

Garden of Voices:
An Ethnography of the Xi'an Concert Hall Children's Choir

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Abstract

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The purpose of this dissertation is to discuss an in-depth exploration of the societal value and significance of the Xi'an Concert Hall Children's Choir in Xi'an China. This study involved exploring the importance and value of the choir by conducting interviews, meetings, and observations, with choir staff, members, and parents. Secondly, I conducted an analysis of practice procedures, instruction in music theory, performance, and repertoire. In addition, I assess value added through the choir's audition process. Finally, the research through a process of ethnographic inquiry, looked more closely at the performance and developmental aspects of the choir, including its concert preparatory procedures, collaborations with diverse organizations, regular performances, and numerous planned events. It became abundantly clear that the choir is actively engaged in endeavors to foster choir members' growth and extend its impact on the development of individuals, families, and the broader society.

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Chapter I: Introduction

In the winter of 2019, I began a new musical journey with the Xi'an Concert Hall Children's Choir (XCHCC). I have always been deeply interested in children's choirs, and the XCHCC has become a special place for me—one that not only raises many questions but also offers great potential for my growth as a music educator and a choral conductor. It has been of great interest to Chinese musicians and the public in South Korea and China that I, a Korean, am making music with a children's choir as their conductor in Xi'an, a historic city in China that once served as a capital of twelve Chinese dynasties spanning 1,500 years.

When I rehearse with the children's choir, I rarely feel tired and lose track of time because I am so passionately immersed in the process. This past January, we had our dress rehearsal one week before the Chinese New Year's performance. Although the children might have felt fatigued, they joyfully jumped during recess. The teachers tried to quiet them down, but it was hard to control the energetic gestures and facial expressions of the children, who looked forward to meeting their friends once a week. They gathered in groups of three to five at recess, with some students singing while others caught up on their assignments. The children do their best whether they sing or play. The practice began again, and before long, sweat broke out on the bridges of their noses and on their foreheads, and their cheeks turned red despite the heater having been turned off to ensure their throats did not become dry as they practiced for many hours. The children learned each pronunciation and note wholeheartedly and sang with their eyes shining. Outside in the concert hall's hallway, parents sat on benches while talking with each other. Sounds of laughter were heard occasionally while others quietly read books. They waited for their children for three long hours. Some families of the choir children came out with all their members while other families came with the children's grandparents. Even the choir members' younger siblings, seated in their strollers, cheered on their older brothers and sisters. They even reminded me of

the many families I saw while studying in the United States cheering on their favorite teams in the football stadium. The hallway of the concert hall was filled with the sounds of the laughter of the families and with expectations for the concert next week. As their practice ended, choir staff came out and gave instructions on the dress rehearsal schedule and attire while parents and children listened intently. The choir members and their families headed home, making promises to see one another at the last dress rehearsal. Several girls pulled and pushed while holding hands because they did not want to part ways. With everyone gone, questions dawned on me suddenly in the quiet practice room: What makes them sing? What is leading this community? What is it that brings them back here?

When I first joined XCHCC as the artistic director four years ago, I led many changes, which of course, attracted some negative perspectives. Another conductor working with XCHCC advised me, “Conductors should focus on the musical growth of the choir and hold stricter auditions to select only the best singers.” Some other choir directors might agree with this sentiment. However, my goal was not to create an elite choir for a select few but to build a choral community that provides opportunities for more students, where diversity is embraced and differences are accepted. Moreover, the approaches I pursued may have seemed like a waste of time to conductors accustomed to traditional teaching methods. This was likely because I sought to focus on more fundamental, albeit less musical, factors in building the choir. There were also constant questions regarding my choices of repertoire. Before I joined, XCHCC primarily performed traditional pieces and songs that expressed Chinese culture, so my selection of diverse genres, styles, and languages might have appeared strange and uncomfortable to them. These criticisms and curiosities prompted me to deeply reflect on the fundamental benefits that the choir possesses. Additionally, I became increasingly curious about whether my thoughts and efforts could positively impact students, parents, and society at large, which ultimately led me to write this dissertation.

Purpose of the Study

Choral participation has played a meaningful role not only in the singer's personal growth and development but also in social integration and harmony. Similarly, choral music contributed to social development and historical events. For these reasons, it can be conjectured that choral music and social development have closely interacted with each other and evolved together. In a broad sense, choirs go beyond simply learning singing and performing; they not only serve as channels of connection for individuals but also play an invaluable role and bear great responsibility for social and individual development. This dissertation seeks to investigate how the Xi'an Concert Hall Children's Choir contributes to this social responsibility and individual growth.

First, the researcher will study how choirs make an impact on society. The harmony choirs create is not simply for music; it also serves to connect, change, and elevate singers and audiences to a deeper level. It can be noted that the Xi'an Concert Hall Children's Choir, as an important local performing group, has evolved in response to the needs and changes in society. This means that the choir hasn't simply functioned as a participant in social events. But it has become an integral part of societal dynamics. Thus, this study aims to understand the choir's more proactive role in fostering positive relationships within homes, society, or schools, and the processes through which changes occur. To accomplish this goal, this study will examine the Xi'an Children's Choir's connections with its audiences, choir members, and those associated with the choir. Moreover, it will examine how the choir has influenced social values and fostered personal development through its interactions with these constituents.

The second objective of this dissertation is to study and investigate the impact and strengths that choral activities provide to individuals. The researcher posits that children can enjoy diverse merits and benefits essential to personal growth through their choral activities.

Choir members can experience not only functional improvement in singing and technical skills, but they can also undergo growth in their social skills through teamwork, self-development, and self-control by participating in the choir. Moreover, students can develop broad and diverse perspectives by performing diverse repertoire, traveling, and participating in various outreach programs. The current research will explore how this personal growth is being realized through questionnaires and observations during choir rehearsals.

Lastly, this research will examine how choirs create and embody value. Additionally, the research will more specifically investigate how choirs create, embody, and grow value not only in choir rehearsals but also in various performances, specially designed programs, and educational programs. To achieve this goal, the researcher will examine the dynamics within the choir and collect members' thoughts through in-depth interviews.

The researcher has written this dissertation with a desire to see the Xi'an Concert Hall Children's Choir grow into an organization that breathes hope and inspiration into the residents of Xi'an, China, through its value-centered direction, its efforts to form solidarity with society, and authenticity in music. I trust that this research will give the Xi'an Concert Hall Children's Choir a chance to objectively evaluate itself, deepen its value, and make the choir a more valuable entity.

Survey of Literature

Numerous bodies of literature, such as dissertations, books, and articles, show the impact of choral music and choirs. One can identify the commonly found strengths and areas of caution in choral activities through these data. Differences, contradictions, and areas for improvement existing in the data can be further identified as well.

The qualitative research by Johnson (2022) argues that choral activities can be conducive to personal growth and connection with society. He observes that choirs provide

opportunities for self-development and connection with marginalized and impoverished individuals in society. A review of studies by Clift and Hancox (2010) and Smith (2015) demonstrates that choral activities play a significant role in reducing depression and anxiety. These studies further maintain that choral activities can contribute greatly to solving social problems beyond personal development. Through these studies, it can be confirmed that choral activities can be instrumental in personal well-being, welfare, and social integration.

Another study by Jackson and Smith (2019) also illustrates how choral activities provide good opportunities not merely to develop musical capabilities and gain exposure to stages but also for individuals to experience social responsibility and enhance social solidarity. Choir members meet many people and groups through music activities in the local community, becoming deeply connected with the community and experiencing the needs of society both directly and indirectly. These activities become an experience that elevates a sense of solidarity with members of the community, demonstrating that choirs become important social assets that can enhance social solidarity.

As shown in the study by Holland (2020) diverse people participate in choirs, representing various cultures. Through these cultural exchanges, choirs provide opportunities for social integration. Thus, choral activities can contribute to overcoming cultural differences and misunderstandings that a local community might have.

The study by Loewy, Patel & Kenny, and Denora & Ansdell et al. (1996) argues that music activities like those of choirs not only positively influence personal development and growth but also provide opportunities for self-respect. Through these opportunities, choir members experience not only the restoration and improvement of physical health but also an improvement in the quality of life. As a result, they are also provided with opportunities to proactively create and enjoy their own lives with confidence. These opportunities develop into essential life skills that contribute to an enhanced quality of life.

Similarly, the study by Lee and Kim (2002) maintains that choral activities are instrumental in fostering both adaptability and resilience in various situations for youths who may struggle to adapt well in society or at home. These studies directly show that choral activities serve as a driving force in their growth from teenagers to mature members of society and provide opportunities for such growth.

Based on these studies, the National Endowment for the Arts and the American Choral Directors Association emphasized the importance of choral education in 2020 and 2021, respectively, stating how important it is to provide high-quality choral education.

However, despite these studies, significant limits and gaps still exist in the literature. First, there are certain limits in these studies. As each of the above authors' research was conducted in specific regions and spaces, it is difficult to assert that all choirs and cultures will produce similar results. Consequently, diverse studies must be done in various regions and populations. Although these studies point to the positive impact of choral activities, clarifying causality remains challenging. Thus, more diverse studies can reinforce prior findings in consistent or unique ways.

Lastly, almost all data are related to the United States or the Western educational systems. Thus, this study will research how the roles of choirs in China. Through comparing similarities and differences, it can be also possible to broadly identify the impact of choral activities regardless of culture.

Need for Study

This study is an attempt to add the literature, as described above, through the lens of the Asian children's choral system. Particularly, the researcher intends to study how the Xi'an Concert Hall Choir collaborates with the local community, contributes to personal growth, and plays a leading role in establishing new values in choral music. Previous studies

have explored singers' well-being, psychological healing, or the correlation between choral participation and academic performance. However, there are few studies focused on the specific dynamics within individual choirs.

This research will also examine how art education and cultural diversity are being affected in Xi'an, China, through examining the impact of the XCHCC. The study will also demonstrate why we should continue to invest in art education and local art projects.

Thus, the researcher hopes to offer practical guidelines on how children mature through the choir and how this children's choir has a positive impact on the local community. Finally, the researcher desires that this research will lead to the development and advancement of more effective and practical choral programs.

Chapter II: Benefits of Choral Participation

The importance of participating in music ensembles has been studied by numerous researchers, most notably Adderley et al., 2003; Bartolome, 2013; Kokotsaki & Hallam, 2011; Schmidt, 2005. In these studies, innumerable themes appear as well.

Since choral singing does not require much music knowledge or proficient skills, unlike ensembles performed with instruments, its benefit is that access to a choir is open to everyone (Bailey & Davidson 2003, p. 19). The many benefits one can gain through choir activities are widely discussed (Barrett, 2007; Bartolome, 2010, 2018; Brown, 2012; Demorest, 2000, Jacob, Guptill & Sumsion, 2009; Joseph & Southcott, 2015; Kennedy, 2002; Phillips, 2004; Pitts 2005; Smith & Sataloff, 2013; Sweek, 2010). Studies have established that the benefits of choral activities extend beyond internal personal progress such as improvement in expression, restored confidence, recovery of health, diversification of

emotional expression, and spiritual growth, as well as improvement in sociality as well as academic performance (Bartolome, 2010; Parker, 2011; Varvarigou et al, 2012; Joseph & Southcott 2014). In this chapter, I will discuss the foundational benefits that can be expected by participating in choral singing.

Musical Benefits

People join a choir for various reasons. As we have already seen, a diversity of choirs exists in the world. For example, choirs such as Treble voice choirs, Tenor-Bass voice choirs, and children's choirs pursue varied repertoire specific to voice type; whereas choirs such as Baroque choirs, Renaissance ensembles, opera choruses, and church choirs focus on various styles and genre. Regardless of all these choir types, people find great delight and satisfaction in being able to gain new musical knowledge and experience (Buchanan, 1998). In addition to the singers, the primary interest many conductors take while conducting choirs is in the development of choir members' musical ability and understanding, which can be seen in the improvement of sight-reading, vocal, music interpretation, and understanding of harmony (Kennedy, 2002).

Hylton (1981) discovered six musical benefits of choral activities in the research he conducted with high school students. The participants reported that they had experienced musical growth, including enhanced musicianship, growth in musical knowledge, improvement in singing, and improved music listening skills. Also, the educational benefits of choral singing were recognized as a primary strength (Hylton, 1981, p. 296). Music knowledge and technical improvement one can gain through choral activities have already been verified through numerous research studies and the data they have gathered (Adderley et al., 2003; Chorus America, 2009; Hylton, 1981; Kennedy, 2002; Pitts, 2005).

Personal Benefits

Mental Health

Those who have been a part of a choir likely have experienced positive emotional changes through choral singing. Many choristers stated that they experienced an improvement in positive emotions such as joy, a sense of accomplishment, happiness, and confidence (Davis et al., 2002; Hills & Argyle, 1998; Willingham, 2005; Clift & Hancox, 2001; Durrant & Hilmonides, 1998). But, there was a difference in the sense of emotional accomplishment between amateur choristers and professional choristers. Interestingly, amateur choristers report experiencing a greater sense of emotional achievement compared to their professional counterparts. Both groups, however, reported that they had become more vibrant and energized through choral music, and at the same time, they noted that they had experienced more comfort and stress release (Grape et al., 2003). It can be said that the positive change in emotions through choral singing is brought about by the passion and joy experienced through choral singing.

One can understand how participation in choral music can enhance a sense of happiness and accomplishment through the research conducted by Barrett and Vermeulen (2019). One research participant explained:

Singing in this choir brings a lot of joy to my life. I can come to rehearsals every Tuesday and Thursday in a bad mood and go home feeling lighter and feel like I can take on the world again. (p. 42)

In another research study that was conducted on the influence of music on middle and high school students, students made the following remarks:

Music is awesome! That's what makes my world go around. (girl, age 13)

Music is an expression of the heart. (girl, age 15)

I love music. It's a way to express myself. (boy, age 14; Campbell et al., 2007, p. 228)

What we can understand through these remarks is that students as participants in music express their emotions and experience freedom and emotional release as a result. This discovery and expression of positive emotions is a benefit that musical activities provide. This also leads us to the potential and expectation that, through musical activities and participation, students can release the stress they experience from their studies, at home, and in their relationships with friends.

Taking this a step further, these research results show the therapeutic function of music. One boy related how he had experienced music's therapeutic role:

When I was 10 years old, I lost my parents. My sister and I had very little to call our own, but we had each other, and we had our music. We started playing with the school band, her the violin and me the drums. It gives us an outlet to express ourselves and something to focus on when we didn't have our parents, our friends, or people who understood us (Campbell et al., 2007, p. 229).

As this moving story shows, the role of music is expansive, and the comfort and strength music provides are limitless.

In her article on the Seattle Girls' Choir, Bartolome (2013) describes the emotional benefits of participating in choral activities. One of Seattle Girls' Choir members mentions that "I personally have learned how to express myself better. In choir, I've learned that through music I can let those emotions out" (p. 406). This example shows how the youth who participate in choirs are better able to cope with the emotional change they experience as adolescents and can more positively express their emotions. This is a very important strength of choral singing for adolescent students.

