates out to Indian with me, and we’d bring the leftovers back to give to the housemother, Ms. Sullivan, in what was, of course, an attempt to garner goodwill in the face of my less-than-stellar behavior. To this day, Joshua Ross attests to me and my mom his love of Indian food.

Roger Black ’62 on a young boy’s passion for the church’s architecture. If you are a Saint Thomas choirboy you spend a lot of time in a special place that few people ever get to know: Saint Thomas Church. My dad, an architect, had endorsed my mother’s proposal that I try to get into the Choir School, saying that the church was one of the great buildings of the century. “Ralph Adams Cram,” he declared, as though there was no more argument needed. My mother had read about the Choir School in an ad in the New York Times magazine, and I came to New York from Texas for the interview in May 1958. During that trip, my mother took me to a service at Saint Thomas. I was ready to be impressed, and the building did not disappoint: the soaring Cram nave with light filtering down from unbelievable stained glass windows, the reredos filled with statues of saints and churchmen, seemingly life size, and the music, too!

After getting into the school and joining the choir, I began to pay closer attention. Sitting in the elevated chancel, we in the choir had a privileged position from which to observe. There was plenty of down-time in the 11 o’clock Sunday service between hymns and the offertory anthem. (In those days it was Morning Prayer. Holy Communion was only offered once a month.)

The reredos, bathed in light, was a wonder in those years. Okay, you have Jesus, and the saints, Mary, John the Baptist, and over the altar a 3D stone diorama of the Last Supper, when Thomas was doing his doubting. Later I found out that a number of Anglican bishops are up there. But, wait, other figures are not wearing Biblical robes. There is George Washington! And, as an older boy pointed out, John Wesley, the Methodist. So, non-Episcopalians? Yes, including plenty of pre-Anglicans like John Wycliffe, the 14th century English reformer, and . . . Savonarola. Both branded as heretics by Rome. All of these people, and more, are surrounded by gothic ornamentation, elaborate finials and traceries.

When I went home for Christmas, I asked my dad about the interior details. Cram? He said, “No, no, Goodhue!”

I expect that the choirboys today will find themselves daydreaming during the lulls in the service and staring at this work. The rector during my time, Dr. Morris, could have a hypnotic effect when he was preaching. I found myself looking up at the little roof of the pulpit and wondering what the pattern inside it meant. I would fall into a kind of meditative state, and I would always leave a little calmer and more thoughtful than I went in. Never mind that I was not an Episcopalian and had never even been baptized. Those church services worked for me and on me. The teachers and clergy, and the building itself, taught me so much that they changed my life. I will never forget it.

Zak Fletcher ’07 remembers Quests. When I was in fourth and fifth grade (2002-2004), our gym teacher, Mr. Benjamin, would take our class every once in a while to the corner store on 58th and 7th on what we called a “Quest.” The goal was to grab as much candy as we could within a few seconds of entering the corner store, and whatever we bought, we’d bring back to the gym for immediate consumption. We tended to get various kinds of Haribo gummy candies, especially sour ones. It so happens that Haribo was also the brand of Alphabet Letters that GRA (Headmaster when I arrived) dispensed as his reward for Green Cards, doubtless purchased from the same corner store. I remember Mr. Benjamin’s Quests – and GRA – every time I have Haribo gummy candies.
Dana Bailey ’73 writes about the Choir School of the early 1970s. Living in midtown Manhattan, we were a short subway or bus ride from everything NYC had to offer: the museums, Lincoln Center, Yankee and Shea Stadiums, Madison Square Garden, everything. We’d always take in at least one baseball game during the year as well as a hockey game at the Garden, always the Rangers vs. the Bruins. There was a gentleman in the parish named Francis Robinson who was the assistant head manager of the Metropolitan Opera. Every year they would donate sixty tickets to the school so the students and faculty could spend a day at the opera.

Every year we would take over Incarnation Camp in Ivoryton, CT for a week in the fall and two weeks in the spring. There we had access to rowboats, canoes, Sunfish sailboats, a lake, and woods. This was quite the difference from the concrete jungle of NYC, especially for city kids who’d never been in such a place or had access to such things outside of Central Park. When we had a father/son weekend, I would proudly take my dad, a retired Naval officer, sailing in a Sunfish. Those things were a blast!

