Southern Chorale logs tour of state high schools

February 7, 2012

Thirty-one members of the Southern Chorale returned to campus early from winter break to prepare for a tour of Georgia high schools. The Chorale gathered on campus on Sunday, Jan. 8 to review literature from their fall semester programs and set out early on Monday morning. The first stop was at John S. Davidson Fine Arts Magnet School in Augusta, where the Southern Chorale and the Fine Arts Chorale performed for one another. Next on the itinerary was Lakeside High School in neighboring Evans, the alma mater of Chorale member Molly Hynes ’14. With the day’s work behind, the group then settled in for the drive to the metro Atlanta area and a great Italian dinner.

A 4:45 a.m. wake-up call on Tuesday prepared the choir for a drive through dense fog to Duluth High School and the Young Women’s Ensemble rehearsal at 7:20; Catherine Steen ’08 is the choral director at DHS. Dr. Shannon Jeffreys, the director of choral activities, warmed up the two groups together. The Chorale and all of the DHS groups — Chamber Choir, Bella Voce and Advanced Women’s Ensemble — sang for one another and joined in DHS’ traditional closing song “The Lord Bless You and Keep You.” Following a lunch break, freshman nursing major Abbey Riddle introduced the Southern Chorale to the Milton High School Chorale. Like Davidson, Milton was preparing for a performance at the GMEA conference. The day ended with dinner and games at Dave and Buster’s. . . and a kazoo performance of Bruckner’s Os Justi.

Wednesday morning’s destination was Wheeler High School, reuniting senior Stephanie Fraser with Beth Wilson, the teacher who inspired her to pursue a career in music education. While preparing to begin student teaching the following week Stephanie wrote, “I loved tour because it gave me a chance to get out into schools around the state and see the varieties of teaching techniques and the different levels of difficulty in each high school chorus. It also allowed me to meet other choral directors, giving me connections with people to contact if I haven’t questions when I begin teaching!”

From Wheeler, the Chorale moved on to Woodstock High School for an after-school concert with the Woodstock Varsity Singers and the Etowah Elite; freshman music education major Kirstin Willard got to see several Etowah classmates. Will Hall ’03 is the choral director at Etowah. Following their performances, Dr. Jeffreys worked with each of the high school groups. The day was topped off with a much-anticipated visit to the Cheesecake Factory where Molly Nuttall ’13 received a full-voiced, four-part serenade of “Happy Birthday” that brought the restaurant to a standstill.

The final day of the tour brought the group back to Bulloch County and Southeast Bulloch High School’s Advanced Chorus, directed by GSU alum Brent Whitaker BM ’01, MM ’06. The last stop was Islands High School in Savannah and a performance with the Women’s and Mixed Choruses, led by Mary Scarborough ’08. The large audience of friends and parents had many questions after the performance.

Throughout the tour, the Chorale performances featured soloists and small ensembles. Joe Sconyers, Brian Strickland, Brian Duckworth, Ashley Rivera, and Robert Figueroa, accompanied by Dr. Karla Rocker, each performed at several high schools. The student-led men’s group, Southern Hospitality, and the women’s a cappella ensemble were audience favorites.

While the tour serves to recruit new students, it is also a chance for GSU students to see what is going on in the schools and to connect with one another. Senior vocal performance major Kody Jones said, “It was amazing to be able to get inside the classroom and meet prospective students. We learned so much about music education programs throughout the state and about each other. We can always get up and sing with energy and remain perfectly in tune – even at 7 a.m.!” In her second semester as a BA major in music Catherine Lentz observed, “One of the great things about tour was the connection I felt with the high schoolers. A year ago, I was in their place, awestruck by the talent of this group. It was an incredible feeling to share our music and inspire other young artists.”

Tired yet renewed, Southern Chorale has already performed at the rededication of the Carol A. Carter Recital Hall and is preparing for James Whitbourn’s Son of God Mass on Feb. 26 at First United Methodist Church, in addition to the CLASS Evening of the Arts on March 9 and its final concert of the year on May 1.