

How it All Began

In 1997, Dr. Elizabeth Kimble, founder of the Georgia Children's Chorus (GCC), submitted a proposal to Dr. Richard Graham, Chair of the University of Georgia School of Music, to establish a children's chorus at UGA.

Dr. Graham accepted the proposal and appointed Dr. Harriet Hair, Chair of the Music Education Committee, to serve as the liaison between the School of Music and Dr. Kimble in developing plans for the GCC.

Dr. Elizabeth Kimble secured a commitment from the School of Music and the University of Georgia in May 1998 through the support of Dr. Harriet Hair. This commitment included the use of Hodgson Hall for concerts and a music suite for practices. The purpose of the collaboration was to provide choral training for children in the community and to provide on-site opportunities for UGA music education/choral students to observe rehearsals and to teach the children.

A 21 member board of directors, consisting of community volunteers and two UGA music faculty members, was formed and led by President Kathryn Nichols to help support the Chorus with fund raising efforts. The board organized procedures for raising community awareness of the chorus, for raising money to support the staff and operations of the chorus, and for providing scholarships for chorus members who needed financial support. Dr. Graham and Dr. Louise McBee, state representative from Athens, comprised the board of advisors for the GCC. The dedicated and enthusiastic support of these initial board members led to the establishment of The Georgia Children's Chorus as a non-profit organization in residence at the University Of Georgia School Of Music.

Dr. Kimble held a kick-off Choral Festival the week of July 6, 1998. The festival ended with a concert on July 10 after one week of choral training and was the perfect opportunity for Dr. Kimble to introduce her idea of a children's chorus to children and parents in Northeast Georgia.

Dr. Kimble, a native of Decatur, graduated summa cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts degree from Queens College in Charlotte, N.C., received a master of music education degree from Florida State University and a doctor of education degree at UGA. She established and directed community choruses at Queens College and Emory University prior to establishing the GCC.

The first enrollment for the 1998-99 season included more than 100 children between the ages of 7 and 17 who came from eight counties: Clarke, Oconee, Oglethorpe, Madison, Jackson, Barrow, Elbert and Franklin. The GCC represented 25 public schools, five private schools and home schools. Cindy Haygood was one of the parents involved in the original chorus group, served as the primary accompanist for the Chorus, and secretary for the Board of Directors.

The GCC, in residence at the University of Georgia, performed its inaugural concert on Tuesday, December 15, 1998, in Hugh Hodgson Concert Hall at the UGA Performing Arts Center. The concert included traditional Christmas carols, Hanukkah music and a Greek New Year song with accompaniments by the Classic City Brass Quintet, a piano and dulcimer. Several songs were sung a cappella.

On Sunday, May 9, 1999, the GCC presented the piece "Alleluia" by Dr. Charles Callahan of New York during the Mother's Day program as part of the Classic Center Community Concert Series and Athens Newspapers "Celebrate 2000" project. This special piece was commissioned for the chorus by Kathryn and Carl Nichols to honor the group's premiere season. Music education majors Jonathan Klein and Heather Melton were accompanists. Carl and Kathryn Nichols hosted a reception in the lobby of the Georgia Museum of Art before the GCC Spring Concert. The reception was catered by Lee Epting. About 800 people attended the concert. The GCC went on its first concert tour in June of 2000 and performed as part of the Spoleto Festival in Charleston. On August 31, 2000, the GCC performed at the dedication of the Loran Smith Center for Cancer Support.

The GCC began a satellite program in Gainesville in cooperation with the Arts Council, Gainesville College and Brenau University. The Arts Council sponsored a kick-off event for the chorus on September 26, 2000, with 40 singers from the Concert Choir of the GCC in Athens presenting a short program.

The first GCC Guild was formed in the Chorus' second season. Sharon Sellars was the first president of the guild, which served as a specific group focused on fund raising, assisting with ushering and chaperoning and generally supporting the chorus in any way possible. The guild was formed by sending letters out to the community and asking for volunteers. Seventy-five people accepted immediately. The first fund raiser given by the guild was a luncheon held at the Athens Country Club in September 2000 with Barbara Dooley as the main speaker. During the summer of 2001, the chorus once again had the opportunity to tour. The chorus toured and performed concerts in Louisiana. The 2002 tour scheduled to London was cancelled due to the September 11 tragedy and subsequent traveling issues.