Occasionally, we choristers would be hired out for special activities. When a group of us were hired by Kodak to hum “Greensleeves” for a Christmas commercial, some of us had to get Social Security numbers because we were paid for this. Probably the coolest thing I ever got to do was sing with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra in a performance of Mahler at Lincoln Center. I was about eleven years old singing to sixty acres of NYC.

I was fortunate to be at Saint Thomas when there was both a choirmaster change and a rector change. My second choirmaster was Gerre Hancock, a man who taught me well as a child and who would become a good friend in life. During Gerre’s time, if your class was having a reunion, you could sing with the choir for the last service of the school year so long as you came to the two required rehearsals. Once, at one of these rehearsals, I told Gerre that I wished I lived in the city so I could go to church there. He said, “Nonsense! If you lived nearby, you’d be singing in my choir.” That’s about the best compliment that any chorister can ever receive.

When I was a chorister, my father made me a memory box, which I still have. On the lid is a three dimensional version of the Choir School Cantate Domino logo that my dad fabricated by hand. The box itself started off as a whiskey crate, but my dad took it apart, sanded it, cut the wood to fit the top of the night stands we had in the old school, then reassembled it and layered a walnut veneer over it. The logo is made from several kinds of wood, and the spear tip from an ivory scrap a man near Incarnation Camp would give us boys when we visited him there. The box is a bit beaten up now because it’s followed me everywhere I’ve gone over the last nearly fifty years, but it’s among my most treasured possessions.

Aaron Primero ’05 and friends remember breakfasts with GRA. At Founders’ Day lunch, my table included Gerry Rosenthal ’94, Stephen Slattery ’01, Joshua Primero ’01, Oliver Holt ’05, and Richard Jarrett ’05. Over hearty plates of chicken and rice, we recalled the colorful moments we shared in the dining hall...how every day at breakfast a bleary-eyed boy would fetch GRA’s breakfast from the kitchen: two fried eggs and four halves of toast, which he’d butter to achieve a one-to-one ratio of toast and butter...or how, during Lent when the sugar bowls were confiscated from the dining tables, one might just sneak into the kitchen and lather one’s plain, Lenten corn flakes in maple syrup to achieve a one-to-one ratio. These memories returned swiftly, and perhaps with some embellishment, but the punch lines always found us reveling in the creativity and mischief of boyhood, of all sorts, visible and invisible.

*Marcus d’Aquino ’13 remembers John Scott cowed by a Russian.* “I asked for eight soloists including the two main ones,” Mr. Jurowski roared at Dr. Scott with a thunderous voice, “Do you know how to count? Eight plus two is ten, not eight.” When Dr. Scott retreated from the concert hall, pale as alabaster, a dead silence descended upon the room except for the snickering of the boy choristers. The room suddenly felt cold.

John Gavin Scott, a world-renowned conductor and organist, had worked with many famous musicians and was accustomed to being in charge; at least, from the perspective of a boy in his choir, I perceived him this way. Like a king before the choristers, Dr. Scott directed with an iron fist, correcting anyone who so much as looked at him, and constantly demanding more than seemed possible from his singers.

In 2012, an elite group of singers in the choir – and I – went on a tour to Dresden, Germany. We performed the world premiere of Lera Auerbach’s Dresden Requiem with the Staatskapelle Orchestra and the St. Paul’s Cathedral Boy Choir. We all enjoyed experiencing other cultures – and other choirmasters – and comparing them to our own. Mr. Archer of the Staatskapelle Orchestra and the St. Paul’s Cathedral Boy Choir. We all enjoyed experiencing other cultures – and other choirmasters – and comparing them to our own. Mr. Archer of St. Paul’s seemed like a nice person when he conducted us, but then we encountered Vladimir Jurowski, or, as we called him, Vlad the Impaler. His brow looked like that of a caveman’s, and his booming voice was infused with a strong and rich Russian accent. Vladimir did not mind who he yelled at. He could yell at a slacker in the orchestra or a ten-year-old boy and show no remorse. His mission: to make this the best performance he had
ever conducted. Not many of us liked him, but we respected the way he could make Dr. Scott look like a scolded puppy with his tail between his legs. I absolutely looked up to this man; nobody but him ever yelled at Dr. Scott.

*Nathan Park ’18 remembers learning about ties, and new friends.* “No, no, no! You wrap it around two times, not five!” the housemother sighed as my classmates and I struggled with our ties. “Two times, then up, then down again!”

