SAINT THOMAS CHOIR SCHOOL

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

HEAD OF SCHOOL

START DATE: JULY 2021

CHOIRSCHOOL.ORG
Mission

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.

OVERVIEW

Saint Thomas Choir School is a unique boarding school for boys in grades 3-8. Founded in 1919, the school, located in the heart of New York City, is one of three of its kind in the world, and the only one in the United States.

All students sing as treble choristers in the renowned Saint Thomas Choir of Men and Boys, a choir representing the Anglican choral tradition in this country with its raison d’être of singing five choral services each week in Saint Thomas Church. The school combines one of the most varied and demanding musical programs in the world with a robust academic curriculum, interscholastic sports, and fine arts education all within a familial community just steps from Central Park, Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, and The Museum of Modern Art.

The new Head of School will succeed Amalia Francisco who is currently serving as Interim Head of School. The school seeks a leader who will embody and advocate for the unique mission of the Choir School, cherish its close relationship with Saint Thomas Church, has a passion for excellence, and has the capacity to propel the school forward.

SCHOOL HISTORY

Saint Thomas Choir School was founded in 1919 at the request of Dr. T. Tertius Noble, organist and choirmaster of Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue. Dr. Noble had previously been the organist and choirmaster at York Minster in England, where his boy singers were students at their choir school.
When the Rector and Vestry of Saint Thomas called Dr. Noble to New York in 1913, Dr. Noble accepted the position with the understanding that a Choir School would be necessary to achieve the musical standard desired for the parish. A new school opened in 1919 on 55th Street with 21 boys. The school remained at that site, with periodic renovations and additions, until 1987, when it relocated to its current location, a purpose-built 15-story building on 58th Street that houses the choristers, full-time faculty, school and church staff, and most of the clergy of the parish. In 2009, the school expanded to include third grade. It currently nurtures and educates 30 boys from grades three through eight, with an ideal enrollment of 35.

**The School**

The Choir School has rolling admissions, and any musically gifted boy who likes music is encouraged to apply regardless of previous training or experience. Additionally, because the school needs adequate time to train a boy’s voice prior to changing, its only entry years are grades 3-5. Class enrollment is built up over the course of those three years. Over the past three years, the school has averaged 10.3 applications per year, has increased enrollment by 9% per year, and has an average of 87% yield.

Of note is the small student body (with a target enrollment of 35 students) and rigorous application process, which is composed of an initial audition (vocal evaluation), followed by a call-back audition entailing academic testing, a more formal audition (voice and instrument plus ear testing), and a two-night stay at the school during which the applicant participates in all aspects of the school, including dorm life.

**Fast Facts**

- Total students: 30
- Students of color: 53%
- Total faculty: 10 FT, 5 PT
- Faculty of color: 7%
- Faculty holding advanced degrees: 10
- Student/teacher ratio: 2:1
- Annual operating budget for current school year: $2.8 million
- Students receiving financial aid: 90%
The school is accredited by the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) and the New York State Association of Independent Schools (NYSAIS).

**THE CHURCH**

Saint Thomas Church is an Episcopal parish in the Diocese of New York. Founded in 1823, the current 1913 church building was designed by Ralph Adams Cram and Bertram Goodhue. Considered one of the finest gothic church buildings in North America, its Fifth Avenue doors are open every day of the year. Saint Thomas draws many visitors each day in addition to worshippers and concertgoers. In 2018, a $12 million organ project was completed.

As the parish approaches its bicentenary, it has recently completed a major strategic-planning project, with the first in-depth period of self-study the parish and Choir School has undertaken in many years. The mission of Saint Thomas Church is “to worship, love, and serve our Lord Jesus Christ through the Anglican tradition and our unique choral heritage.” Thus, the school’s mission is closely aligned with that of the parish and financially dependent upon it.

The Head of School works closely with the Rector and the Director of Music and, with the Office of Institutional Advancement, shares in fundraising initiatives.
ACADEMICS

Learning at the Choir School is active, participatory, and personal, and the academics are as stellar as the school’s rigorous music program. Students learn to think analytically, write effectively, persevere, and solve problems. Through it all, they obtain the skills to become world-class at whatever they do.