Furthermore, many reports show that choral activities have a positive impact on mental health. Data frequently shows that choral singing leads to improvement in psychological challenges and diseases such as a reduction in insecurity, anxiety, and worry.

For instance, singers describe in Moss et al. (2017) that “I have to sing – for my mental health – I’d just die without music!” and how “It has significantly improved my mental health, giving me more confidence and less anxiety” (p. 165). In fact, choral activities can have a positive impact on and be instrumental in helping people discover and strengthen themselves by helping them encounter themselves more deeply, discover their identity, and identify their limitations and strengths through music. Because of this, individuals are rewarded as they gain more respect for their own worth and enhance their self-esteem.

Health

Data shows that in addition to positive emotional changes, participants in music activities also experience benefits such as improved health and well-being. The health and healing various forms of art bring have been already mentioned (Horden, 2000; Weldin & Eagle, 1991; Gouk, 2000; Hargreaves & North, 1999; Lewis, 1998; Lewis & Hughes, 1997; McCraty et al., 1996; Panksepp, 1995; Savan, 1999; Waleson, 2000). As discussed, many choristers reported that they had experienced stress release and positive emotions through their participation. As a result, choral activities ultimately provide us with a healthy life. One singer, Katya, elaborates that:

If it was not for the choir, I would probably have a nervous breakdown. To have rehearsals on Tuesdays and Thursdays and to be able to break away from everything, from an exceptionally difficult day, and to come to choir and sing, has really “saved” me on numerous occasions (Barrent & Vermeulen, 2019, p. 43).

Choristers stated that stretching, abdominal breathing, and posture practice which they experienced in choral rehearsal and warming up had helped them positively. As a result, they could pursue a healthier life and experience well-being through choral singing (Bailey &

Davidson, 2002; Clift et al., 2010; Clift & Hancox, 2010; Gick, 2010; Grape et al., 2003; Jacob et al., 2009; Sanal & Gorsev, 2014; Valentine & Evans, 2001).

Hunter (1999) studied the American music magazine *The Etude* from 1891 until 1949 and discussed the historical correlation between singing and health:

I have been particularly impressed with the value of singing. It is not only a diversion and wholesome mental occupation, and on this account health-promoting, but is also excellent lung gymnastics and promotes not only breathing but circulation as well. It especially aids circulation through the liver, stomach, and other digestive organs, and so promotes digestion (p. 127).

Other studies have reported additional benefits such as increasing lung capacity, breathing improvement, strengthening the diaphragm, improving posture, stimulating the immune system, exercising the heart, and avoiding colds (Clift & Hancox, 2001, p. 252). A great deal of other data point to the strength of health improvement choral activities bring. For instance, Valentine & Evans (2001) report that “Compared to solo singing or swimming, choral singing reduces self-reported tension and increased hedonic tone” (p. 116). Kreuts et al. (2004) describe how “Compared to just listening to choral music, choral singing leads to increases in positive affect and secretory immunoglobulin” (p. 623). Singing is also helpful for Parkinson’s disease (Abell et al., 2016), chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (Morrison et al., 2013), irritable bowel syndrome (Grape et al., 2010), and pain (Hopper et al., 2016).

Discipline and Responsibility

Being part of a choir means belonging to an organization where one learns and adheres to its various responsibilities and expectations. In particular, the discipline and responsibility of the choir provide young children with opportunities for self-discipline. Research conducted with parents of choir members shows that students use choral activities

as an opportunity to train and develop themselves (Bridges, 1996). Parents like Bertha describe how:

There's a real focus on discipline, real respect. If you don't have that first, how can you organize that many young boys to do anything? And they perform like gentlemen, I don't know what happens behind closed doors when they practice, but they're disciplined as much as a military academy would do for kids (Bridges, 1996, p. 130).

What enables this is what "goes on behind closed doors" that is, the responsibility and expectations learned through the choir develop out of the relationships built in the choir, with the conductor, and the physical and emotional elements being discussed. This helps students exercise self-discipline and take responsibility not only at choir rehearsals but also at school and home. Another parent, Mary, indicates that:

Musically, he's gaining a lot, but it's much more than that; it's the discipline, and the responsibility because they require so much working at home—from the uniform they have to be responsible for wearing to the fact that he wants to work to make merits so if he forgets his belt and gets a demerit, he won't have to worry (Bridges, 1996, p. 134).

Choral activities help children to experience discipline and responsibility. The music they make together requires high levels of attention, which is a challenge for most children. Through practice, students learn how to treat and speak to fellow choristers, and their conductors, as well as how to express themselves through choir practices:

One of the beneficial community functions of organized peer groups is to socialize their members by exerting pressure to behave well. When the peer group enforces the community-held norms and goals, parents can turn over some disciplining to the peer group (Schlegel & Barry, 1991, p. 85).

This kind of discipline that is gained through choirs has been supported by various recent data and research (Adderley et al., 2003; Chorus America, 2009).

Another important benefit of choir activity is an improved sense of personal responsibility. In each rehearsal, students are required to manage their belongings like books, writing tools, music folders, and sheet music. At the time of performance, choir members are responsible for their performance attire, dress shoes, other attire, and tools, being punctual, and remembering meeting locations. Any parent or teacher recognizes that these kinds of requirements are a challenge, and yet the practice helps students discipline themselves significantly (Bridges, 1996, p. 135).

One can see easily how the discipline choir members develop can influence work and life outside of choirs. One report shows that students can better control themselves and manage their emotions through the discipline they acquired at their choirs. These parents describe:

It's made a tremendous difference. Howard has a temper, and it was totally out of control until he started the boy choir. He has learned a lot of self-discipline and self-control through the choir (Brenda).

That if you're organized and if you put your best effort forward, it's going to pay off (Terri).

The discipline for Brad has been the best thing. He doesn't know how it's changed him. I told a friend of mine at lunch that Brad is so different now than last year. I think a lot of it is boy choir (Peggy; Bridges, 1996, p.136).

A Sense of Accomplishment and Self-Confidence

Many choristers speak of a sense of accomplishment and self-confidence from choral singing. A sense of musical accomplishment and cooperation experienced through choir

practices, performances, and competitions and the subsequent growth of self-confidence can all be attributed to choral activities. Bartolome (2010) shows through her research with the Seattle Girls' Choir how choir members gain a sense of achievement and self-confidence through choral activities, as one singer reports "I can really accomplish something great through music. I'm at such a high level, and I have this great pride for what I've done. I guess that's what it means to me: self-accomplishment" (p. 162).

Young choristers will often look to older choristers as role models. Vocal coaches, conductors, and other members who sing well can become guides and help establish goals. Furthermore, the choir works toward musical expressions and creating beautiful sounds, and they will work hard to achieve this. The performance itself becomes a common goal for choir members, and the efforts to create a successful performance can bring about a great sense of accomplishment and improve self-confidence. It has been suggested that success within a self-identified area of importance can contribute positively to high levels of self-esteem and that "encouraging adolescent boys and girls to explore, to develop, and to take pride in their talents may be an appropriate means of increasing their self-esteem" (Denmark, 1999, p. 393). These and numerous other studies highlight the connection between music participation and a sense of accomplishment and self-confidence (Adderley et al., 2003; Chorus America, 2009; Hylton, 1981; Kennedy, 2002; Pitts, 2005).

Social Benefits

Social Belonging and the Importance of Teamwork

One of the greatest social benefits of choral activities is a sense of belonging. The solidarity and belonging individual choir members feel is reflected in various studies (Bailey & Davidson, 2002, 2003. Solidarity and cooperation (Anshel & Kipper, 1998; Cohen, 2005; Faulkner & Davidson, 2006) and relationship building with others through choral music

(Cohen, 2005; Stollack et al., 1991) are privileges one can enjoy through choral activities. Those who participate in choral singing often form new human relationships joyfully and make special and deep friendships with others (Blandford & Duarte, 2004; Buchanan, 1998). Not only do they spend time together in choirs, but they also share experiences outside of them (Clift & Hancox, 2001; Durrant & Hilmonides, 1998; Hylton, 1981). This relationship-building and development demonstrates clearly how people not only make beautiful music but also form and develop social relationships through choral singing (Faulkner & Davidson, 2006, p. 219). One chorister, Nkululeko, attests that:

For many choristers, participation in the choir gives them a sense of belonging, a distinct attribute, especially in a large university environment. Similar to the way in which a family provides a strong support structure, the singers feel that the choir environment embodies an open atmosphere of fellowship, togetherness, and connectivity, allowing spontaneity without fear of prejudice or judgment. Participants regard the choir as an extension of their personal families where they fit in and feel at home. As much as we disagree, we still care about each other. That sense of family is never lost, and we pass down this philosophy to new members (Barrett & Vermeulen, 2019, p. 46).

Though some members may think that solidarity with others is not necessary, many choristers state that the choir is their family (Barrett & Smigiel, 2007; Bartolome, 2010, 2013; Clift et al., 2010; Jacob et al., 2009; Joseph & Southcott, 2014; Kokotsaki & Hallam, 2011; Livesey et al., 2012; Tonneijck et al., 2008). These relationships are ones in which they can find comfort and support when going through difficult times in life (Barrett & Vermeulen, 2019, p. 47). Choir members form a special social relationship as they rehearse, perform, and travel together. For instance, interview responses from Moss et al. (2017) describe:

For me, the primary benefit is that it helps me be connected with other choir members and members of the church congregation.

The choir is a social 'equalizer.' Singing together connects people ... you can achieve a high when accomplishing things as a team ... My choir has been my extended family for almost 30 years now. It's really uplifting when we sing together and really enhances my life generally.

For me, the primary benefit is that it helps me be connected with other choir members and members of the church congregation (pp. 161).

Community Benefits

Community Enrichment

In many cases, choirs play a huge part in community development and change. In her dissertation, Bartolome (2010) reports convincingly on the status and value of the Seattle Girls' Choir in the city. Through the testimony of the choir's leaders, she observes that the choir is a leader in cultural development in the Puget Sound area (p. 58). For example, the Seattle Girls' Choir provides the citizens of Seattle with opportunities to listen to a high-level choral performance through their regular and special performances conducted in connection with various cultural groups (p. 58). Except for concerts when ticket purchases are required to attend performances, the choir performs *pro bono* in various places such as schools, hospitals, and libraries, and provides many citizens with opportunities to visit and enjoy performances easily. The Seattle Girls' Choir also plays an important role in exerting a good influence in places where help is needed to aid the needy or orphanages by holding benefit concerts for charity purposes. Such efforts in turn elevate the status of the choir in the area, and the influence of the choir is not limited to within the choir itself, but it can influence the broader society overall. Therefore, choirs play a vital role in community development by

fostering cultural engagement and social cohesion. They provide accessible opportunities for artistic expression and bring people together through shared musical experiences.

Ambassadorship

Choir members represent the community's culture and tradition in many cases outside of the community. As they travel to participate in choral conferences or competitions, and when they perform in other regions or countries, they represent their countries and serve the role of an ambassador, spreading their culture and tradition naturally. Choir members thus serve as a catalyst that connects one community of people with another, builds relationships, connections, and collaboration, and helps cultures understand each other in a more personal way. Conversely, choirs also serve as hosts when outside choirs visit their areas. For instance, Bartolome (2010) notes how "The choir often hosts other youth choirs from the Pacific Northwest and beyond, allowing for further exchanges of ideas and the opportunity for choristers to connect with other student musicians (p. 200). Therefore, choir members serve the role of culture ambassadors through music and grow as they learn and share together. Overall, the role and influence of choirs are not limited to personal development and change, but they can make a great impact on the growth of communities and society.

Chapter III: Perceived Value and Benefits of Participating in the Xi'an Concert Hall Children's Choir

Desires and Expectations from Students and Parents

Firstly, I wanted to find out what desires and expectations students and parents had when entering the choir through the survey. Usually, students and parents join a choir with their own goals and values. In general, when people take on a new task or enter a new discipline, they need to think about what the goals and values are of the tasks they are trying

to accomplish. In this light, it is very important for a community organization, in this case a choir, to be clear with what its goals and values are. It is also important for musical organizations to know the goals and values of families who want to join them to avoid potential problems. In 2021, I conducted a survey and interview asking both students and their parents what kinds of values and goals they had held when they joined the choir intending to narrow any gap in desires and expectations we had as an organization and the expectations of the families wanting to join us.

Through research conducted via surveys, I gathered participants' direct experiences and opinions, which allowed for a deeper insight into my thesis. Additionally, the substantial amount of data collected from over 200 participants reflects various perspectives, enhancing the reliability of the research findings. Face-to-face interviews facilitated more in-depth conversations, enabling me to ask follow-up questions when necessary to extract further information. Furthermore, the survey participants were able to discuss their current experiences, which contributed to the timeliness of the data.

One limitation of my study might be the small number of children I had to interview since I couldn't interview all the choir members. Moreover, my presence as a researcher might have changed how they acted or responded, and there might have been a language barrier to make it clear when I communicated with my choir members and their parents, even though I had an interpreter. Also, the interviews and surveys were not conducted anonymously, which may have influenced responses to be more positive.

Nevertheless, I guided respondents to think clearly about specific topics through the structured questions in the survey, which enhanced the consistency of their responses. The large number of participants allowed for quantitative data collection, enabling me to identify clear trends through statistical analysis. Additionally, I tried to create a safe environment based on trust with the participants, encouraging them to share their experiences more

candidly. Ultimately, I believe that the combination of diverse methods, the authenticity of the participants, and the structured approach contributed to conducting research that is more genuine and trustworthy.

Musical Achievement

The majority of choir members' parents reported that their children joined the choir because they enjoyed singing and desired to develop their musical talents and potential:

“My child likes to sing and I hope for her to get a better singing education in the Xi'an Concert Hall Children's Choir.”

Mother of G. C., Beginning Choir

Particularly, I found out from the survey that many parents and students wanted to receive quality vocal music education and learn skills through the Xi'an Concert Children's Hall Choir:

“I hope that my child will broaden her talents and improve her vocal skills.”

Mother of M.Y.

“I hope they can strengthen their basic skills in music theory and singing.”

Father of L.Q.

“Cultivate children's comprehensive music skills and have more opportunities.”

Mother of C. Z.

These responses show that students and their parents place value in receiving better music and vocal education through the XCHCC.

The Xi'an Concert Hall Children's Choir consists of a conductor, which is me, two vocal teachers, and two music education teachers who help students with their vocal music education and general music education development. Although the choir is an entity that

exists to perform and many hours are invested into learning new pieces, we are making every effort in other areas to ensure that the development of musicianship takes place and vocal abilities are improved. We are also working hard to provide students with quality music education each semester. The plans and strategies being implemented by the XCHCC to achieve these musical and educational goals are detailed below.

Music Appreciation

The survey also showed that many parents tended to desire that their children love music, understand art more deeply, and increase their interest in music through the choir. In response to the question of why they let their children join the choir, some parents wrote:

“To learn how to appreciate music, learn singing skills, and deeper artistry.”

Mother of X. M., Advanced Choir

“To encourage her musical interest and cultivate her artistry as a singer.”