A New Beginning

Dr. Kimble resigned in July of 2002 and the Chorus was graciously directed and maintained by three wonderful interim directors. Richard Gnann served from July 2002 through December 2002. Doris Granum served from January 2003 through May 2003 and Tom Granum served from September 2003 through December 2003. Current director Carol Reeves joined the organization in January of 2004 as Artistic Director with 29 singers in the Chorus. Carol immediately started recruiting and in the first two weeks of January added 20 more students for a total of 49 her first season. The following year, 2004-05, membership rose to include more than 60 choristers. In the 2005-06 season membership climbed to 72 and then 77 in the 2006-07 season. For our 10th season in 2007-08, membership has grown to 85 choristers. The concert audience grew from 200 in 2002 to over 600 in 2007. The chorus currently serves nine counties including Clarke, Oconee, Oglethorpe, Madison, Jackson, Barrow, Walton, Morgan, and Greene.

Carol holds a Masters of Music Education from UGA where she was the Gene M. Simons Memorial Fellowship Recipient in 1992. She received her Bachelors of Science in Music Education from Auburn University where she graduated with Honors and was a member of the Auburn University Singers. When Carol joined the GCC she had over twenty-five years experience in directing children's choirs and teaching music to children in schools and churches in Georgia, Kentucky and North Carolina. Carol taught music in the Oconee County School System for seven years, where she also founded the Oconee County Intermediate School (later Colham Ferry Elementary School) Chorus and was named 1996 "Teacher of the Year" at that school. Carol also serves as Director of Children's Music Ministries at Athens First United Methodist Church.

Erica McClellan, pianist, also joined the GCC in 2002. Erica completed her Masters Degree in piano performance at the Peabody Conservatory in May of 1997, where she studied with Ann Schein. She earned a Bachelor of Music Degree, also in piano performance, from the University of Maryland, College Park, studying with Anne Doscienly. From 1997 to 1999 she taught piano at Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia, Arkansas. Before moving to Athens, she was pianist for the Shenandoah Valley children's Choir in Harrisonburg, Virginia.

Jill Brega, who graduated from Doane College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Music Education, served as GCC's first Chorus Administrator beginning January 2004. She later assumed the position of Children's Coordinator until her family moved to Iowa in the fall of 2006.

In August 2006, Sharon McKillip joined the GCC staff as the Chorus Administrator. Sharon earned a Bachelor of Music degree with concentrations in Music Education and Music Therapy at the University of Georgia. She served as Music Specialist in the Clarke County School system from 1975 until 2005 and was named Clarke County School District Teacher of the Year for the 1999-2000 school year. Sharon was the recipient of the Lamar Dodd Chair of Fine Arts in

2001-2003 and her “blood runs red and black” as she was the recipient of a four year scholarship for the UGA Redcoat Band.

In the past few years the GCC has had wonderful singing opportunities such as performing before the showing of the Sound of Music at the Classic Center, singing at the Perfectly Polished Formal, and performing at the Botanical Gardens at Christmas. The Georgia Children’s Chorus has become an integral part of the community and is frequently asked to perform at special events such as holiday celebrations, weddings, and benefits for local charities.

A Bright Future

Through her tremendous leadership, Carol has raised the quality of singing by the children to such a high level of performance that the Chorus has received an invitation to perform at Carnegie Hall in New York for three consecutive years! It is the hope of Carol and the Board of Directors to accept the invitation in the summer of 2009 if funding allows. As we look to the future of GCC we eagerly anticipate providing our chorus with exciting new performance venues and touring possibilities. We hope that you look to the future of GCC with anticipation as well. Funding for touring and scholarships continues to be a need for the Chorus and we hope you will consider being involved in our future.

We extend our deep appreciation to all board members, chorus directors, patrons, sponsors, Hugh Hodgson School of Music Faculty and Staff, and Hugh Hodgson Performing Arts Staff who have made these past fifteen years successful! We look forward to continuing our partnership with you in the bright future ahead. Thank you for Believing in our Song!