It was our second day at Saint Thomas, and we were learning just how difficult it is to tie a tie. The class was lined up along the whiteboard in the third and fourth grade classroom, and both Mr. Kelly – the third and fourth grade teacher – and Mrs. Eyerly – the housemother – were sitting on the well-worn wooden desks with exasperated expressions on their faces. The desks creaked repeatedly as the teachers rose to help us and then sat back down to watch.

“There goes attempt 14,” I muttered as the soft new tie somehow managed to wrap itself into a tight ball around both of my hands. None of my classmates was having any better luck. Suddenly, someone shouted, “I don't wanna do this!” and a tie fell to the floor. Everyone's eyes snapped to Filip’s bright red face, which caused more tears to streak down his cheeks. When my other classmates saw his outburst, they also dropped their ties and started to cry. Their different pitched wails intermixed with loud sniffling filled the room. My confusion was apparently evident in my expression because Mr. Kelly and Mrs. Eyerly both had their eyes fixed on me. I could only stand there, tie in hand, head cocked, wondering, “Why?” I felt distant, unattached to my classmates. Here they were, all doing the exact same thing (even if it was crying), and I could only watch from the sidelines. I desperately wanted to bridge that gap between us, but I had neither the knowledge nor the tools to do so. It was then that Ms. Eyerly, after wiping away some tears, explained to Mr. Kelly and Mrs. Eyerly that it would, and I walked out of the choir room with a smile on my face.

Later I followed my prospective grade to classes. First was homeroom with a man named Mr. Kelly. The class was learning about the rainforest, and as a project had decorated the homeroom to look like the rainforest. After a long, fun day of meeting people, I pumped myself up to attend one of my favorite classes of the day, sports. That day we played dodgeball inside. We separated into two teams, and the gym teacher, Mr. Holst, introduced me and another boy who was auditioning at the same time, Jan-Carlos Ramirez. Mr. Holst put Jan-Carlos on my side, and the game began. At the beginning Jan-Carlos and I chose not to run for the balls, but instead we stayed together and protected each other. At first it was weird to be with JC since I barely knew him, but over the course of the game we became closer friends.

The next day, my mom and I were going to go back home to discuss whether I wanted to come to this school or not, but I already knew that I wanted to. Later, as I got on the plane, I thought about how great this experience was and how everything was better than I anticipated. I also realized that I was tired from such a great week of fun and adventure, and as I fell asleep, I began to fantasize about this school that I hoped to go to. The school that I attended currently was not challenging me, and I knew this school would. Dazzled by my experience as an auditioner, I knew the Choir School would be a great and amazing experience for me, that it would open great opportunities for me, and that it would help transform me throughout my life.
Daniel Suter was quite ready to do it. “That would be awesome,” I said. I had no idea how I should react. This is what I had been working for since my first year at Saint Thomas, but I was not quite ready to do it. “That would be awesome,” I said.

At the time, Mr. Buzard was giving dual organ lessons to Daniel Suter, who was a fantastic piano player in the class above me, and me. I was always so jealous of Daniel for his talent and ease in piano playing, but organ was a fresh start. Daniel always used to play piano at important events and tours. I, being young and foolish, felt robbed of my time to shine. But, when Mr. Buzard said that I would be the first choirboy to play at a church service, I felt a surge of happiness: this was my shot.

Later that day, after I had shared the news with my parents, my brother Ryan called. I went through the same routine that I did with my dad, about how happy I was, until my brother interrupted me with a staid tone and told me that I needed to just calm down. He told me that I was starting to get too full of myself and that the way people will respect you the most is by being silent and humble. This rung with me. It became very important for me that if someone asked, I would not turn it into a big deal. He insisted that if I made it look easy then I would feel even more proud. Amidst my banter with my brother, Father Wallace peeked outside his office door to see who was talking. I hung up the phone and sat down in Father Wallace’s office chair. He conveniently asked how my organ lesson was and I said simply that I am going to play the nine o’clock prelude tomorrow. His response was terse – “excellent.”

The next morning, I sat down at the organ to practice before the service, feeling a little overwhelmed. I put my hands on the swell and pressed the first piston to see what it sounded like. It sounded perfect for the poco allegretto I was playing. The stop that I pulled out was the “viole de gamba” that the pedals were coupled to and in the pedals there was an extra sixteen-foot bourdon that sounded good. As I moved my foot to the swell box, I put my hands down on the keys.