Mother of Y. Y., Advanced Choir

It was amazing to see how many parents recognize and put a premium on the value that learning music can provide during youth and adolescence. I felt a weight of responsibility as I realized they expect to accomplish the value and goal through the choir. It was very clear that parents want their children to lead a better life through music and ensemble activities:

“To help my kid have a better personality and have a perception of beauty through music.”

Father of Y. R.

“To feel the beauty and joy of life through music.”

Father of F. R.

“To let my child find happiness through music.”

Mother of G. Z.

By emphasizing music appreciation, the Xi'an Concert Hall Children's Choir aims to help students become closer and more connected to music by going beyond simply loving and enjoying music and letting them experience various genres, styles, and historical content. This will also be discussed in more detail in the chapter below.

Future Musicians

Many students often chose and joined the choir, thinking of it as a preparation process to grow as musicians:

“I want to be a music teacher when I grow up.”

L. S. (6 years old), Beginning Choir

“My son likes to sing so I hope he can go further along the way he likes.”

Mother of M. C., Advanced Choir

Two students from our choir participated in the American Protégé Vocal Competition and took first and second places. Recently, I developed an in-depth music program for the XCHCC, providing group and individual lessons for students who have talents in vocal music and dream of becoming a vocalist. We find it very rewarding that through our vocal music program, students are getting awards in vocal music competitions and taking their first steps as future musicians. Since Xi'an is not an internationalized city, many vocal music teachers teach students using traditional methods of vocal music education and curricula. We hope that the Xi'an Concert Hall Children's Choir will be able to instruct students using more student-centered, and internationally informed teaching methods and that it will help many talented students fulfill their dreams through various programs. The next sections explain in detail how these kinds of things are happening.

Repertoire

Although many organizations have choirs, and most elementary, middle, and high schools have a choir, most of these choirs have not expanded their choral repertoire much beyond the limited pieces of traditional Chinese music, folksongs, and famous songs. However, the XCHCC learns and performs more modernized and international choral songs, and in doing so, contributes to the modernization and internationalization of choral music in Xi'an. For that reason, many students and parents in Xi'an believe that the XCHCC is the most well-prepared and professional children's art entity and thus join the choir through auditions:

"I would like to let my child experience professional choral education and cultivate more collective understanding, and experience on a high-standard stage at XCHCC."

Mother of H. P., Beginning Choir

"This professional team attracted us, and the child has been learning music, hoping to broaden her music path at XCHCC."

Mother of L. R.

"XCHCC is an excellent and high-quality platform and learning environment."

Mother of F. Z. & F. Z.

"High-level teaching staff, very good platform."

Mother of L. G.

"We can receive more professional enlightenment education in music."

Mother of G. C.

There were instances in which students joined the choir because they found the stage experiences the Xi'an Concert Hall Children's Choir provides attractive. Members of the XCHCC participate in two performances of opera annually, and XCHCC is the only choir

where one can experience regular performances and diverse styles of performances and stages. Since other children's choirs in Xi'an mostly play traditional Chinese songs, XCHCC is the only place where people can experience diverse and international performances:

“Because there is a professional stage here, you can receive professional guidance.”

Mother of S. Y.

There is a nationalistic bias in Chinese music education. China's music education system tends to emphasize traditional Chinese music centered on the Han Chinese, China's majority ethnic group. In school music education, including universities, music that reflects Chinese history and tradition is mainly adopted as the main repertoire, and Western classical choral pieces with religious overtones are not allowed to be performed. However, the Xi'an Concert Hall Children's Choir is making efforts to overcome such limitations and continues to introduce, practice, and perform choral pieces from various eras and countries.

Understanding Community

Many students join the choir to grow and cooperate with other members of the community. In China, although the birth of more than two children is allowed now, there are many one-child families traditionally. For that reason, there indeed have been fewer opportunities to experience community. In choir, children gain invaluable experience in cooperating, creating, and sharing together through their ensembles:

“Children like it, which is conducive to the team's ability to collaborate, and is conducive to children's integration into society and new groups.”

Father of X. X.

“Strengthen teamwork, improve artistic accomplishment, and one more channel to release yourself.”

Mother of Z. J.

Choir is not only a chance for personal development, but also an opportunity to understand the community and grow within the community. This is a valuable opportunity to experience a sense of social belonging and unity through the process of recognizing individual abilities and achieving goals together as a community.

As mentioned earlier, for the future and development of the choir to continue, it is most important to examine whether the students who joined the choir with many expectations and wishes are in the process of fulfilling them and are enjoying the strengths and benefits of the choir. Below I intend to look at what kind of benefits and strengths are being manifested at the Xi'an Concert Hall Children's Choir.

Musical Benefits

Improvement in Singing Techniques

Among all the strengths mentioned by choir members and their parents, the most prominent musical aspect of the choir was an improvement in singing ability. Primarily, many students responded that they had experienced an improvement in basic vocal music skills such as breathing techniques:

“I sang better than before after joining the choir and learned how to use breathing for singing.”

H. K. (10 years old), Advanced Choir

“There was improvement obviously in the vocal technique. I don't shout my sound anymore but try to sing with abdominal breathing support.”

W. H. (8 years old), Advanced Choir

“There was a great improvement in terms of breathing and vocal training!”

Z. H. (8 years old), Advanced Choir

“I learned and improved my diaphragm breathing skills.”

J. X. (10 years old), Advanced Choir

Students also mentioned development in their growth of the head voice singing techniques. Most often, students first learn how to do head voice singing and how to open the soft palate to develop a basic tone. Through this process, they understand how diverse voices are gathered to make a blended ensemble sound.

“I have learned how to use head-voice singing.”

W. Q. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

“The soprano part uses head-voice singing.”

J. X. (10 years old), Performance Choir

Choral resonance, especially head-voice singing, is one of the most important elements in children’s choir singing that teachers work to develop. Not only is the blending and harmony of choral sounds always emphasized, but head-voice singing also serves as the foundation of healthy singing. Students are educated on how to develop and protect their voices, which are their instruments, through vocalization training:

“I learned and improved how to protect my voice and sing better.”

X. R. (10 years old), Performance Choir

Various factors may have contributed to this outcome, but the foremost among them are the benefits of the vocal training classes run by the Xi’an Concert Hall Music Education Center. These classes, run by professional vocal coaches, help strengthen students' basic vocal skills. The students meet with a vocal coach at least once a month and train individually or in groups to develop areas that cannot happen in a group choir practice. The XCHCC conductors also provide the same direction by collaborating and participating in the vocal coach's lesson plan. Through this vocal coaching program, students acquire all the skills

necessary for vocalization and practice expanding their vocal range, as well as improving what is possible in the ensemble performance.

Intonation

Choir students and their parents also touch on the development of accurate intonation. Choir members recognize their own musical development, particularly improvement and development in intonation:

“Yes, the singing has improved. The singing intonation is especially accurate.”

J. Y. (12 years old), Performance Choir

“There is improvement in terms of singing intonation.”

Y. T. (9 years old), Performance Choir

“Yes, better intonation.”

L. Z. (9 years old), Performance Choir

“Yes, the intonation has improved.”

Q. J. (6 years old), Performance Choir

Parents were also aware of their children’s musical improvement, especially the refinement and strength of intonation, and they mentioned it in the survey:

“My child’s singing intonation is more accurate than before.”

Mother of H. P.

“Yes, the sense of intonation has improved really well.”

Mother of Y. T.

“After joining this choir, my singing intonation has improved a lot and it also helps me to practice the instrument.”

L. Y. & L. Y., Performance Choir

In order to promote these changes and the development of pitch accuracy, XCHCC continually utilizes aural exercises such as diatonic scales and chromatic scales. In addition, rehearsals primarily focus on vocalization problems that create pitch problems and unification of vowels, etc. Another more important part of training to improve pitch is music theory and auditory training. Finally, through music theory classes, students increase their understanding of the composition of harmony and the relationship between sounds, or the pitch and tuning of notes. I believe that these efforts are helping the XCHCC members sing with better pitch.

Rhythm

Students also reported that they had experienced improvement in their ability to understand and play rhythm. Understandably, students have different musical levels when they join the choir. Some students had already learned piano or other instruments in their early childhood and could play high-level songs, yet other students may sing well but have no other music background or knowledge. It is a challenge to develop skills for students who are at different levels of musical understanding and ability. The Xi'an Concert Hall Education Center puts every effort into helping all students to develop and have meaningful experiences together through continuous discussions, diversification, and development of curriculums among teachers. The meaningful impact of such efforts is shown through the statements students and parents make:

“The understanding of rhythm has improved a lot.”

X. M. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

“Improved, both in terms of pronunciation, rhythm, and stage experience.”

Mother of Z. X.

“Yes, the rhythm of the musical sense and the reading of music scores have

improved.”

Mother of Z. C.

Importantly, the improvement in rhythm reading naturally leads to the improvement in sight-singing in general. In order to produce these results, the XCHCC mainly provided learning experiences to invite choir members to feel and express rhythm with their bodies, such as Orff and Dalcroze techniques. Through that, we are leading the choir in a direction that not only uses a mathematical approach to calculate rhythm but also experiences and understands it with the body.

Harmony

Many students responded in their surveys that above all, their understanding and experience of harmony have improved. Through the experience of two-voice harmony or three-voice harmony, choir members experienced the beauty of choral singing and fell more deeply into the world of choral singing.

“Yes, I learned two voices singing, and there are many nice songs.”

H. Y. (8 years old), Advanced Choir

“There is a certain improvement in two-part songs which can be well grasped!”

L. Y. (8 years old), Performance Choir

“Yes, I can harmonize the song myself.”

W. P. (10 years old), Advanced Choir

“My child learned how to sing together in different parts.”

Mother of M. C.

“Yes, the ability to read scores and multi-voice choruses has improved.”

Mother of J. Y.

Like the traditional music of other Asian countries, traditional Chinese harmony-based choral music does not exist. Because traditional Chinese music is played and sung with a single melody, students are not familiar with harmony until they join the choir. For that reason, the understanding and practice of harmony they experience in the choir can be very new and interesting to the students. In addition, because Chinese music notation is made and centered on numbers, it often becomes an obstacle to understanding harmony. However, as mentioned above, the XCHCC teaches with a consistent and improved music education method from vocal coaching to choir rehearsal, which is a great help in solving these problems and helping students acquire better awareness and knowledge of choral music.

Music Knowledge and Theory

The growth of choir members through choir experience is not limited to vocal skills alone; it includes the expansion of their understanding of music knowledge and theory. Unlike adult art organizations, children's art groups must instruct students, prioritizing helping students acquire musical skills and knowledge throughout their membership. We recognize that they can grow to become great adult performers if they have a strong foundation. Historically the choir dedicated a lot of time to practice and perform new pieces. Once I was installed as the new choir conductor, we discussed priorities for the organization and, through the opinion-gathering process, published a music education book exclusively for the choir. As a result, students' understanding of music theory has improved quite a lot, and many people's feedback was that it was a positive influence:

“I have experienced a great improvement in knowledge of notation, intonation, and music theory which also helps in my piano learning.”

X. Z. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

“I understand a lot more of music theory than ever before.”

X. X. (13 years old), Performance Choir

“Yes, I have a deeper understanding of many musical works and music theory.”

M. Y., Advanced Choir

“My basic knowledge is much improved so I will continue to work hard.”

W. S., Performance Choir

“The understanding of music theory has been improved tremendously.”

Mother of Z. L.

As the students' musical knowledge has developed, the choir has become a more academic and serious place of learning. The students seem to understand that the more one knows, the more he or she enjoys.

Sight-Singing

Improvement in sight-singing ability can be seen as a noticeable development. Although members of the Beginning Choir or the Advanced Choir still listen to and sing songs rather than read the pieces and sing, most members of the XCHCC Performance Choir have significantly improved their ability to read music. Because of this, it has become possible to reduce and use more effectively the amount of practice time.

“There is a certain improvement which is the ability to read music!”

L. Y. (8 years old), Performance Choir

“Yes, I can read music and practice new music by myself.”

J. Y. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

“Reading music scores and learning new songs are much faster.”

Y. Y. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

“Yes, the music reading and singing skills have been greatly improved.”

H. C. (8 years old), Performance Choir

“Improved the ability to read scores.”

L. L. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

“She can read music more quickly than ever before.”

Mother of D. K.

“Yes, their music reading skills have improved.”

Mother of Z. C.

I believe that these results are achievable through the two educational methods and plans provided by the XCHCC. The first is a Kodaly sight-singing class, and the second is a more student-centered class using games and activities. Additionally, the XCHCC offers optional Kodaly sight-singing and listening classes for students who wish to participate. These classes are held at least once a week and are taught by teachers who have completed Kodaly professional courses in Europe. This class has a systematic textbook and lesson method and teaches not only how to sight-sing and listen, but also how to sing musically and how to understand music. The second method is to prepare a variety of lesson plans during choir rehearsals so that students can enjoy and improve their sight-singing and listening skills: Note Naming Relay, Melodic Dictation, Musical Bingo, Sing-Back Game, Speed Sight-Singing, Forbidden pattern, and online Tools.

The ability to read music scores is as important as reading the language of books. Through Kodaly instruction and sight-singing activities, the students are provided the opportunities to read, understand, and practice music scores on their own.

Improvement in Instrument Playing

Interestingly, many students and parents mentioned that there was a surprising improvement in instrumental playing through their experience and education of the choir.

This point demonstrates that a choir is not simply learning songs to perform, but more so helps students understand music generally and become better performers:

“I usually practice the songs that I learned from the choir with the piano, and it definitely helps me improve my piano playing skills as well.”

Z. X. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

“My child has been learning piano, and the choir experience has been very helpful to improve her piano playing skills.”

Mother of X. J.

“Her piano practice is much more active than before. She is saying that music is her dream now.”

Mother of M. C.

According to the survey results, many students practice songs at home while playing the piano, and this process has helped them not only with their song practice but also their piano skills. Some students practice both their singing parts and the accompaniment. During the XCHCC rehearsal, I heard two students practice the accompaniment part of the choral song “Ritmo.” I was quite surprised that they played it so well because even professional accompanists find it hard to perform. I think they can practice it with more enthusiasm because it is a song they sing in the choir themselves:

“Yes, because singing is helpful for my cello study.”

W. M. (8 years old), Advanced Choir

“It is very helpful to practice the instrument.”

Mother of L. Y.

Choral activities contribute significantly to improving the ability to play instruments such as piano, cello, and other instruments.

A great number of choir students are already learning more than one instrument, and these activities supplement each other dramatically. Learning instruments helps those students participating in the choir, and conversely, the understanding of music and basic abilities they acquire help students in their ability to play instruments.

Music Appreciation

The survey also indicates that the choir experience contributes greatly to students loving music and to music becoming a very important part of the lives of the students, transcending the simple musical development:

“There is improvement, and the intonation and rhythm have improved. Music appreciation has also improved.”

X. M. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

“There is growth. I know how to appreciate music better. When I was young, I didn't know how to appreciate music. Now I can discover the beauty of music such as songs in operas.”

