

Milwaukee Children's Choir Strategic Plan 2008-2012¹

Mission

The Milwaukee Children's Choir provides exceptional choral music instruction and performance experiences² that foster creativity, personal expression and social growth.

Vision³

The Milwaukee Children's Choir makes a difference in the lives of children and the greater Milwaukee community by:

- § striving for continued musical excellence in choral music;
- § achieving artistic prominence locally and beyond;
- § reaching out to children in communities underserved by the arts;
- § cultivating diversity;
- § collaborating with other arts organizations; and
- § bringing recognition to Milwaukee and its arts community.

MCC History

Artistic Director Emily Crocker founded the Milwaukee Children's Choir (MCC) in 1994 as part of the Milwaukee Chamber Orchestra. Crocker envisioned a choir that would serve Milwaukee youth through quality music education and please Milwaukee audiences through artistic excellence. She began with a group of 35 musical novices simply wanting to sing. By 2000 MCC was on sound enough footing to become an independent 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization.

As Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Music Critic Tom Strini has reported, MCC has grown in "size, reach and prestige" each year since it was founded. MCC has become "the children's choir of choice of the Milwaukee Symphony, Present Music and other major performing arts organizations." (MJS July 6, 2006). For the past two years MCC performances have been featured in Tom Strini's Top 10 performances of the year. With close to 400 singers, MCC is Southeastern Wisconsin's largest children's choir.

¹ This Strategic Plan was adopted by the Board of Directors of Milwaukee Children's Choir February 11, 2008. It supersedes an earlier Strategic Plan 2004-2007. As part of the strategic planning process we held "listening sessions" with parents and staff during the fall of 2007. Additional feedback provided through several sources also helped form the basis of discussions, e.g.: regular meetings held with constituents affected by Project Represent; parent and concert surveys; reviews and informal feedback from performance partners; unsolicited compliments, questions and concerns raised from time to time; Chorus America's annual survey and materials/advice from peers; and a review and comparison of MCC's federal income tax form (990) against other children's choirs across the nation. All MCC Committees met to review portions of the prior strategic plan and recommend changes. The Strategic Planning Committee met from time to time and reviewed the data received. Finally, a full-day strategic planning session with all staff and board was held in January 2008.

² Mission Statement revised Spring 2008 to change word "opportunities" to "experiences."

³ Currently under review by MCC Strategic Planning Committee in conjunction with review of Strategic Goals.

MCC has produced several commercial CDs. It has also been featured in recordings from the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra and Present Music and in several educational recordings, including Macmillan McGraw-Hill's nationally distributed "Spotlight on Music" school series. Members of certain choir levels have toured regularly, most recently to the Toronto International Choral Festival (MYC) and the Rhapsody Prague Children's Music Festival (Cantorei/Chamber Cantorei).

MCC has never failed to balance its budget. As a young organization with no endowment, MCC has worked to build its fiscal reserve, and has ended each fiscal year with a surplus.

Customer Base

MCC serves children ages 6 through 18, many of whom have a gift or love of music. The children come from all over the greater Milwaukee area. MCC is firmly committed to developing programs to bring greater ethnic, racial, gender, and economic diversity into the membership of its choirs and recognizes that increasing diversity requires overcoming the barriers that prevent children from participating in MCC. In some cases, this may be offering a scholarship; in other cases it requires finding transportation and working with parents who may not be able to provide the structure perceived to be important for the child's successful participation.

When MCC parents were asked why they enrolled their children with MCC, they responded that they wanted their children to:

- experience the discipline and joy of choral music, practice and performance;
- enjoy camaraderie through a choral experience;
- make new friends;
- participate in a program with an ethnically diverse membership; and
- take advantage of the valuable voice instruction it provides.

Most of our members are referred to us by other choir members or music teachers. Other referral sources include print ads, seeing MCC perform at events, television coverage, MCC's website, articles, and recruitment activities.

Program and Value

The Milwaukee Children's Choir consists of roughly 400 youth grades 1-12, drawn from six counties and more than 150 different schools. Youth come from family farms, dense urban areas and everything in between. The youth rehearse at one of 13 rehearsal sites while participating in one of five choir levels: Prelude (grades 1-3), Concert (grades 4-8), Cantorei (grades 4-9), Chamber Cantorei (grades 6-12 treble) and the Milwaukee Youth Chorale (grades 9-12). One of these choirs – Chamber Cantorei – was added at the beginning of 06-07 to address growing enrollment in the Cantorei and an ever growing performance schedule. At the junior choir levels, rehearsal sites are throughout the greater metropolitan area. As members matriculate to more senior choirs, rehearsal activity occurs at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center. All choir levels are directed by well-qualified arts educators/conductors passionate about their work.

The program is designed to provide a rewarding experience for each child. Instruction is child-centered and age appropriate. Choirs rehearse after school and evenings weekly throughout the

school year. Repertoire is varied and carefully chosen, and recognized teaching concepts are used. Choral seasons are planned with education and performance in mind.

