

Let the children sing
By Stephen Snyder, Times Staff Writer
KEN KOONS/STAFF PHOTO

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Members of the Children's Chorus of Carroll County rehearse Handel's "Messiah" with the Masterworks Chorale Society at McDaniel College.

When Diane W. Jones started the Children's Chorus of Carroll County with another teacher in 1986, no one had any idea how big it would become.

"We jumped in not really knowing what we were doing," said Jones recently.

But over the years, the chorus has grown from one performing group to four, and has sung on stage at Carnegie Hall, at the White House and all across Carroll County and Maryland.

This season, the chorus will perform at the Estonian House in Baltimore this month and at the Heritage Festival in Philadelphia in April, before setting off on its first international trip - to Estonia, Finland and Sweden in July.

"I think it's going to open up their perspective on the world," said Jones.

The idea to travel to Estonia came about after Jones helped bring the Estonian Television Girl Choir to Westminster in February. Jones heard about the group from the American Choral Directors Association.

After the girl choir performed, Tom Beyard, director of planning and public works for the city, suggested that Jones take her group to Westminster's sister city in Estonia, Paide.

"I had already been thinking about that," said Jones.

For the trip, Jones assembled a new traveling chorus, Voce Viaggio, composed of 24 auditioned members from the middle school group. In July, the children and their parents will go to the capital of Estonia, Tallinn, traveling from there to Paide and other cities in the country.

"We're going to meeting mayors and national dignitaries," said Jones. "We'll also be singing in a medieval castle."

For many of the children, it will be their first time overseas.

"I think maybe one child has gone to Hawaii," said Jones. "A lot have not traveled at all."

Jones grew up in Hampstead before attending college in New York. After teaching in the state for a few years, she moved back to Carroll and began teaching music in Carroll County public schools. She and another teacher, Idalea Rubin, realized the need for a group where the best singers from each school could sing together.

"We were concerned because the children who loved to sing had no consistent way to do that," said Jones.

Holly Kennedy, a music teacher at Freedom Elementary School, joined the chorus as a co-director 12 years ago. She directs the two elementary school groups - Les Petites Voix, for grades 2 and 3, and Il Choro Della Bella Voce, for grades 4 and 5.

"It really expands upon what they get at school," said Kennedy about the chorus. "The kids can get to know other children who share a love of music and are talented like they are."

The all-auditioned chorus regularly attracts between 100 and 120 members each year, said Jones. Besides traveling, the chorus also makes a point of performing with many adult singing groups in the county.

On Sunday, the chorus will perform with the Masterworks Chorale of Carroll County. In the past, the group has performed with the McDaniel College Choir and the Old Line Statesmen Barbershop Chorus.

"It's really important to promote singing through all generations," said Margaret Boudreaux, director of the college choir and the Masterworks Chorale.

Boudreaux said she is impressed with how Jones exposes her children to adult choirs.

"I went to the Children's Chorus concert and it included the Old Line Statesmen. I thought that was really exciting," said Boudreaux. "She did that especially to encourage her boys."

Young boys, Boudreaux explained, are less likely than girls to continue singing into adulthood because of their voices changing in puberty.

Jones said she has the chorus perform with adult groups so that her children can hear what they can sound like when they're older.

"The little boys will hear men singing and know that they will sing like that one day," said Jones.

The Masterworks Chorale will also perform at the Children's Chorus concert on Dec. 14. For the concert on Sunday, the Children's Chorus will help the Masterworks Chorale perform selections from Handel's "Messiah."

Kennedy said that audience members are often surprised at the sophistication of music performed by the Children's Chorus.

"They're very surprised how focused [the children] can be," said Kennedy. "The sound they create is a very unique sound, a very beautiful sound."

She also said that children's voices are something people particularly like to hear during this time of year.

"Child voices, especially during the holidays," she said, "are meaningful for people."

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Winter Celebration

The Children's Chorus of Carroll County presents "Winter Celebration" at 3 p.m. Dec. 14 in Baker Memorial Chapel on the campus of McDaniel College at 2 College Hill in Westminster.

"Les Petites Voix," children in grades 2 and 3, will perform "As I Sat On a Sunny Bank," a traditional English composition, "Mrs. Jenny Wren" by Arthur Baynon, "December's Rose," by Michael Coghian, "S'Vivon," a traditional Hebrew composition, and "Winter Fantasy" by Jill Gallina.

"Il Choro Della Bella Voce," grades 4 and 5, will perform "Hand Me Down My Silver Trumpet," a spiritual arranged by Jean Asworth Bartle, "Good King Wenceslas," arranged by Earlene Pentz, "Bring a Torch, Jeannette, Isabelle," a French carol, "Hinei Mah Tov" by Robert Starer, "The Birds" by Benjamin Britten and "Jazzy Old St. Nick," arranged by Ruth Artman.

"Cantare Bel Canto," children in middle school, will perform "Dormi, Dormi" by Mary Goetze, "Hannerot Halalu" by Baruch Cohan, "Mid-Winter" by Bob Chilcott, and a swinging version of Jingle Bells titled "Dashing Through the Snow," arranged by John Leavitt.

The Blue Ridge Quintet, a brass quintet under the direction of Jeffrey Hiner will accompany the singers on some selections and will also be featured on the concert. The finale will feature "Cantare Bel Canto," the Masterworks Chorale of Carroll County, and the brass quintet under the direction of Margaret Boudreaux for a performance of Handel's "For Unto Us a Child is Born" and the "Hallelujah" chorus from the "Messiah."

A free-will offering will be taken. For more visit the Web site at c4notes.com.