L. C. (11 years old), Performance Choir

“There is an improvement. I like classic opera songs and classical symphonies even more than ever before by joining the choir.”

W. Y. (9 years old), Performance Choir

As these responses show, the choir experience led the students to the world of music, and they could discover new aspects of themselves through music. As they grow with music, they love, understand, and see the world through music. We found that the interest in and love of music has transferred to other types of music and resulted in the students enjoying diverse musical genres, not just operas and symphonies. The understanding and study of

music history and culture, as well as explanations and discussions about various music genres conducted in choirs, are greatly helpful in increasing music appreciation from students.

In addition, the performance ticket discount policy for all the concerts in Xi'an Concert Hall provided by the XCHCC to encourage students to appreciate music seems to offer students and their families more opportunities to attend concerts. We hope that through these efforts, students will become interested in music appreciation, love music more, accept it as part of their lives, and make music a great companion in their lives.

Personal Benefits

Confidence and Self-Expression

One of the greatest strengths of choir activities is that students develop self-confidence through their stage experience. Many choir members reported that they could have more self-confidence in singing on stage:

“I am more confident on stage.”

X. M. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

Z. C. (8 years old), Performance Choir

T. Y. (8 years old), Advanced Choir

Mother of X. M.

Mother of Z. C.

Self-confidence also stimulates the desire in the students to get to know and better express themselves. This stimulation also becomes a great boost to the growth of students:

“Yes, dare to express myself.”

H. K. (10 years old), Advanced Choir

Z. G. (9 years old), Advanced class

I have grown up a lot. I can sing at any time. When I am not feeling well, music also helps me to make my feelings better. I like to express myself more and more.”

J. Y. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

“Yes, improved communication and self-expression skills.”

Z. Y. (9 years old), Performance Choir

X. Z. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

Self-confidence in music not only helps students to take more interest in music, but it also helps them dream of growing as performers on stage:

“Yes, I am more confident, and I like the stage better. I am more willing to show myself.”

H. X. (8 years old), Advanced Choir

W. Z. (9 years old), Performance Choir

“More confident and interested in music.”

L. P. (8 years old), Advanced Choir

“Enjoy the joy of standing on stage!”

Y. Y. (9 years old), Advanced Class

“I have grown, my stage experience has been enriched.”

M. Y. (11 years old), Performance Choir

“I think there has been personal growth through many concerts and performances.”

W. Q. (10 years old), Performance Choir

Like the statement of the student below, such confidence turns into a greater expectation of themselves, and it also becomes the driving force for the students to train themselves and develop into people with bigger dreams:

“I feel that I am more confident, and I have higher demands on myself.”

Q. J. (12 years old), Performance Choir

More deeply, through this kind of experience students develop into people who can communicate with their audience through music:

“I have exercised my ability to communicate with people through the choir performance, so I am not timid!”

L. S. (6 years old), Enlightenment Choir

Although personal growth through choral activities varies, participants can improve their desire and ability to express themselves, and the confidence students develop through their stage experience helps develop self-esteem, elevate their self-worth, and prepare for their future. These results can be viewed as growth stemming from the four characteristics that the XCHCC aims for: musical achievement, positive feedback, experience of various musical styles, and expression.

To foster a sense of musical achievement, our choir focuses on a repertoire that is challenging and unfamiliar. Although the songs are difficult and unfamiliar at first, the students feel a great sense of musical accomplishment when they learn and complete these songs. Unlike other Chinese local choirs or schools, the XCHCC tries to provide mainly positive feedback whenever possible. We aim to help students express themselves more confidently by using praise and encouragement rather than criticism. Additionally, by experiencing various musical styles, young students will have the opportunity to express themselves in various ways and expand the scope of self-expression.

Language Skills

Choral singing creates and conveys meaning both through music and lyrics. Students must learn that not only should lyrics be heard to convey meaning through enunciation, but they also need to learn to “tell the story” and show cultural honor by learning accurate pronunciation. Choir activities become a good opportunity to explore languages. At our

concert in July 2021, during the time of this research, our choirs sang in six different languages (English, Latin, German, Korean, Chinese, and Japanese). Of course, young children might have a hard time learning new languages, but I believe that experiencing diverse languages early on will help them learn and use new languages later.

As you can see below, many students and their parents mentioned improvement in language as one of the strengths of choir activities:

“After joining the chorus, I learned several foreign language songs, and I have higher requirements for foreign language learning, and I am more confident in foreign language learning.”

X. M. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

“A certain degree of improvement, especially the singing of foreign songs.”

Y. Z. (8 years old), Advanced Choir

“I didn't know English well enough when I first started choir, but I am much better now.”

W. Z. (9 years old), Beginning Choir

“Yes, foreign language and singing skills have improved significantly.”

M. Y. (10 years old), Performance Choir

Additionally, experiencing diverse languages motivates students to take an interest in languages and to want to learn more about them:

“Yes, English songs can increase children’s interest in learning English.”

Father of L. X., Advanced Choir

“Yes, the level of English songs is enhanced. She wants to study more about English now.”

Mother of J. Y., Performance Choir

In many Asian countries, especially China, students study English as a part of their language education. Choral singing helps this process greatly. Many parents shared that their children had improved their English and language abilities after choir activities. There were times when I was quite surprised to see students' growing fluency. Their understanding, pronunciation, and memory ability of language were quite remarkable. To promote such language development, various repertoires are selected and taught.

Through this, children can also experience various cultures. This practice helps students become comfortable exploring new languages. In addition, this provides an opportunity to not only learn about the language but also indirectly experience various. This fosters students' interest in other countries and cultures. For example, when we practiced "African Noel," we talked about African culture, particularly its rich musical traditions. We explored how the rhythms and melodies of African music evolved as they fused with other musical styles upon the arrival of African people in America, eventually giving rise to jazz. This discussion highlighted the significance of community and storytelling in African music, illustrating how these elements shaped genres like jazz and blues. Additionally, we examined the instruments commonly used in African music, such as the djembe and kora, and how their sounds contributed to the unique fusion of musical forms in America. This exploration enhanced the students' comprehension of the piece.

Self-Discipline Skills

There was strong evidence that the student's ability to manage personal matters on their own had improved through choir activities. Students work on how to better manage their time and schedules such as their practice and performance schedule. Furthermore, students experience continuous growth in self-management and responsibility as they record and submit their assignments weekly. I also believe that individuals can develop self-control

through the process of setting and achieving their own musical or self-management goals. Additionally, choir practice and performance require a lot of concentration, and I think this process can help students develop self-control.

“Yes, for example, every time I go to class, it takes nearly an hour on the road. From the first music file folder and the water cup, I sorted it out by myself and arranged the things to bring for class.”

Z. X. (10 years old), Advanced Choir

“Yes, I will organize my school bags before class every time and bring a record of my studies.”

L. S. (7 years old), Beginning Choir

“Yes, my self-learning ability has improved.”

H. C. (8 years old), Beginning Choir

Students also manage their own practice schedule through weekly practices and personal practices and make and manage their own routines to grow into performers:

“I have learned music knowledge and developed a good habit of practicing songs every day.”

M. C. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

“I have grown up, learned to work hard, and learned to persist. I will try my best to finish the songs that I used to find difficult.”

Mother of Y. T.

“Yes, my self-learning ability improved.”

H. C. (11 years old), Performance Choir

Collaboration Skills

The development of collaboration skills might be the most important of all group activities. Since choral performance requires singing with a unified sense of meaning and expression and practicing in unified technique, resonance, and ensemble sound, they can naturally foster a sense of collaboration. Particularly, in an era now when people are individualistic, and the role of communities has been reduced. Therefore, it is important for students to learn the importance of being together. Because choirs are based on collaborative work, they learn and grow their sense of cooperation through interdependence, in which they harmonize with other members as part of a whole. In addition, students can understand better and respect each other through joint musical tasks and joint emotional exchanges through music. These experiences help students create deeper solidarity through understanding and respect for each other:

“I learned how to work with other children to prepare for concerts and performances.”

X. Y. (8 years old), Advanced Choir

“Now I understand the importance of collaboration in ensembles.”

W. H. (8 years old), Advanced Choir

Students also reported that choir activities made them humbler, and they also made them grow into people who consider others before themselves:

“Yes, participating in the choir made me meet many outstanding classmates and teachers. I gradually discovered my shortcomings, learned to be humble, and learned how to work with other students to accomplish our goals as a group.”

X. J. (10 years old), Advanced Choir

“I will not only think about myself but also take care of others because chorus is not a personal business.”

Y. T. (9 years old), Performance Choir

“I am able to cooperate with classmates and learn from outstanding members.”

Mother of L. L.

Parents of choir members also shared that they observed positive growth as the students learned the importance of a community while in choir. From the parental viewpoint, they could see the students be successful in creating community through collaboration. They recognized it was one of the most important outcomes of choral singing:

“They are more able to appreciate the importance of unity in group activities.”

Mother of Z. C.

“Yes, while cognizing themselves, they also recognize the meaning of the collective, and realize the importance and beauty of collaboration.”

Mother of J. Y.

“The growth is also great. She has a more collective mindset.”

Father of C. W.

Often, people perceive similarities between a choir and a sports team. I can agree to some extent that both aim to achieve goals through collaborative effort. However, choirs are distinctly different from sports activities. In sports, the pressure to win can diminish enjoyment and harm the sense of community. In contrast, a choir activity focuses on expressing emotions and feelings through music and emphasizes collaboration without the pressure of competition or victory. While sports teach teamwork and physical fitness, choirs help develop emotional skills, such as empathy and communication abilities in children. What I, along with XCHCC, pursue is also this inner growth and achievement, aiming to help choir members discover themselves through this process.

Emotional Improvement

As was mentioned in Chapter II, music plays the role of helping us to encounter and know ourselves more deeply. More specifically, I think music helps us to have a positive fellowship with our emotions. As you can see from the words of the students who participated in the survey I conducted, music helped students understand their own emotions, purify them, and lead them in a positive direction. Young children, especially teenage students, often experience emotional changes because of hormonal fluctuations. Such changes are manifested as worry, anxiety, depression, and the like. The choir activities play a positive role in bringing about such a change:

“I will improve when I am not happy. I like to express myself more.”

J. Y. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

“There is growth. I can express my mood by singing.”

Z. J. (11 years old), Advanced Choir

“It's helpful to me and can regulate my emotions.”

T. Y. (8 years old), Advanced Choir

Parents also reported that they had detected this kind of purification of emotions and positive changes:

“The growth is obvious, my daughter felt very calm once she joined the choir.”

Mother of Q. J.

Personality

Emotional maturity through choir activities also plays a part in helping children mature in their behavior and relationships. We found that the primary indicators of maturing were the students becoming more understanding and more generous:

“Yes, I have become a lot more generous than before.”

Q. W. (8 and a half years old), Advanced Choir

“Yes, since joining the choir, the children are more generous than before and dare to show them in front of others.”

Mother of X. J.

Also, some parents noted that their children had become brighter and happier through music. Other parents also reported that their children had become more polite and confident through music:

“Have a great growth, will stick to their hobbies, have a more cheerful personality, and sing happily at all times.”

Mother of J. Y.

“There is great growth. Their personality is more cheerful, their field of vision is broader, and their attitude is more calm.”

Father of Y. R.

“They had growth, became more used to expressing themselves, has a more cheerful personality, and do not have stage fright in public.”

L. R. & Mother

“With growth, the child becomes more attentive, gentle, and confident.”

F. S. & Mother

“To grow. Happier and more confident. “

Father of F. R.

“Yes, more generous, confident.”

W. Z.

As seen above, students were allowed to develop more skills through repeated practice and rehearsal to discover and overcome their limitations. Patience, collaboration, curiosity, and problem-solving helped them better understand themselves and others. They

were also provided opportunities to apply these skills through the many musical, technical, or organizational challenges encountered within the choir.

Various Experiences

Another benefit is that XCHCC is affiliated with the Xi'an Concert Hall. The rich environment of the concert hall is an avenue for children to experience diverse cultures and art. The Xi'an Concert Hall is a well-organized arts organization that is well-known for its impact and quality. Because of its reputation, it presents widely diverse and high-quality art performances and events. Members of the Xi'an Concert Hall Choir have the benefit of getting a discount when purchasing tickets, and they appreciate the opportunity to enjoy performances more comfortably and easily.

“Yes, I have seen many international artists and exchanges with foreign children and gained my knowledge.”

S. Y. (9 years old), Performance Choir

“Participating in outdoor performances and other activities, children have a sense of honor and pride.”

Mother of L. G.

Children's choir members are also provided with multiple opportunities to participate in many performances, representing Xi'an Concert Hall.

Social Benefits

In General

One of the great strengths of choir activities might be that one can experience and grow sociality. The choir activities serve as a platform for individuals to socialize, develop interpersonal skills, and build lasting connections within a supportive environment.:

“The improvement is obvious! Sing with your friends, happy, happy, and friendly!”

Z. H. (8 years old), Advanced Choir

“Yes, I met more good friends and played with them.”

Y. M. (8 years old), Advanced Choir

“You can share music, study, life, etc. with your classmates.”

X. M. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

“I have met a lot of new friends, and I am more brave.”

H. X. (8 years old), Advanced Choir

“Yes, become friends with many classmates.”

L. X. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

“Yes, I made a lot of new friends.”

L. P. (8 years old), Advanced Choir

It is clear that XCHCC is a place where students meet new students and have fellowship with one another. They learn the meaning of togetherness as they share making music, life experiences. Although those students whose social skills are less developed might face difficulty initially when they join a choir, they grow in confident and accept others as their friends as they experience diverse activities:

“Yes, when I first came to the choir, I was very timid and didn’t know how to communicate with the children. Through studying in the choir, I learned to get along with and communicate with the children and made many good friends. Now I dare to take the initiative to communicate with the teacher.”

X. J. (10 years old), Advanced Choir

“I think my social skills have improved. The first reason is because I know many new classmates and new friends. The second reason is that I chat with my teachers and

classmates and face various difficulties together, and I feel that my social skills have improved.”

W. Q. (10 years old), Performance Choir

Students share hobbies and hang out together with the friends they made in the choir, and as a result, they develop their friendships and get to share their lives more. For example, students formed a dance club and uploaded their singing and dancing videos regularly on their WeChat, and they often played computer games online together. One even can see how many students eat together and enjoy cultural activities together around the concert hall after the choir practice on Saturdays:

“Yes, I can play with a group of people with the same hobbies.”

J. Y. (12 years old), Performance Choir

When practicing and performing together, students experience many difficulties and challenges they must address, and such experience helps them know the importance of teamwork and see how it is more meaningful and valuable when they work together than trying to solve problems alone:

“Teamwork benefits me. Yes, I understand the meaning of cooperation. Yes, made new friends.”

Y. Z. (8 years old), Advanced Choir

“Yes, I have met a lot of students in the choir class and have fun learning together.”

W. Y. (9 years old), Performance Choir

“Improved, very confident, and made many good friends in the chorus unity.”

Mother of M. C.

Some students reported that they had cultivated their sociality through their relationships with fellow students, teachers, and staff personnel, and as a result, developed their confidence.