The Choir School’s individualized academic support offers each student multiple pathways to develop academic confidence in pursuit of fulfilling their potential. Thanks to small class sizes, teachers differentiate classroom strategies and curricula for each year’s set of students. The faculty closely monitors students’ progress and works collaboratively on solutions to help each student succeed. Each teacher is a department of one, and the Head of School works closely with the Director of Studies to oversee and provide support for the faculty and the academic program of the school.

The majority of graduates go on to competitive boarding schools, often with significant financial aid packages, prepared to succeed in high school and beyond.

High School Acceptances

Some of the boarding high schools accepting Saint Thomas graduates in the last five years:

Avon Old Farms, Connecticut
Cate School, California
Choate Rosemary Hall, Connecticut
Christ School, North Carolina
Church Farm School, Pennsylvania
Concord Academy, Massachusetts
Cranbrook Schools, Michigan
Episcopal High School, Virginia
Groton School, Massachusetts
The Gunnery School, Connecticut
The Hill School, Pennsylvania
Hotchkiss School, Connecticut
Kent School, Connecticut
Loomis Chaffee School, Connecticut
McCallie School, Tennessee
Millbrook School, New York
Milton Academy, Massachusetts
Phillips Exeter Academy, New Hampshire
Portsmouth Abbey School, Rhode Island
Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School, Georgia
Saint James School, Maryland
St. Albans School, DC
St. Andrew’s School, Delaware
St. Stephen’s School, Austin, Texas
South Kent School, Connecticut
Taft School, Connecticut
Trinity-Pawling School, New York
Woodberry Forest School, Virginia
Wyoming Seminary, Pennsylvania
Third and Fourth Grade
The Choir School experience generally begins in third or fourth grade. The curriculum for these new students helps them make a smooth transition into the residential community. The academic focus in the third and fourth grade classroom is on comprehension through active listening and reading, collaboration in the shared pursuit of knowledge, and the communication of that knowledge through clear and well-constructed verbal presentations and written compositions.

Boys in third and fourth grades have classes in English, history, mathematics, French, theology, technology, health, social justice, physical education, and art. Their music curriculum is extensive and includes music theory, individual voice and instrument lessons, and choir.

Fifth through Eighth Grade
Students at this level have opportunities and responsibilities that broaden their view of themselves, their futures, and the world. Students are encouraged to take ownership of their own learning, and small classes continue to ensure that the individual interests and learning style of each student are understood and appreciated.

The academic program is student-centered in its approach, promoting the 21st century skills of communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity. Students take coursework in English, history, mathematics, science, Latin, French, art, health, social justice, music theory, and physical education.

The Choir School devotes considerable time and attention to helping every boy find a high school that will fit their needs. Graduates attend a wide range of schools, including independent day and boarding schools, parochial schools, and public schools. Over the last five years, approximately 65% of graduates have attended independent boarding schools for high school, 15% have attended public schools, 10% have attended independent day schools, and 10% have attended parochial schools.
Music

The Saint Thomas Choir of Men and Boys is considered to be the leading ensemble of its kind in the Anglican choral tradition in the country. Its primary raison d'être is to sing five choral services each week, two on Sunday and three on weekdays. In addition, the Choir sings at a very full observance of Holy Week and, in December, continues singing through Christmas Day. This is unlike any school in the United States and the life of the Choir affects the lives of students' families. The Gentlemen of the Saint Thomas Choir are professional singers, and the choristers perform regularly with professional orchestras and soloists as part of the Saint Thomas Church concert series.

The Choir has toured throughout the U.S., Europe, and Scandinavia with performances at Westminster Abbey and St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, King's College, Cambridge, Windsor, Edinburgh, St. Albans, the Aldeburgh Festival, and the Vatican. Domestically, the Choir most recently toured the Southeastern U.S and featured at the National AGO Convention in Houston, Texas. The Choir has made many commercial recordings over the past three decades, and was prolific under former Director of Music, John Scott. Most recently the Choir has recorded for SIGNUM records (to be released in late 2020) and has appeared over the years with musical celebrities such as Leonard Bernstein, Sir Simon Rattle and Sting.