I noticed a few small mistakes so I decided to do it again. As I moved my foot to the swell box again my toe accidentally nicked the general 12 pedal piston, unleashing all of the most powerful stops and leaving a roar echoing through the church. Even the 32 ft. Bombarde was pulled. Soon the clock hit 8:40 so I had to get off the bench.

The feeling before a performance is one of the most exciting and thrilling experiences one can ever go through. Performance is like going into combat. You cannot fully prepare for what you experience during a live performance. You just have to trust your training and use your instinct. Before I knew it, my 15-minute buffer was up and I had to play. Nothing is more nerve racking than knowing your performance is being webcast, live, all over the world.

Once I laid down that first G major broken chord, all of the nerves went away. I had fun with it, opening up the swell box and seeing the shutters open and close. I really just felt in control of the room. I had everyone’s eyes and ears. I realized again why I loved the organ. Organists control a massive instrument that is capable of imitating other instruments like a mix board. Not many people today play organ either so you feel like you are part of a small community, especially of people your age. At the last chord, I felt for that G and gently pressed it with my foot.

My pride in the performance did not resonate with me until weeks later when I was mentioned in the Choir School Newsletter as “the organist.” I felt a deep understanding of what Mr. Sheen and Mr. Buzard did, and I fell in love with it. I am still thankful for the opportunity that Saint Thomas has provided me. My whole musical training, theory and discipline, prepared me for this incredible opportunity.

*Samuel Long ’13 looks back on Gerre Hancock’s memorial service and legacy. “Boys, I have some very unfortunate news to tell you. Dr. Hancock had a heart attack today and he has passed away.” All of the boys looked back at Dr. Scott, not knowing what to say, their smiles fading from their faces.

Although I didn’t know Dr. Hancock personally, I knew that he had changed the fate of the church and choir school. Dr. Scott, in a rehearsal a few days before the memorial service, reminded us that not only did he serve our church for 33 years from 1971-2004, but he had revived the choir school and church. He went above and beyond what his duties as Director of Music required him to do: he made the first Saint Thomas choir recordings, revived the weekday evensongs with the help of the Rector at the time, John Andrew, and he took part in the decision to let boys below grade 5 enter the school.

The day of the memorial service arrived, just a normal, cold, dark, winter Saturday. We would sing a requiem by Duruflé, an anthem by Harris, and an arrangement of “Deep River” by Hancock himself. As we arrived and I walked through the parish...
house, I noticed that solemn expressions filled people's faces, and tears poured out from their eyes. I recall Dr. Scott telling us to strive for perfection because Gerre Hancock deserved nothing less.

The sermons by Father Mead and Father Andrews created vivid images of their lives with Hancock. For example, on a Christmas Eve service, Dr. Hancock started playing the wrong Christmas hymn, and when Father Mead informed him of his mistake, he fixed it by creating what would become his famous Christmas improvisation, segueing through multiple Christmas hymns before ultimately landing on the correct tune, “O Come, All Ye Faithful.” Father Mead also recounted how, in 1971 when the church needed to search for another choirmaster, it was likely that the Choir School would close. When Dr. Hancock heard this news, he said that he would never let any choir go without a Director of Music and that he would happily accept the post and do what he could to keep the school open. Upon his arrival, he found out that the new rector, John Andrew, wanted not only to keep the school open, but also to elongate the choral schedule and add more services to extend the Saint Thomas tradition. These moments made me wish I had gotten to know him and made me wish I'd gotten the chance to sing under his direction.

When it came to the singing of “Deep River,” the sound of the choir put everyone into tears as we bade farewell to our servant Gerre Hancock, who as the piece says, crossed over the river in hope of the Promised Land and perpetual peace. For the final hymn and our procession out of the church, we sang the classic Saint Thomas hymn, “Come Labor On,” by our own T. Tertius Noble, whose vision of the Choir School Dr. Hancock helped fulfill. The hymn felt different than when we sing it at graduation, yet both occasions involved saying goodbye. To this day, I thank Dr. Hancock for his devotion to Saint Thomas, for giving all of us choristers – those who knew him and those who didn’t – the chance to follow down a path many others have followed.