“Yes, I met good friends, like teachers and conductors.”

F. Z. (8 years old), Performance Choir

“Yes, I have made a group of good friends and excellent teachers who like music.”

J. Y. & Mother

“Yes, the interaction with teachers and children has increased.”

L. Y. & Mother

“Have. I have met a lot of children and can play and interact together.”

C. Z. (7 years old), Beginning Choir

“Yes, I like to exchange music with my friends.”

L. C. (10 years old), Performance Choir

Some survey respondents noted that family intimacy has also improved as they shared the things that happened in the choir:

“There is an improvement, and there are more topics to communicate with classmates or family members.”

Mother of X. M.

“Yes, when I get home, I will talk about funny stories among the choir students.”

Mother of L. P.

“Yes, children can make friends by singing, and they have been appreciated by many people.”

Mother of M. Y.

The confidence choir members gain through improvements in their sociality empowers them to behave confidently in school life and develop a desire to share the songs they learned in the choir:

“Yes, my child made many good friends in the choir. He is willing to share the songs learned in the choir class with his school friends.”

Father of Q. W.

Through a multi-age learning environment which students do not experience in school, they gain diverse experiences, help and learn from one another, and thus experience a family-like environment:

“Yes, be classmates with different ages, and learn from capable older brothers and older sisters.’

Mother of L. M.

Other Opportunities for Social Interaction and Growth

At times, students develop deeper and closer relationships with one another through new environments and special events. Performances at various places such as the performance at Cuihua Mountain, a very famous mountain in Xi’an, or the performance in front of the Giant Wild Goose Pagoda, remain special memories, and such special experiences bind the choir members together and strengthen the sociality of students.

“Improved, through the performance of Cuihua Mountain, I met several teachers and sisters in the special training class. When we went to the concert hall to watch the screening of Cuihua Mountain, when we saw Teacher Tian, all of us would take the initiative to hug the teacher.”

X. Z. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

“Children will often bring up interesting stories from teachers and other students in class. It is very happy to meet students from different schools with different personalities.”

Mother of C. Z.

Still, a gap exists among students, highlighting the need for them to acknowledge and address their social limitations while working to develop social skills. As shown above, some students find it difficult to cultivate sociality because of differences in age and personal preferences. Indeed, China's education system centers on competition and grades, which can be one of the reasons. As a result, students are each other's competitors, which makes social interaction difficult. Also, culturally, China, like other East Asian countries, has a strong collective culture that values harmony and stability within a group rather than expressing individual feelings or opinions. This kind of environment does not help students express themselves enough I believe.

However, what matters is that many students in the choir want to learn about one another and develop a deeper and closer relationship with one another. Of course, more time and effort will be needed, but such a desire will contribute greatly to students developing sociality through the choir:

“Yes. Let me better socialize with friends and get to know more friends.”

F. Y. (11 years old), Performance Choir

“Yes, I am more willing to meet more children.”

C. Y. (9 years old), Performance Choir

“Yes. Let me better socialize with friends and know more friends.”

F. Y. (11 years old), Performance Choir

“Yes, I am willing to meet more friends and dare to express myself in front of strangers.”

C. Y. & Father

“Social skills really need to be improved step by step, I am a slow-heat type, I need teachers to promote a lot!”

L. Y. (8 years old), Performance Choir

Community Benefits beyond the XCHCC

Family

Choir activities sometimes strengthen family ties together through doing homework and practice and also allow for greater cultural experiences. XCHCC members share the music and music theory they learned in the choir with their families and study them together. They also share vocal music skills, postures, and how to sing with their parents, and as a result, the students themselves understand it better. It also gives them things to talk about, and consequently, family ties are strengthened through it. This can be seen as another strength of choir activity:

“Yes, my mother’s music theory knowledge is improving, and she will go forward with me.”

X. Z. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

“Yes, I took my mother to learn music recognition and Colvin’s gestures.”

G. H. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

“Yes, I go home and teach my parents to sing the songs I learned in the choir. It’s fun to sing together as a family.”

Z. X. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

“Yes, it brought happiness to family and friends, everyone started to love singing.”

J. Y. (12 years old), Performance Choir

Some survey respondents also noted that they had shared and taught the songs they had learned from the choir to their families and had a great time. Through the process, families came to love and take a greater interest in music:

“My relatives and friends all like to listen to the songs I learn.”

M. C. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

“I showed and sang the English songs I learned to my family and classmates.

Several classmates said they would like to join the choir.”

X. Y. (8 years old), Advanced Choir

“Mom and Dad have liked listening to a symphony ever since I joined the choir and paying attention to such activities.”

J. Y. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

Through this process, what started as the child’s hobby became the parents’ hobby and the hobby of the whole family. Thus, it becomes a meaningful hobby the entire family can enjoy:

“I sing all the songs I have learned to dad when he is driving.”

J. Y. (7 years old), Advanced Choir

“Mom and dad enjoy my singing every time I practice at home.”

Q. J. (12 years old), Performance Choir

“Not only has the children’s musical literacy improved, but parents have also benefited from it. Now they are happy to accept classical music on demand at home and in the car.”

Mother of G. M.

School

Benefits developing through choir are manifested not only at home but also at school as well. Students develop confidence and interest in singing through choir activities, and this in turn becomes a natural reason for them to join the school choir.

As is seen below, many students are actively involved in their school choirs. Many students are in leadership positions like section leaders:

“Yes, it’s more convenient when learning music at school and also when leading the performances at school.”

Y. M. (8 years old), Advanced Choir

“Successfully entered the school’s high-level choir.”

W. S. (10 years old), Performance Choir

“Yes, join the school chorus.”

L. M. (9 years old), Performance Choir

Not only do students join their school choirs, but they also play a key role that requires them to take the initiative during school events. Moreover, we have received numerous messages from school choir directors highlighting the significant contributions of XCHCC members. By performing a variety of musical genres and styles, their voices enhance the depth and richness of the choir, elevating the quality of each school performance. As a result, some XCHCC members have even been accepted into prestigious high schools as talented students. By sharing their choir experiences with friends, they spark interest in music and act as “evangelist” for the choir as well:

“I would take the initiative to sign up to sing for activities in the class, and my teachers and classmates praised me for singing.”

M. C. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

“Yes, every year, I became a member of the cultural and entertainment committee of the class without any suspense.”

S. Y. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

“And I can also direct for everyone in class activities.”

Q. J. (12 years old), Performance Choir

They participate in choral concerts or singing competitions, representing their schools, and as a result, they come to gain more experience and confidence:

“Have. Now in the school chorus competition, I am the lead singer in the class.”

W. Z. (9 years old), Performance Choir

“Yes, participated in the school choir, participated in the competition, and won the competition.”

Z. X. (11 years old), Performance Choir

These responses are examples of how choir activities can contribute broadly to the operation and development of school communities in connection with school music education or school music entities and functions that unify communities as choir members share music with others.

Additional Benefits Not Discussed Prior

The Role of Parents

I asked the parents of XCHCC members about their role in the choral activity of their children. A good number of parents pointed out that their role is to encourage their children when they become tired and stressed out. In fact, we see how our children have difficulties moment by moment when they learn something new. When children dislike practicing or studying, it is important for parents to encourage children and help them reconsider why they practice and learn:

“Parents are the ones who give timely encouragement and partners who fully appreciate expectations.”

Mother of Y. Y.

“Assistance and support, encouragement and appreciation.”

Mother of L. P.

“I am a listener, appreciator, and helper.”

Mother of X. J.

Others stated that they should play the role of forming a good team with choir teachers to help their children learn better in a supportive and safe environment. Good education is possible when it is accompanied by close relationships and understanding between families and schools or between parents and teachers. At the XCHCC, we maintain a close relationship with parents, teachers, and staff and have a good network and a system so that we detect the needs and requests of children quickly and inform others to address them holistically. Particularly, for the development of individual students, the XCHCC informs the parents of assignments and the educational status quo through networks so that parents can know how to help and instruct their children at home. Then, parents can create an environment that encourages individual practice by providing a quiet space and setting specific practice times for their children. Finally, teachers can communicate regularly with parents to share students’ progress, and parents can discuss their children’s practice experiences, offering encouragement and support to motivate them:

“Cooperate with the teacher to supervise the children to practice and communicate with the teacher in time the problems in learning.”

X. Y. & Mother

Some parents responded that they go beyond the role of a mere helper and learn and grow together with their children. In fact, I am aware that some parents actively participate in

children's practice at home. I am also aware that those parents who can play piano create practice accompaniment files and share them with other students, while other parents study and practice lyrics in English or other diverse languages with their children. The participation of these parents motivates children to practice and learn more passionately, and it also creates an environment in which children can practice more interestingly and with more fun:

“Happy parents who can participate together, it is best to listen to lessons together occasionally.”

J. Y. & Mother

“Study together, accompany.”

Mother of M. T.

“Slowly change from sparring to appreciator, and the improvement of children will force us to continue to learn, hoping that there will be more links where parents need to participate.”

Z. L. & Mother

“The main thing is to accompany the child, let the child experience the beauty of music, not one-sidedly pursue the immediate utility, and guide the child to face life optimistically. Music will be a good partner with the child throughout the life.”

F. S. & Mother

As shown above, the role of parents goes beyond the passive role of simply providing rides to their children. Parents practice, learn, and grow together with their children and help make the learning process a meaningful and valuable one. By doing so, they present an image of good parents as authentic assistants for their children's learning.

Special Experiences: Special Place

Many students stated that the choir is not just a place of learning, not just a part of their ordinary routine, but a special place that provides special time and experiences, which they cannot experience at school or home:

“My most special experience in XCHCC is that I participated in concerts and had many performances.”

W. Q. (10 years old), Performance Choir

Students can experience not only performances at the concert hall but also visit special performances through the choir. Many students who responded reminisced that the performance with the Xi’an Symphony Orchestra and Xi’an Symphony Orchestra Chorus at Cuihua Mountain, a famous mountain in China, was the most special ever. This performance was a special one Xi’an Concert Hall designed when indoor performance was impossible because of the great spread of the Coronavirus at the beginning of 2020.

During the lockdown, we faced isolation but found comfort in our regular online practices. Finally, the day arrived when restrictions lifted, and we could perform together again.

We were invited to perform in the breathtaking Cuihua Mountain, one of China's sacred peaks, marking our first face-to-face reunion since COVID-19 began. As we gathered, the crisp mountain air filled us with joy and anticipation. When we began to sing, our voices echoed through the mountains, creating a powerful atmosphere. Each note resonated deeply, reminding us of the strength of our unity. Many of us were moved to tears—not just by the music, but by the significance of being together again.

In that moment, surrounded by nature and each other, we felt immense gratitude, celebrating our resilience and the unbreakable bonds we had forged through adversity.

“I participated in the performance of Cuihua Mountain with the teachers. It was really great, and the teacher said that I became more cheerful.”

X. Z. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

“Go to Cuihua Mountain for outdoor performances.”

L. G. (10 years old), Performance Choir

Some students pointed out the choir competition in which they participated as the most memorable out of all the special events they had experienced. The Xi’an Concert Hall Choir took part in the choir competition held in Beijing, representing Shaanxi Province. Although they did not receive any award, I think it was a meaningful event in that people had the pride of representing their province and experienced solidarity with other students:

“The most memorable experience for me is participating in a chorus competition in Beijing.”

W. Q. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

Another special experience many students mentioned above all was the large-scale outdoor performance held at Wild Goose Pagoda Park, a famous cultural heritage in China, where many cultural legacies and remains of Xi’an are found. This outdoor performance is the most meaningful and greatest performance in size, and it is a spectacular performance. Diverse performance entities design and perform in front of an audience consisting of thousands of spectators. The Xi’an Concert Hall Choir that I conduct is also invited annually, and many students noted that this outdoor performance was the most memorable performance for them. For example, last year, XCHCC had the incredible opportunity to perform with the renowned Chinese pianist Lang Lang on the stage. While waiting backstage, the students were thrilled to take pictures with him and hold his hands, creating a memorable experience for all. Additionally, singing popular Chinese folk songs like “Molihua” and “Yellow River” alongside the audience was a highlight for XCHCC members. This moment allowed them to

share their cultural heritage and foster a sense of community through music. The joy and pride they felt during these performances will be cherished memories of a lifetime:

“Show off as a part of the children’s chorus during outdoor performances!”

L. Y. (8 years old), Performance Choir

“Fortunately to participate in outdoor performances this year.”

Y. T. (9 years old), Performance Choir

“Participate in the Big Wild Goose Pagoda performance in the rain.”

J. Y. (10 years old), Performance Choir

“Participate in outdoor performances.”

C. Y. (9 years old), Performance Choir

“Participated in the outdoor performances of Big Wild Goose Pagoda twice, as well as the performance of Cuihua Mountain.”

Q. J. (12 years old), Performance Choir

Xi’an boasts of many historical, cultural, and heritage sites, and many visitors and cultural art groups visit Xi’an. Many choirs from Europe and the United States have visited Xi’an and performed at the Xi’an Concert Hall. There have been times when the Xi’an Concert Hall Choir performed together with children’s choirs from around the world in the past, and some students remembered them as special and meaningful moments.

Some students held as a special memory the joint performance they had with a children’s choir from Colorado when they visited Xi’an. When the Colorado Children’s Choir visited Xi’an, XCHCC had the wonderful opportunity to perform alongside them. To make this special collaboration more meaningful, XCHCC students wrote heartfelt letters to each member of the Colorado choir and presented them with simple gifts. XCHCC students also prepared some English phrases to communicate with the Colorado Children’s choir members. During their joint performance of the song “The Moon Represents My Heart,” they

even taught each other some Chinese words. All of these experiences were truly memorable and fostered a deeper connection between the two choirs.

“Perform on the same stage with friends from the Colorado Children's Choir.”

Z. X. (11 years old), Performance Choir

The Xi'an Concert Hall holds two large-scale opera performances twice a year, and many students who participated in those performances thought of them as a special experience. The Xi'an Concert Hall Choir has had the honor of participating in various operas and musicals such as *Carmen*, *Turandot*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Ivy Tower*, *Don Quixote*, and the like. Through their participation in these performances, students had the opportunity to learn of how operas and musicals are created and performed. Perhaps more importantly, they get to be up close and participate with great singers, and to be exposed to the grand spectacle of staging, acting, and dancing. I believe that these special performances are not something students can experience at schools or at private institutes and thus must be remembered as a truly meaningful experience:

“When participating in the opera “Carmen,” I came backstage of the Grand Theater for the first time. I was very excited. I was instantly full of curiosity when I saw the equipment and props in backstage.”

Z. J. (11 years old), Performance Choir

“Participated in the selection of Madame Veron's musical.”

Z. C. (11 years old), Performance Choir

“Especially many participated in Don Quixote, Madame Veron, and other performances.”

S. Y. (9 years old), Performance Choir

“Through the platform of the choir, as a young actor, participated in the performance of the opera “Ivy Tower” in Xi'an.”

