

## MUSIC AT ST. COLUMBA'S

### A. OVERVIEW

Congregational singing has always been central to worship at St. Columba's Episcopal Church. Every Sunday parishioners lift their voices in praise as a central part of the liturgy.

St. Columba's holds up to six services each Sunday during the program year, which runs from Labor Day until Columba Day in early June. The 8 am service has no music. The Boy and Girl Choirs typically sing in the 9 am service, and the St. Columba Singers in the 11:15 am. Two services designed for pre-school children and their families are at 9:15 am and 11:15 am in the Great Hall. Parishioners and clergy form a band to provide music at a monthly 5 pm contemporary worship service called "Live@5."

The music program emerged from the congregation and allows members of the parish to donate their time and talents to a variety of choral and instrumental groups. The following narrative describes these groups and summarizes their current activities.

### B. THE PRIMARY CHOIR

The Primary Choir consists of first and second graders. A one-hour weekly rehearsal is divided between play, snacks, and the basics of rhythm, pitch, and repertoire. The Primary Choir sings every four to six weeks and at a children's Christmas Eve service.

### C. THE BOY CHOIR AND THE GIRL CHOIR

The Boy Choir and the Girl Choir (open to third- through eighth graders) rehearse on Wednesday evenings and sing most Sunday mornings at the 9 am service. Participation in the Boy and Girl Choirs is a major part of outreach and welcome, and an important element of Christian formation at St. Columba's. These young choristers build technical skills and grow into roles of leadership and responsibility within the music program and the broader church community.

Many choristers participate in weekly, volunteer-taught sight-singing classes.

Some Boy Choir and Girl Choir members sing in the Chapel Choir, based on their proficiency and willingness to rehearse for an extra half-hour each Wednesday. The Chapel Choir provides a challenge for the more experienced singers.

### D. THE GALLERY CHOIR

The Gallery Choir is open to all high school parishioners. It has the intimacy of a chamber ensemble, usually gathering in a semi-circle around the piano for rehearsal. Most Gallery Choir members have sung together for many years, and they participate in Sunday worship several times each year, typically from the Gallery.

### E. THE ST. COLUMBA SINGERS AND THE ENSEMBLE

The St. Columba Singers are a non-auditioned, all-volunteer adult choir that rehearses on Thursday evenings and sings at the 11:15 am service each Sunday. Their substantial repertoire includes the best-loved anthems of the Anglican tradition, as well as newer Christian choral music. The choir currently numbers 67 singers and is therefore able to tackle larger-scale works. On All Saints' Day the choir regularly presents a major requiem. In the spring, the choir typically sings a mass as part of the liturgy.

The Ensemble is a standing sub-group of about 15 invited singers interested in additional opportunities to sing more challenging music. The Ensemble sings at the 11:15 am service approximately twice a month. Since 2004, the Ensemble has sung 185 different anthems by diverse composers including Peter Aston and Charles Wood.

The St. Columba Singers continue to be the core of the adult choral music program and a resource for many services and activities outside the Sunday services.

#### **F. SUMMER SINGERS**

After the program year ends with Columba Day in early June, the 9 am and 11:15 am services are combined into a 10:30 am service supported by a pickup choir consisting of everyone who arrives by 9:45 am to rehearse a simple anthem. The Summer Singers provide opportunities for singers who are not regular choristers, or those who normally sing in different choirs, to sing together.

#### **G. MUSIC IN THE GREAT HALL SERVICES**

The 9:15 am and 11:15 am Great Hall services for pre-school children and their families are filled with music that is accessible, theologically solid, and fun. These services are a major point of entry to St. Columba's. Music is currently led by both volunteer and staff pianists.

#### **H. MUSIC AT "LIVE@5" SERVICES**

Live@5 is a monthly contemporary worship service that is liturgically creative and adventurous, with songs and hymns in the "Christian Contemporary" repertoire. The music is led by a band – vocalists, keyboard, guitars, bass and percussion, with other instruments such as violin, flute, and oboe, as available – and its tag-line is "Serious worship with a playful vibe." Live@5 is envisioned as a weekly outreach service to connect with people beyond the parish who are not drawn to traditional worship or who find Sunday mornings inconvenient.

#### **I. THE ST. COLUMBA ORCHESTRA**

This chamber orchestra is comprised primarily of strings, complemented by flutes, oboes, and organ or harpsichord. The group rehearses most Wednesdays, and approximately once a month performs movements from a classic work as prelude and postlude to the 11:15 am service in the main church. While focusing on Baroque concertos, the orchestra has performed music of all periods including new and lesser known works. On some festival Sundays the orchestra accompanies the choirs. From time to time the orchestra performs at venues other than St. Columba's, such as the Smithsonian museums. Players include parishioners and guest performers including professional musicians. New members are sought out and welcomed. An important role of the orchestra is to encourage and feature young musicians.

#### **J. THE HANDBELL GROUPS**

Handbells have long been a part of the musical tradition at St. Columba's. At one time, the bell program was a key element in high school Christian formation, and there has been a constant variety of handbell groups. At present the most active group is the Genesis Ringers, made of up Boy and Girl Choir members who ring with the service music.

## **K. THE ARTS HOUR**

The Arts Hour highlights the depth and breadth of talent in the visual, performing, and literary arts that exists among St. Columba parishioners and associates. It gives us a way to recognize and celebrate those talents by sharing them with one another and with our friends. Arts Hours are usually held three times per year (September/October, January/February, and May) immediately after the end of the 11:15 am Sunday service. Past Arts Hours have featured painting and sculpture, poetry, typography, music from classical to bluegrass, and J.S. Bach's *Coffee Cantata*.

## **L. THE ORGAN SCHOLAR PROGRAM**

In 2015, the St. Columba's music department created an Organ Scholar Program in response to a nationwide shortage of organ students. The goal of this program is to encourage young pianists to explore organ study for a year at St. Columba's, under the direction of the Assistant Music Director.

## **M. CONCERTS**

Each year St. Columba's hosts a New Year's Eve concert featuring vocal and instrumental musicians from the Washington DC area. The proceeds benefit the music program. In addition, the parish periodically invites choral groups to perform in the excellent acoustic space of our main church. A recent concert featured "The Thirteen."

## **N. NEW POSSIBILITIES**

The preceding narrative provides an overview of our music and music program as they currently exist. While remaining committed to a robust music program for all ages, St. Columba's is open to new possibilities.