



25th Anniversary Remarks

by Trish Joyce, Founder & Artistic Director

How do you sum up 25 years in just a few minutes? I was reminiscing with the girls this past Monday, about some of the early days of the choir. As you may know, the New Jersey Youth Chorus was ‘born’ as I sat at Kathy and Peter Henry’s kitchen table in Bernardsville. I was teaching at Bernardsville Middle School, at the time, and told the Henry’s how I wanted to start a community children’s chorus, because there wasn’t enough time allotted in the school curriculum for choir. When the choir was launched in 1992, there was no Administrator, no Board of Directors, no staff, really no home computers or email, no cell phones. We used phone chains to get in touch with parents. There was no choir phone – I used my home phone – and ran the choir administration from my house; everything from setting auditions and performances to booking buses and writing press releases. We hand-sewed the first uniforms in the Bernards HS sewing room; a whole group of Moms and Dads on several Saturdays (including Becky Creswell, who is here tonight). Our first overnight trip was a weekend in Boston. I was about a month pregnant, and was so nauseas on that LONG bus ride up; the chaperones thought I was mad, because I didn’t say a word on the bus. But, once we arrived, I got to share my good news with those chaperones, including Beth Stout, who is here tonight.

I had no idea what the possibilities were for the Somerset Hills Children’s Chorus --- renamed the New Jersey Youth Chorus 15 years ago. What I DID know was that I was passionate about the choral art and teaching, and that children and young singers deserved the opportunity to experience the beauty, joy, artistry and elegance of singing. That hasn’t changed. What I have come to learn, however, is the profound affect of singing and community.

Our commitment to musical excellence and integrity remains high, as we’ve had many outstanding performance opportunities, from NJPAC and the NJ Symphony to Carnegie Hall; from Ronan Tynan, the Chieftains and the Celtic Tenors to the Today Show; with the South African Drakensberg Boys Choir to Queen Latifah at the Super Bowl; from regional and national music conferences to various National Anthem performances; Kids for Kids out-reach, workshops, domestic and international tours. While these are fantastic, and are a very important part of what we do, it goes far beyond that.

I’m sure that many of you have heard about the incredible healing effect of music on persons struggling with cancer, Parkinson’s, brain trauma, Alzheimer’s, and so on.

Singing IS important.
SINGING is essential.

Travis Roy was a talented young hockey player, who, in 1995, skated onto the ice for his varsity debut with Boston University. Eleven fateful seconds later, he was paralyzed from the neck down.

He went on to graduate from BU, and in 1997, founded the Travis Roy Foundation, which has raised millions toward finding a cure for spinal cord injuries. In watching a documentary about him, he said:

“I like to say the first 20 years, I had a life that was full of passion, and the last 20 I’ve had a life full of purpose. The dream is to have both at the same time.”

And I thought --- that is exactly it. I believe that the NJ Youth Chorus is about PASSION and PURPOSE.

I have a purpose.
We have a purpose.

Quoting some of our choristers and parents --- **THIS** is our purpose:

(From a parent): The atmosphere of community, respect, self-discipline and love that was modeled, and expected, made my daughter feel valued in a way that nothing else in which she participated could have done. These girls and boys are sent into the world kinder, stronger and surer of their values for having been in NJYC.

(These words from three different choristers):

For six years now, NJYC has been a huge part of my life. It has changed who I am as a person and how I think about music and the world around me. But, not only did NJYC change my love for music, it changed me. When I was at practice every Monday, it was one of the few times that I actually felt beautiful. With the choir, it wasn’t about who was the prettiest or thinnest, it was about making something beautiful as a group, and then moving someone through song.

Through hard times the choir supported me and gave me something to look forward to when everything else fell apart. It was my refuge, my home, my family..... It is where hard work is expected, but one’s work pays off in the greatest of ways. It is a magical place where friends and music intertwine to create sisterhood, and where sisterhood breeds the upmost respect of one another. Choir supported me through the hardest of times, and Mondays became a reprieve from the world—a place where I could just focus on the music and know that at least in choir, things made sense.

Every Monday, my heart is filled with happiness and laughter. If there is one thing I have learned more and more each year, it has been finding the meaning and purpose of singing. NJYC has helped me realize that the reason that music is just so powerful is because for many, it is the one way to truly express yourself.

I always tell the choristers that you never know when your singing will touch someone in a profound way. Sing with intention ----- we sing to lift the audience up, or bring joy, or bring healing. What we sing is a snapshot of what we feel, and hopefully, you feel too. To borrow the text of our one of our pieces tonight,

“Our voices, united, offer a gift of love. Touching every spirit with passion and emotion, we give you a song.”

This IS my passion ---- this IS my purpose ---- this is NJYC’s purpose. There were several times in NJYC’s history, when I didn’t know if there would be enough money to open our doors the following September. There were many times when I wondered if anyone would care whether we did or didn’t open our doors in September. I don’t wonder about that any more.

I’m grateful for 25 years of creating beauty and artistry with the amazing choristers I’ve had the privilege to teach, and who have made me a better teacher. I thank every parent who entrusted their child to our care each week, and who supported our mission. I thank all those who have selflessly volunteered; from bakers and chaperones, to Board members. I thank our administrative staff, Krystiana, Christy, Sarah, Kristen for all they do. I thank past directors of our choirs, and, of course, our current outstanding directors and accompanists: Matt, Tara, Gyasi, Jodie, Phil and Thom, for their commitment to the choral art, and their great respect, love and dedication to the children they work with each week.

To my family, and especially to my husband, Paul. You know, it’s not easy being married to a Type-A musician! In 25 years, he has hardly missed one concert, in-state or out-of-state. He’s been there for me, through all the highs and lows, and supported me in this 25 year ‘labor of love.’ There are no words to express my love and gratitude to him.

I am proud of the many choristers, past and present, who have given their talent, spirit, dedication, artistry and passion to make NJYC what it is. I am honored to be its Founder, Artistic Director, and, as my Coriste girls say, “choir mother.” Composer Randall Stroepe said:

“A voice never knows when its message is a light which others will use to navigate their lives.”

Here’s to NJYC’s voice continuing for many years to come.