All rehearsals lead to performance. During 06-07 MCC members from the various choir levels appeared in more than 40 performances, reaching 14,600 audience members plus an additional 30,000 at the Milwaukee Ballet's *Nutcracker*. Five performances were concerts produced by MCC. The rest of the 06-07 performances were guest appearances.

MCC members learn more than singing. They learn music, and through their creative experiences, develop a personal sense of self-worth. They learn the value of discipline, hard work and team work. They learn grace under the pressure of performance. In other words, participation in MCC builds the whole person, a person of noteworthy character.

Tuition for the 2007-2008 season ranged between \$325 and \$400, which is roughly \$12-14 per rehearsal. Choir members are expected to purchase their own uniforms. MCC has a liberal tuition aid policy. MCC tuition is lower than that of MYSO, First Stage and the Milwaukee Ballet, and many sporting activities, and is below the national average children's choir tuition.

Market and Competition

MCC is the largest children's choir program in the Southeastern Wisconsin area. It draws students from the 6 county area. While many schools and churches offer choirs, the MCC offers a level of excellence that is difficult to match on the smaller scale. The Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra exclusively calls upon the MCC when children's voices are needed for their performances. Families who enroll their children in the choirs are typically seeking MCC's higher level of instruction and performance opportunities. "Competition" typically comes from other activities—sports, orchestra, theater, and the like. There are many demands on the time of today's families. Parents also perceive that school and church choirs are competitive with MCC, and we strive to educate the public about the advantages of MCC membership.

Leadership & Human Resources

The MCC is blessed with committed and talented choir directors, staff and Board members. Founder and artistic director Emily Crocker is highly regarded in the national artistic community and brings a vision and passion that continues to inspire students, colleagues, staff and the board. All staff members are highly skilled, trained, experienced and dedicated. MCC's Board members bring energy, experience and connections with the greater community. The Board provides both leadership and support to the staff and sets high goals for itself and MCC.

Principles

There are three overarching principles that guide all efforts of the Milwaukee Children's Choir organization. These are:

1. Maintain the highest level of artistic excellence.
2. Promote choirs, staff and Board that represent the diversity of the greater Milwaukee area.
3. Plan and manage to insure the continuation of quality in all aspects of the organization.

The goals of the Milwaukee Children's Choir and its Board of Directors are focused in three areas: Program, Management & Strategic

Program Goals

- **Maintain a cohesive developmental curriculum of instruction and performance**
 - Curriculum
 - Performance Experiences

Management Goals

- **Provide appropriate governance, staffing, systems, and facilities to support the operation and growth**
 - Governance
 - Leadership development
 - Planning
 - Future direction
 - Human Resources
 - Staffing
 - Staff development
 - Infrastructure
 - Operations
 - Knowledge and information management
 - Communication
- **Maintain infrastructure support to recruit, retain, and develop the organization's membership**
 - Accessible for every child
 - Partnerships
 - Member Development
 - Singers
 - Leadership development
 - Alumni
 - Parent/Family relations
 - Volunteer development
- **Build and create community awareness of the organization and its program**
 - Market our niche for the arts
 - Communication
 - Marketing & Publicity
 - Public Relations
 - Collaborations & Partnerships
 - Adult choir organizations
 - Other arts organizations
 - Other cultural organizations
 - Other community organizations
 - Schools
 - Outreach

- Community
- Corporate
- Music Educators
- Milwaukee Public Schools
- **Assure a strong and sustainable funding strategy**
 - Continuous comprehensive 3/5/10/20 year business plan
 - Long range development plan
 - Capital fund raising program, including endowment

Strategic Goals

- **Provide opportunities for choral music experiences for children in all communities in Greater Milwaukee**
 - Explore the development of a “school of music program” that can be delivered for school partnership, charter, or other
 - Strengthen partnership with Milwaukee Public Schools
 - Strengthen partnership with music educators
- **Increase the membership base to strengthen the organization**
- **Be recognized as ambassadors for Greater Milwaukee**
- **Acquire a facility (either solo or cooperative) as organization headquarters and performance venue**

Action Plan:

The Strategic Planning Committee will assign goals to the stewardship of various board committees and staff for their leadership in developing Action Plans that include specific actions, measurements, time tables, etc. An appropriate deadline for the creation of action plans will be set. The Strategic Planning Committee is responsible for reviewing the plans and assisting in their development.

Regular reporting of progress on goals will take place quarterly. Committees and staff will create one year, two year, and three year action plans. Action plans will be approved by the Board and become part of the Strategic Plan.

Examples: Action plans will be utilized by the Finance Committee in developing budgets to support the goals of the organization. Action plans will provide the Development Committee with information for fund raising efforts.

Measurement and accountability for progress on action plans will be reviewed quarterly by MCC’s Board of Directors. The Board will maintain a calendar of dates for reporting on progress tied into the budgeting and grant reporting (or grant writing) cycles. Board committees will schedule regular standing meetings in order to keep moving forward on the progress.

Standing committees of the Board will meet regularly to maintain progress toward the action plans. Staff, both administrative and artistic, may be assigned to assist in the committees with their expertise and knowledge. It may also prove beneficial for Board committees to invite parents or others to participate in membership on the committees and they are free to do so.