W. Y. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

Some students responded that the Christmas performance was a special experience for them. Although a festive atmosphere for Christmas is gradually being embraced by young adults, Christmas is not considered a major event in China. Chinese New Year is the greatest holiday each year, yet surprisingly, some students still thought of the Christmas performance the Xi'an Concert Hall was especially impactful:

“Performing with the teacher at Christmas 2018.”

F. Z. (8 years old), Performance Choir

“Christmas concert was memorable since the Christmas carol or songs were familiar but not performed very often in public.”

Mother of L. M.

The choir is indeed a special place that has created special memories for the students in many senses. In addition to normal choir activities, the special outdoor performance, the performance at Cuihua Mountain, and opera and musical performances create lifetime memories. Even though Xi'an a major city is remote, and therefore it is not easy for most children to experience new and special cultures. But, through the choir, children can experience the world and enjoy unusual experiences.

Building Relationships

Another unique experience lies in the special relationships students form in the choir, particularly the relationships with adults. In Eastern culture, there are not many opportunities in which children and adults mingle, get to know, and learn from one another. The reality is that the gap between children and adults is widening (Nisbett, 2003, 45). It is clear that

teachers and children in the choir can create music together, build diverse forms of solidarity, and grow together. The relationship between teachers and students in local schools is formed based on the authority and hierarchy of teachers to a great degree. However, the Xi'an Concert Hall Choir pursues student-centered education, creates strong and intimate solidarity through the interest and love of teachers, and creates music based on that solidarity.

This is a major societal shift! Contrary to most educators, our teachers' instruction is based on love and interest, and the postures of students based on respect strengthen this solidarity:

“Every lesson is filled with the love of the teachers, and I can often enjoy the piano performance of Pinyan.”

X. Z. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

“Teacher Zhang Mei Tuli's encouragement made me full of confidence!”

Z. H. (8 years old), Advanced Choir

“You can sing in the concert hall and sing happily with teachers and classmates.”

M. C. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

“This time I reported that I had a cold before the performance, and I had some coughs during the performance. The teacher and classmates still friendlily let me participate in the performance, which made me feel very warm.”

X. J. (10 years old), Advanced Choir

“I think the teacher here is nice. Teacher Zhu and I are good friends.”

D. K. (7 years old), Advanced Choir

“The teacher praised me while singing.”

Z. C. (8 years old), Advanced Choir

“Korean conductor Mr. Kim knows my name.”

J. X. (10 years old), Performance Choir

Difficulties

Of course, one cannot say without fail that choir activities provide positive experiences only. In this section, I will address some of the difficulties choir children experience.

Singing Techniques and Skills

Some students expressed challenges in learning singing techniques. We use this information to continue to find better methods and language to teach. This might be a natural part of the learning process, but I think teachers and I as the conductor must think about how we can explain and teach more easily and effectively:

“The teacher pointed out that I still can’t use the air well.”

X. Z. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

“Can’t go up the treble, weak basic skills.”

Z. H. (8 years old), Advanced Choir

“It is difficult to grasp the conversion between true and false voice in singing.”

L. Y. (8 years old), Performance Choir

“The position of the vocalization is wrong, resulting in a hoarse voice after singing.”

J. Y. (12 years old), Performance Choir

Some young students also expressed difficulty reading music scores. During the early days of running the choir, since we prepared easier repertoire, we had much time to devote to sight-reading during rehearsals. As repertoire became more challenging, we found ourselves in a situation where we need to teach sight-reading skills separately. Soon, we created a new class called Music Sight-Reading so that students who need it would sign up for and take the class:

“The sight-singing of the new song is relatively difficult.”

Y. T. (9 years old), Performance Choir

“The ability to read music and stage performance needs to be improved, but I will continue to practice and work hard.”

F. S. (8 years old), Beginning Choir

“Reading music is very fast now, knowing that the voice is high, and singing is not tired.”

D. K. (7 years old), Advanced Choir

Language

As students mentioned above, it might be difficult for young students who are not proficient in foreign languages like English to learn diverse new languages. To help students with these difficulties, the choir has assigned teachers talented in languages so that students can understand and learn new foreign languages more easily. The choir also makes audio files that help students practice languages and pronunciation at home. Because of the nature of the choir which requires its members to learn and sing in diverse languages, a good number of students had difficulties in learning the languages:

“I cannot speak English well enough.”

Y. M. (8 years old), Advanced Choir

“It’s a bit difficult to learn Japanese songs.”

M. C. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

“Foreign language songs are a bit difficult.”

X. Y. (8 years old), Advanced Choir

“When learning foreign language songs, the pronunciation of lyrics is not standard.”

X. J. (10 years old), Advanced Choir

“For some songs, the proficiency is not enough, and it is difficult.”

S. X. (8 years old), Advanced Choir

“No, it is a little difficult to learn English songs.”

Z. X. (9 years old), Advanced Choir

“When encountering a song in a foreign language, it will take a long time because the lyrics are not familiar.”

W. Q. (10 years old), Performance Choir

Relationships

The ability to socialize helps to adjust well when newly participating in an entity. Since there are individual differences, making friends might not be difficult for some students, but expanding one’s social network might be difficult for other students. When one is preoccupied too much with music or the operation of the choir, it is easy to miss students’ challenges. That is something I will take more interest in and think about.

“When I first joined the chorus, I was not familiar with the children and I didn’t like talking.”

L. Y. (10 years old), Performance Choir

Chapter IV: Solutions and Suggestions for Conductors

Introduction

As shown in the interview in the previous chapter, it was seen that children's choir activities had a significant impact on personal growth. It was found to have a particularly

positive impact on self-management as the development of personal musical growth. In addition, it was confirmed that it had a significant impact on forming and developing social preferences. As seen in the study of the Xi'an Concert Hall Choir, the choir becomes a place to connect with society. This provides young members with opportunities to connect as well as the driving force to experience and grow in the larger society. It has also been confirmed that choir activities help with academic achievement. This appears to be helping not only the growth of musical knowledge but also other subjects and studies in various fields. It shows that the expansion of time management, self-management, and responsibility experienced through the choir is helping growth in other areas of their lives as well. Additionally, it has been shown that choir activities have a positive effect on children's health. I was able to confirm that choir activities played a positive role in their own mental health by reducing stress, easing emotional control, and increasing opportunities to express myself more positively. Lastly, the choir is a place where society's values can be shared and experienced more deeply. It was experienced that the value of choir activities does not exist only within individuals and the choir but makes society more positive and meaningful.

Therefore, in this chapter, based on the various types of results learned through interviews in the previous chapter, I will propose solutions and suggestions needed for choir operation and guidance to create an influential choir (you can find more information on my website: <https://pyounggangkim.wixsite.com/the-choir-gardner>).

Important Findings: Benefits of Participating in the XCHCC

I will briefly summarize the benefits of choral music revealed in the previous chapter, following the order of Musical Development, Personal Growth, Social Connection, and Community Involvement. Then, I will suggest how to create such an educational environment and atmosphere as a conductor and mentor in each section.

Musical Development

Through the research in the previous chapter, it was shown that the students' primary area of growth is musical development. The Xi'an Concert Hall Children's Choir was able to confirm that regular rehearsals helped develop musical and vocal foundations. In addition, the development of basic musical understanding skills essential for singers, such as music theory, sight-singing, and listening, was evident. I believe that these skills go beyond simple musical growth and serves as a foundation for people to appreciate music of all types.

Dynamic Breathing

I would like to recommend an approach based on the Laban Movement theory for vocal development. This is because my experience with the Xi'an Concert Hall Choir showed that traditional choral vocalization techniques and functional theoretical approaches are not as effectively applicable to young children today.

For more effective and dynamic breathing, rather than the traditional method of the conductor instructing and imitating it, invite the choir members to experience Laban effort quality movements (light, heavy, quick, slow) with the conductor. For example, we connect breathing and movement by having the members raise their hands and breathe in, lower their hands, and exhale. This experience allows the singer to experience how dynamic breathing is possible through physical movement rather than breathing that is only understood theoretically in the head. Or, use one of Laban's eight basic efforts (float, flick, slash, wring, dab, glide, press, and punch) to explain sensations of breathing, such as using quick or slow motions to explain different breathing needs. This approach can also allow students to experience various sensations that evoke emotions as they breathe and move.

Movement and Pitch Matching

I suggest implementing weight-related pitch-matching concepts derived from the Laban Movement to have a better understanding of the intonation. For example, you can assign pitches based on the concept of weight. For low pitches (Heavy), you may utilize slow, grounded movements (e.g., squatting, heavy arm drops). Alternatively, for high pitches (Light), you might utilize quick, buoyant movements (e.g., jumping, lifting arms). So, singers will move their bodies according to the assigned weight while singing corresponding pitches. These movements greatly help students find and imagine the physical expressions or movements necessary to produce accurate pitches.

Pharyngeal Spatial Awareness for Intonation

I encourage the choir director to incorporate more physical movements or gestures to help singers understand how to utilize their pharyngeal space while singing. Accurate pitch is especially achievable when creating accurate space within the oral cavity or pharynx. Thus, it is very helpful when students can understand the creation of space using gestures to “visualize” what they can’t see inside. The gestures are a physical representation of the movement inside of the body and apply this to singing. For example, you can guide students to lift their arms over their heads while visualizing that they are lifting the soft palate and the back of the throat. Or, you can ask your singers, with one hand, to create an imaginary circle in front of their mouth, indicating the space they must open up in the pharynx. This approach enables your singers to feel the space within their bodies and use it more actively through movement.

Repertoire Goals

I would like to recommend the choir directors to set clear goals for the performance repertoire. For example, it is important to make accurate and clear judgments and set goals as

to whether to aim to improve students' vocal skills, improve their musical understanding, or allow them to experience diverse cultures and languages through the repertoire.

We, at the XCHCC emphasize the importance of a diverse performance repertoire. As mentioned earlier, a diverse repertoire can be a great resource for young students to experience cultures beyond their own, and those that interest them. By exploring songs from different cultures and singing in various languages, students gain an appreciation for diverse musical customs and enhance their understanding of language and expression.

Genre Diversity and Age of Singers

I encourage the choir directors to consider genre diversity when selecting repertoire. By the way, I've found that when we talk about genre diversity we need to consider students' age as well. Younger students may struggle with complex musical structures or themes. Selecting genres that match their cognitive abilities ensures they can engage meaningfully with the music. Different age groups have varying learning styles. For example, younger children aged from 5 to 8 years old often benefit from repetitive and simple melodies, while older students aged from 9 to 16 years old can handle more complex harmonies and rhythms. Also, music often reflects themes and emotions relevant to the listener's life stage. Younger students connect better with playful and simple tunes, while teenagers might relate more to contemporary pop or emotional ballads. In addition, certain genres demand different technical skills. For instance, classical music might require more precise vocal techniques, while pop music can be more accessible for younger students.

Engage with Thematic Programming

Lastly, I would like to emphasize the importance of Thematic Programming. For example, it might be important to have the experience of singing about the change of seasons

through Seasonal Themes; social themes to sing for special national events or preparing performances for holidays such as Teacher's Day or Mother's and Father's Day.

Thematic programming enables singers to connect emotionally with the music. Also, it can showcase the values and traditions of the community. Performing songs for national celebrations or holidays nurtures a feeling of connection and pride, aiding children in engaging with their cultural heritage.

Personal Growth

The next benefit most easily identified was personal growth. Through the process of practicing performance, students experience their development, and this experience grows into confidence. Fear of the stage changed into confidence that they could express themselves through practice, and students experienced how to use their time and effort and how to create valuable things through it. By means of it, students developed the power to transform challenges into a process that they enjoy rather than being afraid of. Through this experience, they also learned that they are a valuable person.

Fostering Self-Expression

Developing self-expression among choir members is a primary effort. For that, I propose creating a safe atmosphere where students can trust and rely on each other. Indeed, students are not able to express themselves freely and comfortably in an atmosphere that is oppressive rather than a comfortable and safe atmosphere.

The first thing a conductor must do to create a comfortable and safe atmosphere is to redefine their role. In many cases, in a choir, the conductor decides everything, and the members are seen as assistants who strive to achieve the conductor's musical direction and goals. However, if a rehearsal environment centered on singers is created, choir members will

be able to freely express their thoughts and feelings more comfortably, and this will furthermore lead to the creation of “our” music rather than one person’s music. For example, the conductor should make a lot of effort to invite choir members to become interpreters of the music by asking questions during rehearsals. You should have open discussions about how students feel about music, why the composer created this music, and how we should express it and discover and create “our” music through various thoughts and perspectives. To give a specific example:

Can you share your thoughts regarding the theme of this music?

If you were to express this music in color, what color would suit you best?

What emotions does the composer want to convey in this song?

Is there anything you would like to add or remove from this song?

How can we complete this concert as a team?

These questions help singers have deeper thinking and enable meaningful performances.

Additionally, in order to better understand the lyrics, the conductor can help and encourage the singers to work in teams during practice to express the meaning of the lyrics as they feel them by creating a drama, short skit, or tableau-like motionless image with the lyrics in the background. In addition, by encouraging not only the conductor but also the choir members to give each other positive advice, they are encouraged to experience that expressing themselves is a joyful act rather than a fearful one.

Building Discipline

It was also able to see that as participants in the choir, the XCHCC members also experience a strong sense of responsibility and discipline. The choir members mentioned that they experienced a sense of responsibility and meaningful moments through the choir, and through the process of implementing this, they grew into more responsible individuals. It has

been confirmed that the entire process of managing their time, doing choir homework, and preparing for rehearsals serves as a process for them to acquire greater responsibility and life skills that choir members will experience as members of society. This has strong value and meaning beyond musical development.

Consistent Rehearsal Times

I would like to recommend setting a regular choir practice time. Once it is decided on what day and time to practice on a weekly basis, this becomes a routine for students and an opportunity to help them realize the importance of setting and investing their own time. Create a calendar for each semester to help parents and students identify important deadlines, such as rehearsal dates and times, performance dates and schedules, and prepare in advance.

Goal Setting

It is significant for students to clearly share and talk about their own goals for each semester when the semester begins. Also, it is important to share individual and group goals for each practice and help singers practice with a clear sense of it.

For example, what direction of vocalization or musicality do you personally want to develop, and what are the future goals of the entire choir? Or are you planning to participate in a choir festival or perform overseas? I believe that through the process of talking and sharing in detail, members will have a clearer sense of purpose, and through this, they will become clear about how they want to manage themselves and develop.

Attendance and Punctuality Policies

I also recommend checking attendance regularly since attendance is also the most basic indicator to evaluate students' sincerity. Therefore, the process of checking attendance and absence in a choir is important, and it is also crucial to systematize this. The XCHCC also has a choir staff member who carefully checks attendance and absences, and we give a small gift at the end of the semester to students who faithfully attend. Having assistance from

a parent or teaching assistant is a common solution so that the conductor can be connected and supported immediately. Through this, the conductor can help students fulfill their responsibilities as part of the choir with more sincerity.

