

Chorale Provides Creative Outlet, Instruction for Children Singers

By Lindsay Emery

The Putnam Chorale is forming the county's first youth chorus for children eight to 12 years old, beginning hour-long online instruction this Wednesday afternoon.

Musical Director Jessica Zamek is excited about the prospect of guiding children of that age now and once the pandemic ends.

"For middle schoolers and high schoolers, they have their musicals, they have select choirs, but for this age group, eight to 12, we wanted to offer something that isn't offered a lot for that age group - really consistent musical instruction and quality pieces and an opportunity to be with those students who are also interested in that," Zamek said.

The first practice will focus on meeting one another and finding out how much musical aptitude students have, such as whether they can match pitch. It is not an audition, Zamek said, but rather a gauge as to what needs to be taught. It is hoped that they attract children from throughout Putnam and northern Westchester.

During the first month of rehearsals, the students will practice vocalizing, warming up and beginning the process of learning how to have healthy vocal techniques. Zamek plans to introduce the children to a broad variety of pieces and a wide breadth of lyrics. She also wants to teach the students a piece in a foreign language as soon as they commence practices.

In addition to the weekly chorus gatherings, two voice lessons with Zamek are included in each semester's package. Zamek has been teaching voice lessons for about 20 years and completed her undergraduate degree in vocal performance and graduate degree in opera performance. She currently provides private voice lessons to children at Rye Country Day School and is familiar with online teaching.

"I definitely want to see my students in person, but there's a lot to be done and it's certainly better than the alternative, which is no music," Zamek said.

Although the first month of the Putnam Youth Chorus will be through Zoom, Zamek and Putnam Chorale President Nick Simonelli hope that students can meet in person by next month by following all Centers for Disease Control precautions including singing outside with masks and maintaining social distance. Simonelli believes that professionals should task themselves with teaching youngsters.

"Every discipline, every work, every craft, needs to train the next generation in whatever it is you're doing," he said. "I love choral singing and it's my objective to help promote kids singing in choruses and move from there so eventually the kids will even sing in the Putnam Chorale with the adults."

The arts have been among the field that have been severely impacted during the pandemic with artists losing their livelihood. But they have also been



Musical Director Jessica Zamek is leading a new youth chorus, which was recently formed by the Putnam Chorale. The first sessions will be held this week.

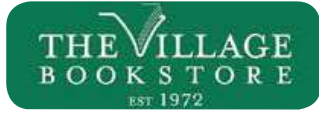
even if it's nonmusical at first," Zamek said. "So, I think that pairing is definitely going to be transformative."

What are Zamek and Simonelli looking forward to during the inception of the Putnam Youth Chorus?

"I just want to see the smiles on the kids' faces when they get to sing something for the first time," Simonelli said.

Even though the Putnam Youth Chorus is a tuition-based group, there are scholarships available for those who qualify.

The weekly rehearsals will begin this Wednesday from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. To register and learn more about the program, visit <https://www.putnamchorale.org/youth/>.



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deprived of their creativity, Zamek said. She and Simonelli stressed that encouraging the youngsters' creativity is more important now than ever.

Socialization, even if it is in an online setting, is also crucial for children so that they can develop empathy, form friendships and even release endorphins.

"I think being involved in a creative community, it really is transformative, and I think that's one of the things that Nick was also very interested in, is that the adults and the children will be interacting together,

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