

Giving Girls a Voice

Introduction

Where do young girls find a healthy sense of self? How do they learn to be happy with themselves as people, so that they can be positive members of society as a whole?

They certainly do not learn this from the media. Our entire pop culture hammers girls with superficial measures of worth – skin, body shape, hair – while dismissing the true character and personality of the individual.

Sometimes they learn it from family. Many homes are wonderful sanctuaries that provide healthy support. Unfortunately, given the current rates of divorce and domestic violence, home is not always the source of security that it used to be.

Perhaps they learn it in school. But then again – school is a highly competitive environment. What does school reinforce for those girls who are not A students, who are not popular, and who are not athletes?

The truth is this: it is extremely difficult for girls to make positive choices about their self-worth, given the adverse conditions and influences that surround them. And these same girls who struggle to find their bearings today are the women who will take up leadership roles in our community tomorrow.

This is why the Girls Choral Academy is so critical to the girls in West Michigan. The Girls Choral Academy seeks to provide a safe, loving and nurturing environment, where girls can form a positive sense of self as they experience the joy of successful musical accomplishment.

History of the Organization

The Girls Choral Academy (formerly the West Michigan Academy of Music for Girls) was started in 1998 by Dr. Monique Salinas-Stauffer. As a highly-accomplished female musician and a Latina by background, she knew first-hand about the challenges facing young girls. She recognized that musical excellence offers the opportunity for girls to experience self-satisfaction and to build their self-image.

The Academy has blossomed under her leadership, growing to nine choirs of girls ages 5-18. The girls come from all over West Michigan and represent every cultural and ethnic population of the area.

Over 240 girls participate in the Girls Choral Academy each year, and that number continues to grow. Three of the choirs are tuition-free, and serve the primarily Latina and African American girls who attend school in urban areas. The other six choirs are comprised of tuition-paying students from many walks of life.

The Girls Choral Academy teaches girls the basics of good choral performance: breathing, diction, posture and blending. However, these fundamental skills are taught in an atmosphere of fun and mutual respect, using a widely diverse repertoire of songs from around the world.