The Choristers make frequent appearances on local and national television programs, such as the TODAY program, and on classical music radio stations. They sang with Sting at the tree lighting ceremony in Rockefeller Center in 2015 and, at Christmas 2019, they were invited to be the opening act of the Radio City Christmas Spectacular.

In addition to their rich education in choral music through their 20 hours a week of choir rehearsals, services, and concerts, the boys deepen their musical knowledge and skills with weekly instrumental
and voice lessons as well as music theory classes. Boys perform vocal and instrumental recitals throughout the year, and take the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music examinations in the spring. Through the daily singing of liturgical music within the context of a professional choir, the boys absorb the beauty and aspirational quality of Saint Thomas’ worship. Through singing the poetry and music of 600 years, young hearts, minds, and voices can also be made aware of multitudes of those gone before us.

**SOCIAL JUSTICE**

All students take part in a weekly Social Justice class that is co-taught and co-planned by the entire full-time faculty. This course—which includes a heavily experiential component—seeks to give boys a space to talk safely and think critically about the world around them, and helps provide structures for them to wrestle with difficult questions and realities. It complements the work being done by the school on an institutional level: given its socioeconomically, racially, and geographically diverse student body, and its commitment to meeting 100% of the need demonstrated by families (full pay tuition is $16,500, and 90% of families receive financial aid on top of that), the school is committed both through its program and through its structure to the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

**PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND ATHLETICS**

The physical education program at Saint Thomas is designed to provide an introduction to a variety of skill sets across multiple athletic platforms. Equally important to the philosophy of athletics at Saint
Thomas are the lessons and values which are instilled in the students through their participation in competitive sport, such as sportsmanship, teamwork, and self-confidence.

Physical education classes and sports periods provide students with a safe environment in which to develop the necessary physical skills to be athletically competent and efficient, while staying focused on the principles of teamwork, respect, and perseverance. By the time the boys are in fifth grade, they begin to compete in interscholastic athletic competitions against other New York City schools in basketball and soccer, and to participate in school-wide competitions in softball and track. Graduates have gone on to participate in a variety of junior varsity and varsity interscholastic sports teams in high school and college.

ADVISING

The advisor program at Saint Thomas provides a special, extra-curricular link between students and faculty members. Each class is assigned to a team of faculty advisors who offer guidance and insight.

Advisor groups meet weekly to discuss the days ahead and to improve skills such as study strategies and assignment planning. The groups also plan their own parties during Christmas season and at the end of the school year. The Choir School is already a familial environment, and the advisor program establishes a deeper relationship in which the students always have an advocate and personal mentor throughout their time at Saint Thomas. Advisors also serve as the primary contacts for parents, along with the houseparents, regarding how their sons are doing academically and socially.
The boarding experience is central at Saint Thomas. Boys develop deep bonds through numerous shared experiences: family-style meals, sports, summer camp, an annual ski trip, and a capstone eighth grade trip, to name a few. The program teaches boys to be resilient and helps them learn practical social skills in a nurturing environment. Boys in grade three have a five-day boarding program, while the program for boys in grades four through eight is seven days.

Boarding school life begins in the dorms. The boys live on three floors of the school building where they are connected by an open style architecture which supports conversation and community. While some older boys enjoy the privilege of having their own private room, most students have a roommate. Roommates are thoughtfully arranged by the housemothers in consultation with other staff members. Boys are welcome to personalize their space and make it feel like their own.

Housemothers supervise the dorms both day and night and are easily accessible because their apartments are located on the dorm floors. The housemothers wake the boys up each morning, and put them to bed at night, with the help of the staff members on duty. The housemothers work closely with the Head of School to oversee the residential life of the school and student wellbeing.

The close-knit community gathers together throughout the day for meals in the Dining Room, meetings in the classrooms, and mayhem in the Rec Room. Through these communal moments and experiences, the boys and the residential staff bond together in their shared home.
CAMPUS

Saint Thomas Choir School is located in midtown Manhattan. The 15-story, 55,000 square-foot building was purpose built for the school in 1987 and has undergone major renovations within the last decade. It houses the boys, faculty, staff, priests, and organists.