CENTENNIAL EVENTS

As this newsletter reaches your mailboxes, Centenary celebrations will be well under way. In addition to the alumni lunch at the Choir School on Founders’ Day itself, we have been thrilled to welcome alumni back at Sunday evensongs to preach in the pulpit and to play the Miller-Scott organ. Our first guest preacher was the Reverend David Cobb, PA ’01 ’03 on March 3 (see page 10 for highlights), and he was followed by the Reverend Geoff Simpson ’78 on March 10, the Reverend Sean Mullen ’81 on March 24, the Right Reverend William Stokes ’71 on March 31, and the Reverend R-J Heijmen ’90. What a gift the Choir School has given the church in educating these young men who returned as priests! You can read and also listen to these sermons by visiting the church website (www.SaintThomasChurch.org) and clicking on the appropriate date in the calendar tab. The four young alumni who gave the Founders’ Day organ recital – Dylan Cranston ’17, Augustine Segger ’15, Luca Cantone ’15 and Samuel Long ’13 (see page 8) – were followed by Virginia Bolena, PA ’20 on March 10, Dr. Dana Marsh ’79 on March 17, Edward Landin ’02 on March 24, Erik Suter PA ’16 on March 31, and Julian Wachner ’83 on April 7.

Please see the back page for more events upcoming this year.

GIVING

Many of you have made gifts to the Choir School since the publication of the 2018 Summer/Fall Newsletter. Thank you very much – we are deeply appreciative of each contribution received throughout the year from generous alumni, alumni parents, parishioners and friends. These donations are critical to the school's ability to advance its mission. All contributions made since June 30, 2018 will be listed in the 2019 Summer/Fall Newsletter as gifts are not recorded in this issue. If you have any questions, please contact Ann Hall Kaplan aakaplan@SaintThomasChurch.org.
In addition to his role as a Gentleman of the Choir, Nathan Fletcher ’07 continues to work part-time as an editorial assistant at Boosey & Hawkes, a classical music publishing house. In November 2018, his 20-minute chamber opera originally commissioned by the Kennedy Center was staged again by Hartford Opera Theater. His recent opera-film, Someone Like Me (The Facebook Opera), has surpassed 6,000 views on YouTube and has won a number of accolades, including Best Musical at the 2018 Orlando Film Festival. His next opera-film, Rumspringawakening, will be out on YouTube soon (www.nathanfletchermusic.com).

After a year of chaplain residency at Mount Sinai Hospital, Zachary Fletcher ’07 will move to New York-Presbyterian Hospital for a second residency starting in August 2019. He continues to sing in the choirs of Saint Ignatius of Antioch and Calvary-St. George’s.

James Schreppler ’09, lives in Seattle and works for Microsoft doing software engineering of “the cloud.” In his freetime, he sings barbershop with the Northwest Sound Men’s Chorus in Bellevue, Washington, and this summer they will be going to Salt Lake City, UT for the Barbershop Harmony Society international convention and competition.

Daniel DeVeau ’10 graduated from Duke last spring and is now working as an engineer in Reston, VA. He tells us this is the first time he has not been in a choir since coming to Saint Thomas. Hopefully a local choir will snatch him up soon!

Julian Turner ’10 graduated in 2018 from American University, where he studied business and entertainment. Julian is currently living in Manhattan and working at a talent agency.

Calvin Wentling ’10 has been doing various jobs around the Choir School this term, from teaching Music Theory lessons to assisting with sports. It’s been wonderful having him around!

Olajuwon Osinaike ’13 is a sophomore at Wartburg College in Waverly, IA, where he has an academic and choral scholarship. He is majoring in Public Health and Psychology while singing with the Castle Singers.

Richard Pittsinger ’13 continues his studies at Juilliard, and this summer his musical pursuits will take him to Versailles, France and Athens, Greece.

This March, Kidron Kollin ’15 and Bobby Zahorsky ’18 sang evensong at Selwyn College, Cambridge under Sarah MacDonald as part of a school choir tour that also took them to Winchester and Romsey Abbey. Bobby and Kidron are both attending Episcopal High School, and Kidron will graduate this June.
Upcoming Dates

2019
Saturday, June 8 • 11am
100th Commencement Ceremonies: Prize Day

July 20-28, 2019
Saint Thomas Girl Chorister Course

September 5, 2019
101st Academic School Year Begins

Thursday, November 7 • 7:30pm
Thursday-Sunday, November 7-10
Saint Thomas Choir School Centennial Concert: Featuring the music of Rachmaninov, Noble, and Paulus

For more information please visit our website at www.choirschool.org

Call Susan Hill at 646.568.6464 or email alumni@choirschool.org