Preparation Assignments

I strongly urge conductors of once-a-week choirs to assign homework! We have found one of the most important commitments for the XCHCC members is to complete their weekly assignments. It has allowed students to record their practice process and results and submit them to the teachers online. When the students' practice and homework are delivered to the teachers, the teachers write written feedback to the students and send it back to them in email format. Through the feedback, the students can recognize areas that need improvement and make corrections before the next rehearsal. It has the effect of killing two birds with one stone, as students get to hear feedback from their teachers at home and hear in detail what they need for personal development that cannot be provided during choir rehearsals.

Confidence Building

I encourage choir directors to provide opportunities such as talent shows and solo performances for choir members to show off their talents in front of many people and gain greater confidence through this. Talent shows provide opportunities to express a variety of talents, including not only singing but also playing a musical instrument, writing, poetry reading, or painting. Additionally, the solo performance opportunity given through auditions during each performance provides an opportunity for many students to develop their talents. This provides an opportunity to build confidence both when performing on stage.

The excellent and meaningful performance that comes from day-by-day rehearsals shows that the difficulties and efforts felt during the process are worth it as well. I believe

that the feelings of nervousness and fear that often accompany performance are transformed into confidence through this hard work. Also, it is expressed in the team spirit and confidence of the choir group.

Social Connections

A strong bond among choir members is a necessary element to create a cooperative environment. This sense of connectedness is essential for choirs to create better practice and performances. Therefore, the XCHCC strives to expand social bonds among members by creating various activities and environments.

Team-building Activities

I recommend implementing a variety of team-building activities to foster strong bonds and enhance team spirit. In the XCHCC, we try to foster bonds between choir members who meet for the first time by actively using various team-building activities and ice-breaking projects during the practice process at the beginning of the semester. For example, Spaghetti Tower Project, Unity Balance, Human Knot, Hoola Hoop Activity, Moon Walk activity, Two Truths and a Lie, etc. Through this process, young singers open their hearts to each other and experience getting to know each other better.

Mentorship Program

I would like to suggest a Buddy System: Pair new members with experienced ones to provide guidance and support, fostering connections and a sense of belonging. For instance, at the beginning of a new choir season, directors might conduct interviews or surveys to learn about the musical interests, personalities, and goals of the new members. For example, the new member Duoduo revealed her passion for musical theatre songs, although she feels

somewhat shy about performing. Then, the director will create pairs according to her interests and personalities. For example, a self-assured mentor, Jingyao, who is older and loves musical theatre songs as Duoduo does, will be working with Duoduo. Subsequently, the mentor Jingyao and the mentee Duoduo will hold regular meetings for practice sessions and casual conversations about music and personal insights. For instance, Jingyao arranges weekly practices to collaborate on vocal skills and performance selections, enabling Duoduo to feel more comfortable in a nurturing setting.

Social Media Presence

Establishing a strong social media presence for the choir can greatly enhance interaction among members and promote the choir to a wider audience. To begin, you need to choose the social media platform that your members are most active on. You can select from Facebook, Instagram, WeChat, or TikTok. Then, choir members can share behind-the-scenes photos or stories on the social media platform. Also, you can create posts that include short interviews of fun facts about choir members or share short video clips of members discussing their experiences in the choir, offering a deeper glimpse into the community. Choir members can also engage with followers using questions and polls on this platform, building a vibrant online community.

Therefore, social media creates a platform where choir members can communicate with each other outside of practice. By sharing updates, photos, and events, members can feel more connected to one another and foster a sense of belonging.

Choir Tour Tradition

A choir tour can become a memorable tradition by providing unique experiences that foster solidarity among members. The shared journey, filled with rehearsals, performances,

and travel, creates lasting bonds and cherished memories. Special traditions, such as a tour song or designated photo spots, add fun and a sense of identity to the experience. Celebratory events, like closing dinners and reflection circles, allow members to share their highlights and express gratitude. Overall, the combination of music, adventure, and shared moments makes choir tours a significant and unforgettable part of the choir culture.

Community Involvement

The social participation of a choir is important because it ultimately promotes cultural or social cohesion beyond the connections among choir members. The inclusivity and teamwork of the choir are further strengthened through participation in community service programs or events. This social participation inspires people through music and allows for sharing and enjoying the arts. By building various relationships with the audience, the choir's influence and significance are deepened. Through this process, the role of the choir is not limited to within the choir itself but rather established itself as a medium that enriches the broader society.

Event Participation in the City

Collaborating with other choral directors and choirs to create a choral festival is a great way to create change. For example, the 2024 Chang'an International Choral Festival in Xi'an was an opportunity to experience the impact choirs can have on the local community. At this first National Choral Festival held in Xi'an, popular Chinese conductors and Dr. Geoffrey Boers from the University of Washington attended as workshop leaders and judges of the festival, and many choirs from China attended and experienced many exchanges.

The Chang'an International Choral Festival served as an opportunity for the creation of many new choirs in Xi'an, such as the Xi'an Teacher's Choir, Xi'an Concert Hall Youth

Choir, and school choirs, and served as an opportunity to increase new demands and desires for choral conducting and choral music in Xi'an. It is a good example of how a choir can create a positive influence on society.

Parental involvement

Another important factor for children's choir development is increasing parents' participation and involvement. If the choir directors and parents work as a team, this will create great synergy in the development of young singers.

I encourage conductors to hold a meeting or workshop with parents before the start of the semester to share the choir's long-term goals and vision as well as short-term goals. For example, the XCHCC conductors usually have a presentation for each semester and provide more specific directions during the presentation. This is a time to introduce not only musical plans but also educate them on how to participate as a helper or a parent.

In addition, I suggest conductors to deliver reports on how the purpose and benefits of the choir are progressing and developing through monthly choir newsletters or parent consultations. I think that when this happens, trust between the choir and parents builds, and a strong sense of community develops.

This chapter presented various solutions and recommendations to lead the choir in a more positive and learner-centered direction. As noted above, the conductor's role today resembles that of a "facilitator" who creates and invites the choir members to the learner-centered environment. The learner-centered approach and environment require the full and active participation of all the choir members, including teachers and students, to create an effective learner-centered climate, as seen above. It is the conductors who motivate, empower, drive, and encourage the choir members, guiding them to the learner-centered

direction instead of just letting them be submissive or passive learners to become active participants in the ongoing processes of the rehearsal.

Additionally, the conductor's role extends beyond choir rehearsal; they are also expected to act as a "mediator" who develops and fosters connections between the choir and broader social or community relationships. Therefore, conductors must acknowledge the significance of fostering a social environment among choir members alongside their musical skills. This goes beyond simply directing music; the conductors should be committed to strengthening and nurturing the bonds among choir members through continuous effort.

Conductors should also understand that the choir is a part of the community that can engage in various social activities and contribute to it. Consequently, they need to explore and guide the choir in understanding its role within a broader social context through various activities and events.

Chapter V: Conclusion

Present the World

The XCHCC is a place to show the world to choir members, their parents, and the audience who love the choir and seek out their performances. There must be many layers to experiencing the world and experiencing globalization. In that sense, we first want to think about what globalization our choir is offering.

China has made a lot of progress, and it has been modernizing in many ways. Unfortunately, however, it seems that China's modernization is mainly surface level, sometimes without content, depth, or philosophy to it. It is a problem that mainly appears in countries that have achieved rapid development in a short period. Even in Korea, my home

country, these phenomena or problems often occur. When the cultures of advanced countries are accepted and followed without deep consideration and discussion, we often see that they only imitate the phenomenon, not the meaning that exists behind it. Imitation may be the beginning of all development, but it always brings limitations and becomes an object that must be overcome. An artistic activity in which the meaning does not exist can only be an empty sound and a loud noise.

As seen from parents' expectations and choir members' interviews, XCHCC is becoming a space where young students can experience the modernization or advancement of the choir. Philosophical and technical aspects coexist. Among the many advantages that choral music provides, the most important is the invitation to diversity. By learning and singing a variety of repertoires, XCHCC members have the opportunity to experience different cultures, languages, and histories. Choir members learn a new language and experience a new culture at the same time through choral music and rehearsals. Also, in order to better understand the meaning of the song, they learn and understand the history of other countries and their ways of life. When rehearsing for the Broadway musical *Annie*, students ponder what family might have meant to Annie. By practicing and playing Ola Gjeilo's choral music, students will understand how Norwegian composers expressed the beauty of the world through harmony and learn their thoughts and attitudes toward the world. By studying and practicing Bach's church music, students experience what Baroque is, what counterpoint is, what faith is, and how to express such faith through musical ideas. Perhaps these are all too familiar to us living in an open society, but I believe that they can come as a fresh worldview to XCHCC students. Therefore, this process gives students the power to respond positively to the diversity of the world a little more. For students accustomed to standardized music and culture, this experience is an important opportunity to accept and meet the world.

In addition, the opportunity to perform abroad at XCHCC is an opportunity for students and their families to see and learn from the wider world. As overseas travel is still not free for anyone, and it is an environment where foreign materials or videos cannot be accessed freely, the choir's overseas performance or participation in overseas choir competitions is accepted as a big change for the choir members. Participation in the choir competition not only enables students to feel the level and diversity of choral music in the world but also brings many positive challenges. These experiences serve as a driving force for students to dream bigger dreams.

As a result, XCHCC members and their families experience a greater sense of freedom through the globalization of the choir. Since the definition of freedom is relative, the experience of a new culture, knowledge, or environment can sometimes be perceived as a significant change or liberation for those who are unfamiliar with it. I believe that freedom comes from knowing and is developed through seeing and hearing. In that sense, I do not doubt that the XCHCC will become a space that provides freedom to students through knowledge and new experiences referred to becoming a global citizen.

Quality in Education

The XCHCC can be described as a place where the modernization of education is realized. At the core of this modernization is “student-centered education.” This approach emphasizes music education centered on students, rehearsals led by students, and musical interpretations that fully reflect students' thoughts and emotional experiences. Student-centered education has been an important foundation of constructivism in Western education for a long time, in which students are not passive learners but they are the agents of their own learning.

In that sense, the rehearsal of the XCHCC will be a space where Chinese students, who are accustomed to teacher-centered education of Chinese traditional teaching methods,

experience more advanced education. In this student-centered choral rehearsal, students have the opportunity to teach one another, freely ask questions, and explore the beauty of music through various approaches. For example, when studying lyrics, they practice methods that allow students to understand and learn with their bodies and minds through short plays or dramas using the lyrics, rather than simply memorizing and mastering words that they do not know the meaning of. This kind of method encourages students to joyfully become masters of music. Also, through the process of learning difficult music theory classes through games, students probably feel that the theory classes are not just hard and boring, but enjoyable and meaningful.

Thus, this advanced education not only enlightens students' thoughts and imprints them on how to practice and perform as the subjects and masters of music, but also nourishes them in developing the attitude that they should have as future musicians. Certainly, the beginning can be challenging, and sometimes students get frustrated, setbacks, and failures. However, I believe that these experiences will help them move away from a passive mindset and transform into true artists who express their thoughts, feelings, or perspectives through music.

Social Platform

Music education deals with the emotional aspect of human beings and is in a very important position among all education fields. In particular, choral education is of great value as it educates adolescent students in the basics of music as well as social skills that foster cooperation and responsibility. Nevertheless, in the actual field of choral education, it is very often witnessed that there is choral education with unclear goals in place. In particular, in many cases, students are required to only focus on learning choral skills. Therefore, setting

and implementing desirable goals for choral education is a very important task for its development.

As shown in the choir research discussed above, the XCHCC choir members said that when they practice together, they feel a sense of belonging and a sense of kinship and intimacy that they are doing something together, and they forget their loneliness. The choir members also experienced many times that they came to think of each other as essential, as they exchanged stories such as “I can’t sing this song without a soprano,” and “As expected, it sounds empty somewhere without an Alto.” In addition, I experienced and witnessed many times when singers in the XCHCC were satisfied and happy with the “need for recognition” as they had the consciousness that “I am an indispensable person in this choir.”

A study by Stewart (2008) of the Center for Public Health at Griffith University in Australia shows the effectiveness of singing together in direct numbers. Professor Stewart's research team surveyed 21 choirs, including five teams, in Queensland, where Griffith University is located. Then, 98% of the choir members surveyed rated their quality of life as good or excellent. 81% of them said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their health. What is surprising, however, is that 51% of the choir members had long-term health problems. It is twice the average of the general Australian people, but I believe that the sense of being together and of being closely connected to each other gave the choir members a sense of happiness and satisfaction with life. Isn't it because the goal of dialectical humanism mentioned by Erich Fromm, that is, a true human community that exists only between completely free people without social class or discrimination, is realized at least when they sing together as members of the same choir? (McLean, 2008).

There are more than 400 members in the XCHCC, and they are all children from different families, parents, and environments with different education and values. Our children live in a world where differences are emphasized, competition is emphasized, and

the importance of individuality is emphasized. However, the moment we sing together, it is the moment we discover we are not different, and we are shining together as a group. In that sense, I believe that the XCHCC is a good starting point to develop and experience social skills. The XCHCC is becoming a place where there is no discrimination, no distinction, and no dividing.

New Cultural Momentum

Integration and healing have become some of the biggest topics of our time, common to any country and any generation. Conflicts start from small communities within families and societies and are gradually spreading between countries, systems, and ideologies. In addition, conflicts such as race, religion, and gender equality have become like the detonator of a bomb that may explode at any time. With the development of science, technology, and communication, the global village is physically getting smaller (as the word implies), but it seems that the gap between people is getting bigger. It is self-evident that this confrontation and antagonism started from a lack of mutual understanding and consideration, but it is never easy to elicit concessions from anyone.

Humanity has been developing and devising various devices to solve these problems through generations. Like Pope Francis, religious people are meeting with the heads of other religious circles to pray for peace, and politicians are drawing agreements through discussions. Entrepreneurs are fulfilling their social responsibilities through donations, and philosophers through their own philosophies. And artists, with the spirit of the times to fulfill their social obligations, draw sympathy from others by using pens and their own instruments as tools of communication.

I believe that the zeitgeist of art in the current era revolves around empathy. Among them, music has an intuitive yet direct power. Even in war, music does not stop giving courage and hope to everyone. What is music and what is its role in society?

Venezuela's *El Sistema* ("system" in Spanish) is a national free educational music program. It began in 1975 when Dr. Jose Antonio Abreu, an economist and amateur musician from Venezuela, gave musical instruments to children from low-income families and slums. Dr. Abreu organized an ensemble to help young musicians who could not get a job and to rehabilitate teenagers who were about to fall into crime through music. However, although his thoughts and beliefs were firm, it was not easy to accomplish all of his grand plans with only his own strength. However, as time passed, many people who sympathized with Dr. Abreu's vision supported his efforts little by little, and as senior musicians and teachers who grew up as *El Sistema* taught junior musicians, this free program gradually developed. Since then, the Venezuelan government, recognizing the positive social effect, has provided active support at the national level, and has spread the positive influence of *El Sistema* to other countries through overseas performances as well (Baker, 2014, pp. 10-15).

