



My name is Samantha Farmilant, an alumna of Chicago Children's Choir. I joined the Rogers Park Neighborhood Choir when I was in the 6th grade and was a member through high school. The CCC gave me the foundation not only to become a successful musician, but also the foundation to have a successful life.

I learned how to read and memorize music. I learned to sustain a melody *alone* while the rest of the choir sang the harmony in Danny Wallenberg's "Chamber of Death". I learned to recognize different scales – melodic, harmonic, major and minor – by listening to music and by singing it. Most of all I learned to be disciplined, in part because I didn't want to let the other singers down. They were supportive, encouraging and became some of the best friends I ever had. I learned the most important lesson in music from them – that no one voice is more important than the others. The cooperation, confidence and community spirit I learned has been valuable in everything I've done since.

After a year singing in Rogers Park, I was invited to audition for the Concert Choir, the ensemble at the center of the Neighborhood Choirs. I knew singers in the Concert Choir travelled all over the world and the demands were even more rigorous than the Rogers Park Choir. I auditioned and not only survived but was invited to join the Concert Choir. There I learned professionalism and musicianship, which built on the music and discipline fundamentals instilled at the Neighborhood Choir. During the six years I was with the Concert Choir, I was blessed to be able to perform all over the world. We sang in Prague, Germany, Japan, Canada and cities in the USA. We sang at prestigious concert halls like Carnegie Hall, Chicago's Symphony Center and the Lyric Opera. We sang for civic leaders, professional musicians and, on Valentine's Day, to total strangers.

We rehearsed every Tuesday and Saturday for six years, sometimes adding rehearsals, to learn requiems, spirituals and pop songs in English, French, Hebrew, Italian, German and even Swahili! We rehearsed relentlessly, working to express the composer's intent and to perform the music as truthfully as we could. The kind of professionalism the CCC demanded required commitment. But as strange as it seems, the experience didn't distract from my high school experience, it actually added to it. I was voted class valedictorian at my high school and earned Headmasters Awards in French and Music. I believe I was able to accomplish this because, at its core, the CCC isn't about the fame or prestigious venues; it's about the music. The principles of discipline were the focus of the Choir, rather than the fame, fortune and attention we got.

When I graduated from the Choir in 2006 (oh, and high school too), I attended Oberlin College, where I majored in Music and French. While at Oberlin, I built on what I learned in the Choir by studying music theory and music history. I also sang with the Oberlin College Choir, where I realized how rigorous the CCC's training was. I was in four musical productions at Oberlin, including one in Arezzo, Italy and another where I had the female lead in Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Pirates of Penzance*.

I want to learn as much as I can about the music industry to discover what all my options are and to prepare myself in advance for the goals I seek. I learned this technique from the Choir – preparation is golden. Since graduating from Oberlin College last March, I have interned with the Lyric Opera, taught at the Suzuki-Orff School of Music and worked at the Grant Park Music Festival. Rehearsal starts in January for a University of Chicago production of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Gondoliers*. This summer, I will be debuting in Italy as Sister Genovieffa in Puccini's *Suor Angelica*. I have taken courses in marketing, Shakespeare, beginning piano and Alexander Technique, a technique that teaches efficiency in body movement.

I would not be where I am today without Chicago Children's Choir. The Choir gave me the essential tools I needed to become a world-class musician: discipline, sight-reading, professionalism, musicianship and, most importantly, to do all of the above while having fun.