The school building boasts a full gymnasium, a dedicated choir rehearsal space, a recreation room complete with ping pong and foosball tables, a spacious dining room, nine classrooms, five soundproof practice rooms, 11 grand and six upright pianos, a two-story library, 17 dorm rooms, a small chapel, and faculty apartments for all of the full-time school staff and a number of church staff.

One block south of Central Park, the campus provides easy access to a variety of open spaces for the boys to run and play, fields for sports practice, and a large playground. The school is around the corner from Carnegie Hall, and a quick walk to Lincoln Center, Times Square, and the Broadway theaters.

The Choir School is also easy to reach by public transportation: the school is one block away from the Columbus Circle subway station and on the same block as the 57th Street-7th Avenue subway station. New York City airports and train stations can easily be reached by subway, bus, or taxi from the school.
New York, New York

New York City, with an estimated population over 8.3 million, is the most populous city in the United States and boasts a land area of approximately 300 square miles. Situated on a massive natural harbor, New York City today consists of five boroughs, each of which is a separate county of the State of New York. At its core, New York is an international city; it was once the primary gateway for immigration into the United States and current estimates suggest that hundreds of languages are spoken in New York, making it one of the most linguistically diverse cities in the world.

Any resident or visitor will attest that the attractions offered by New York City are, quite literally, unparalleled. The City offers stunning views from the Top of the Rock, the Empire State Building, and One World Observatory. For those who prefer to keep sightseeing at ground-level, the City has an ever-changing rotation of shows and a breathtaking range of permanent exhibits at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the American Museum of Natural History, the Brooklyn Museum, and New York Hall of Science (the list goes on!), as well as at countless small-scale galleries. Additionally, adults and children alike can enjoy thrilling performances on Broadway, and at Lincoln Center, Brooklyn Academy of Music, and Barclays Center, among other venues.

Opportunities and Challenges

The next Head of School will be asked to lead this unique and strong school in addressing a set of complex issues that will position Saint Thomas for continued success. Among the top priorities:

- In light of the consequences of the pandemic, ongoing work will need to be done on revising budgets, reallocating spaces, and putting in place the safeguards that will ensure the safety of students and staff in the boarding environment.
• Work with the Choir School Committee and the Vestry of Saint Thomas Church in articulating and implementing a revised governance structure that supports the school’s mission and provides for a governing body that is increasingly independent of the Vestry while valuing the important relationship between the church and the school.
• Leverage the many benefits associated with being located in New York City; this would include establishing partnerships with other cultural and artistic organizations and highlighting the musical accomplishments of the school. These efforts would benefit admissions and fundraising.
• Be the strong, external voice of the school to raise the school’s profile and continue to be an accessible and kind presence in all aspects of the life of the school.
• Attract, retain, and support an outstanding faculty in order to continue to offer a rigorous academic program that prepares graduates for entrance into the most selective secondary schools.
• Work in partnership with the Rector, Director of Music, and Office of Institutional Advancement to play an active role in the life of the entire institution, particularly in the area of fund-raising.

**Desired Qualities and Qualifications**

In order to successfully address the school’s priorities, it is important that the next Head of School possess the following attributes:

• Be an experienced leader able to support and direct the academically rigorous program that is so highly valued by the school community.
• Be able to embrace the spiritual, moral, and ethical teachings and traditions of the school.
• Demonstrate a commitment to the arts with a particular appreciation for the Anglican boy choir tradition.
• Be a strong, clear communicator dedicated to creating and maintaining strong relations with students, teachers, parents, alumni, and the broader church community.
• In meeting the mission of the school, always act to ensure that the health and well-being of the boys is the highest priority.
• Possess the maturity and collaborative skills needed to work in an environment that has the highest academic and performing standards.
• Be committed to the ethos of a church boarding school in the Episcopal tradition and ensure that the religious education is both broad and nurturing.

**To Apply**

Interested and qualified candidates should submit electronically in one email and as separate documents (preferably PDFs) the following materials:

• A cover letter expressing their interest in this particular position;
• A current résumé;
• A one-page statement of educational philosophy and practice;
• One other writing sample (letter to parents, published article, newsletter);
• A list of five professional references with name, phone number, and email address of each (references will not be contacted without the candidate’s permission) to:

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