Of course, comparing XCHCC and *El Sistema* may be meaningless, but I sincerely hope that XCHCC learns from and emulates the spirit of *El Sistema*. I want XCHCC to emulate the way *El Sistema* achieves social empathy through music, comforts those in need, and connects with the world. I also wish to create a choral society where we can move people through music and share our hearts together. I sincerely dream that this process will further develop Xi'an society and further serve as an opportunity for Chinese people to experience the world. Therefore, by exploring their identities through the choir's global influences, discovering themselves in a student-centered environment, and fostering a caring community to create a social platform together, we are generating significant momentum toward building a better society.

I am so proud that we, who met and started through music, are now moving in unison toward values and meanings beyond music. These things are in touch with the true value of

music, and I believe that it will be an opportunity for society to realize justice through music.

This is because a high level of beauty already implies justice.

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Appendix 1
Parent letter

Dear Parent and Guardian,

My name is Pyoung Gang Kim, who conducts the Xi'an Concert Hall Children's Choir. I am currently writing my dissertation as a doctoral candidate in choral conducting at the University of Washington. My thesis aims to organize and study the special values, strengths, and culture of the Xi'an Concert Hall Children's Choir. The study is also sponsored by the University of Washington.

The fundamental purpose of this project is to investigate the social or cultural value of the Xi'an Concert Hall Children's Choir. To that end, I would like to first investigate what values and benefits the Xi'an Concert Hall Children's Choir provides to the choir members. For that, I will investigate and observe the practice of the Performance choir, Advanced choir, and Beginning choir every week, and try to find out where the true value of the choir lies through conversations and discussions with the members. I am also planning interviews with various people, including choir members, conductors, staff, parents, and alumni, for a more accurate and broader understanding of the organization. Those who participate in this interview will participate by voluntary consent.

The interview questions are attached below for your review. Participation in the interview is freely decided, and it is clear that there will be no other disadvantages for not participating. I hope that this research will be of great resource in understanding and leading the choir better in the future as well.

If you have any other questions or want more details, please contact me at my email address below.

Warm regards,

Pyoung Gang Kim
Principal Conductor of Xi'an Concert Hall Children's Choir
DMA Candidate, Choral Conducting
University of Washington

Appendix 2
Interview Questions

XCHCC Faculty Interview Questions

1. What is your role in the XCHCC?
2. How long have you worked for XCHCC? Why have you stayed?
3. As a faculty member, what is your goal or philosophy?
4. Do you think joining XCHCC will benefit for young musicians?
5. What kind of social benefits we can expect from XCHCC?
6. What is your impression of the XCHCC in general?
7. What are the difficulties you face in XCHCC?
8. What do you think of XCHCC's parent community?

XCHCC Chorister Interview Questions

1. How long have you been in the XCHCC?
2. Why did you join XCHCC?
3. What is your special experience at XCHCC?
4. What are your difficulties in studying at XCHCC?
5. By joining XCHCC, do you think your comprehensive music skills have improved? If yes, how?
6. By joining XCHCC, do you think you have personal growth? If so, please give an example. If not, please tell us how you feel.
7. By joining XCHCC, do you think your social skills have improved? If so, please give an example. If not, please tell us how you feel.
8. By joining XCHCC, do you think you have brought any influence in your family and friends/class/school? If so, please give examples of how it helps. If not, leave it blank.
9. What does this experience mean to you? How has it affected you?
10. What is difficult about your XCHCC experience?

XCHCC Parents Interview Questions

1. How long has your child been in XCHCC?
2. Why do you want your children to join XCHCC?
3. Do you think your child's comprehensive music ability has improved by joining XCHCC? If so, please give an example. If not, please tell us how you feel.
4. Do you think your child has grown up by joining XCHCC? If so, please give an example. If not, please tell us how you feel.
5. Do you think your child has improved his/her social skills by joining XCHCC? If so, please give an example. If not, please tell us how you feel.
6. How has the XCHCC experience affected your child?
7. As the parent of XCHCC members, what do you think is your role?

Appendix 3
Interview Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
Information Statement

**The Influence of the Children's Choir:
An Ethnography of the Xi'an Concert Hall Children's Choir**

Pyoung Gang Kim
Dr. Geoffrey Boers

DMA Candidate, UW School of Music (617) 755-4616
Professor, UW School of Music (206) 543-9212

September 17, 2010

The University of Washington is sponsoring my dissertation research study on the influence of Xi'an Concert Hall Children's choir. I would like you to be in the study. This information Statement aims to help you decide if you want to be in the study. Please read the statement carefully. If you have questions about the purpose of the study, what I would ask you to do, possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research that is unclear, you may contact me directly. When I have answered all your questions, you can decide if you want to participate in this study. Xi'an Concert Hall has approved this project and has agreed to cooperate with this study.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to examine the value and influence of the Xi'an Concert Hall Children's Choir. I want to learn how this organization functions as an educational enterprise and why choristers, faculty, parents, and alumnae consider this experience valuable.

STUDY PROCEDURES

I will be observing weekly rehearsals and attending concerts and other events. I will continue to interact with the students as a conductor of Performance Choir A. Additionally, I will be conducting interviews with choristers, faculty, parents, and alumnae and distributing a survey to parents and alumnae. Interviews with adults will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and location. Before the interview starts, I will ask you to read an information statement and sign a consent form. You will also decide if you want the interview to be audio recorded or not. I will then ask questions related to your experiences as a participant in the XCHCC community. The interviews will be 20 minutes or less.

Only I will have access to the recordings, which will be kept in a locked file cabinet. I will transcribe your interview recording within 4 weeks of your interview, assign a study code to the transcript, and destroy the recording after 3 years. Please indicate below whether or not you give your permission for me to audio record your interview.

RISK, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT

Although minimal, there is a risk that you might experience slight discomfort, embarrassment, or stress while answering questions about your personal experiences as a member of the XCHCC community. Some people feel self-conscious when they are audio

recorded. You are free to withdraw from the interview at any point should this discomfort occur.

OTHER INFORMATION

Only I will have access to the data. All data will be kept in a locked office at my school, Xi'an Liangjiatan International School. Information about you is confidential. I will code the study information. I will keep the link between your name and the code in a separate, secured location until June 2024. Then I will destroy the link. If the results of this study are published or presented, I will not use your name.

If you have questions later about the research, you may contact me directly at (185) 9178-7291. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the University of Washington Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098.

Subject's statement

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later about the research, I can ask one of the researchers listed above. If I have questions about my right as a research subject, I can call the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

_____ I give my permission for the researcher to audiotape my interview.

_____ I do not give my permission for the researcher to audiotape my interview.

Printed name of subject

Signature of subject

Date

Appendix 4

Mission Statement of the Xi'an Concert Hall Children's Choir

VISION

The Xi'an Concert Hall Children's Choir envisions a community where children can explore the joy of singing.

MISSION

The mission of the Xi'an Concert Hall Children's Choir is to provide a music education and performance program for young children in Xi'an. The XCHCC seeks to continuously enhance the cultural life of Xi'an by providing choristers and the audience with an organization that teaches respect, teamwork, commitment, collaboration, artistic integrity, innovation, and dedicated effort.

VALUES

COMMITMENT

We value commitment. Through the belief in having respect for themselves and others, children learn that it is the attention to their commitment that will determine the depth of their personal development and the quality of the ensemble presentations.

DEDICATED EFFORT

We value the dedicated effort. Each child comes to the XCHCC from different background and with varying skill sets. It is here where they learn that their dedicated effort determines the extent of their personal and artistic growth.

ARTISTRY

We value artistry. Through an organized program of understanding and skill development, the children learn to make music like practicing artists. They develop a respect for diversity and gain a sense of community by learning music of many cultures and styles in their original languages.

INNOVATION

We believe in the importance of expanding the boundaries traditionally applied to choir, and encourage creativity in programming, rehearsal, and performance.

西安音乐厅童声合唱团

愿景

西安音乐厅童声合唱团要创建一个孩子们可以在其中探索唱歌乐趣的社区。

使命

西安音乐厅童声合唱团的使命是为西安的青少年提供音乐教育和表演节目。XCHCC 致力于通过向合唱团和听众提供组织尊重，团队合作，承诺，协作，艺术诚信，创新和奉献精神的组织，来不断增加西安的文化生活。

价值观

承诺

我们重视承诺。通过相信尊重自己和他人的信念，孩子们知道，对自己承诺的关注将决定他们个人发展的深度和整体表演的质量。

尽力而为

我们重视奉献精神。每个孩子都有不同的背景和不同的技能来参加 XCHCC。在这里，他们得知自己的奉献精神决定了他们个人和艺术发展的程度。

艺术性

我们重视艺术性。通过有组织的理解和技能发展计划，孩子们像做练习的艺术家一样学习制作音乐。他们通过学习原始语言的多种文化和风格的音乐来培养对多样性的尊重，并获得社区感。

革新

我们相信扩大合唱团边界的重要性，并鼓励在编排、排练和表演中发挥创造力。

Appendix 5

*Audition Requirements for Xi'an Concert Hall Children's Choir***To Join Advanced Choir**

- Vocal exercise to determine vocal range and attributes
- Assessment of music reading skills with a short sight-singing example:
Basic music reading skills or strong tonal memory with a commitment to work on music reading is a requirement for this ensemble
- Sing one song (less than 3 minutes)

To join Performance Choir

- Vocal exercise to determine vocal range and attributes
- Assessment of music reading skills with a sight-singing example:
Basic music reading skills are a requirement for entry to this ensemble.
- Learn and sing a short phrase that is taught during the assessment and sung in harmony with the director.
(Imitating melodies and will be asked singing harmony as well.)
- Sing one song (less than 3 minutes)

考核内容**进阶班**

- 通过练声曲确定音域和声部
- 通过单声部视唱和旋律模唱评估音乐综合素养 (C 大调 G 大调)
- 演唱自选曲目 (不超过 3 分钟)

专修班

- 通过练声曲确定音域和声部
- 通过单声部视唱、旋律模唱、和声即兴编配三个方面评估音乐综合素养 (C 大调 F 大调 G 大调 D 大调)
- 演唱自选曲目 (不超过 3 分钟)

Appendix 6
Audition Form

XCHCC Audition Form

Name 姓名：_____ Age 年龄：_____

Do you play an instrument (if yes, what and how long)? 是否有学习乐器？如果有，什么乐器，学习了多长时间？

STOP HERE

Please present this form to the instructor upon entering the audition room

*以下为老师填写，请进入排练厅后将表格交给考核老师。

*(1 = low, 5 = high)

Rhythm 节奏	1	2	3	4	5
Tone Quality 音色	1	2	3	4	5
Intonation 音准	1	2	3	4	5
Sight-singing 视唱	1	2	3	4	5
Melody Memorization 模唱	1	2	3	4	5
Confidence 自信	1	2	3	4	5
Overall Rating 综合评分	1	2	3	4	5

Total score: _____ 哦

Accept 是否升班： Yes No
Undetermined

Voice Part 声部建议： Soprano Mezzo
 Alto

Comments 评价：_____ i



Teacher sign 教师签名：

Appendix 7
Chorister Curriculum Expectations

Each season, under the direction of the director of each choir choristers will:
Learn to read musical notation and understand key musical concepts in weekly classes
Acquire a solid education in music theory and skill in ear training and sight-singing

1st Semester

	Rhythm 节奏	Melody/Sight Singing 视唱	Conduct 挥拍	Score Reading 读谱	Expressive Elements 表现力的要素
Beginning Choir 基础班	Notes 音符： <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quarter 四分音符 • Eighth 八分音符 • Rests 休止符 • Quarter 四分休止符 	Melodic Patterns 旋律模唱 Kodaly Hand Sign 柯达伊手势	2/4	Repeat sign 反复记号	Dynamic Markings 力度标记: <i>Piano, Forte</i> 弱、强
Advanced Choir 进阶班	Notes & Rests 音符和休止符: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole note 全音符 • Sixteenth notes 十六分音符 • Whole, half, eighth rests 全休止符、二分休止符、八分休止符 • Ties 连线 	Major Scale Pattern (Keys of C, F, G) 大调音阶 CWFWG 调 Key Signatures 调号(C, F, G) Sight-reading 视唱 (C, F, G) Tonic Triad 主三和弦(C, F, G)	3/4 4/4	1 st /2 nd ending 1、2段的结尾 D.C.从头反复 D.S.从记号处反复 Coda 尾声 Fine 结束	Added tempo markings 速度标记 Added Dynamics 力度标记 Slur 连线 Phrasing 分句 Accent 重音
Performance Choir	Notes & Rests 音符	Intervals 音程	6/8 2/2	2-3 part voicing	Vocabulary from repertoire

专修班	符和休止符： ● Triplets 三连音 ● Syncopation 切分音 ● Dotted Quarter 附点四分音符 ● Sixteenth note patterns 十六分音符	4ths, tritones, 5ths, and 6ths, 7ths, octaves 四度、三度、五度、六度、七度、八度 Key signatures through 5 sharps and flats 五升五降的调号 Natural minor 自然小调 Chromatic Scale 半音音阶		二/三声部	谱面的音乐术语
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2nd Semester

	Rhythm 节奏	Melody/Sight Singing 视唱	Conduct 挥拍	Score Reading 读谱	Expressive Elements 表现力的要素
Beginning Choir 基础班	Notes & Rests: 音符和休止符 ● Quarter note 四分音符 ● Eighth note 八分音符 ● Half note 二分音符 ● Dotted half note 附点二分音符 ● Quarter rest 四分休止符 Measure 小节 Meter 节拍	Major Scale 大调音阶 Chromatic Scale 半音音阶 Solfège & letter names of notes 音符的唱名和音名 Half & Whole Steps 半音和全音 Sight-sing simple melodies 视唱简单旋律 Sharps & Flats 升号和降号	2/4 3/4 4/4	Title 名称 Composer 作曲 Lyricist 作词 Voice/Accom. 1 + 2 part voicing 一/二声部 Treble Clef 高音谱号 Slurs/Ties 连线	Tempo Markings 速度标记 Dynamics fermata 力度&延长 Staccato 断奏 Legato 连奏

Advanced Choir 进阶班	Notes & Rests 音符和休止符: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sixteenths 十六分音符 ● Triplets 三连音 ● Dotted quarter 附点四分音符 ● Syncopation 切分音 	Intervals 音程 : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Major 2nd and 3rd 大二度和大三度 ● minor 2nd and 3rd 小二度和小三度 Order of Sharps/Flats 升降号顺序 Key Signatures: Keys of D, B flat, A, E flat 调号 : D 调、降 B 调、A 调、降 E 调	3/8 6/8	2-3 part voicing 二/三声部	Vocabulary from repertoire 谱面的音乐术语
Performance Choir 专修班	Notes & Rests 音符和休止符: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Dotted eighths 附点八分音符 ● 32nd notes 32 分音符 ● Compound Meter 复拍子 	Minor Keys 小调: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Natural 自然小调 ● Harmonic 和声小调 ● Melodic 旋律小调 Dorian and Mixolydian 多利亚和混合利底亚 Intervals 音程 : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Augmented & Diminished 增减音程 	3/8 2/2 9/8 12/8 Mixed meter 混合拍子	3-4 part voicing 三至四声部	Vocabulary from repertoire 谱面的音乐术语