

# Carnegie Hall is calling for Chiles singers

**Amanda Karioth Thompson**  
Council on Culture & Arts

Chiles High School students now have a personal connection to the classic joke "How do you get to Carnegie Hall?" The famous punch line is "practice," and that's exactly what they're doing. Since October, vocalists at Chiles have been rehearsing for a performance of a lifetime.

They will be making their Carnegie Hall debut on Sunday, Feb. 17.

Carnegie Hall is considered one of the world's most prestigious venues and only the finest musicians are invited to perform there. Chiles choral director, Corey Sullivan, knows his students are up for the task. As part of MidAmerica Productions' 36th annual concert season, they will perform Morten Lauridsen's modern-day classic, "Lux Aeterna."

"It's a very big work," explained Sullivan. "It's almost 40 minutes of music and to program something like that with high school singers is daunting. The burden has fallen largely on the students to learn the music independently or get with others who can help them. I've been impressed with how these kids handle that on their own."

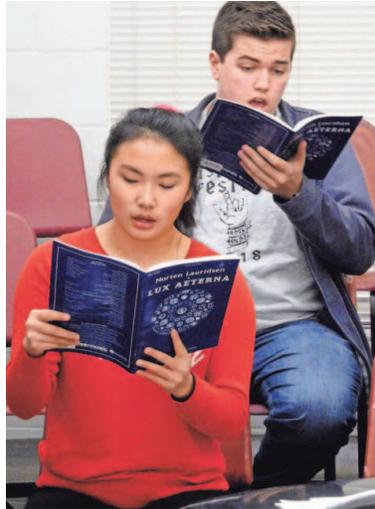
The opportunity for Chiles to perform was presented to Sullivan by the school's former choral director, Tucker Biddlecombe. Sullivan is one of Biddlecombe's former choral students and he has led the program since 2012. "I joined chorus in high school because of Tucker. He encouraged me," recalled Sullivan. "I never sang before that and look at what happened. I took his old job."

Currently, Biddlecombe is the director of choral studies at Vanderbilt Uni-

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**Chiles choral director, Corey Sullivan, rehearses "Lux Aeterna" with his soprano section. AMANDA THOMPSON**



Chiles 12th-graders Anna Edge and Conner Fabrega practice for trip to Carnegie Hall. AMANDA THOMPSON

## Singers

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versity's Blair School of Music and serves as director of the Nashville Symphony Chorus. He will be conducting the Carnegie Hall concert and Sullivan is delighted to work with him again.

The Chiles singers will be joined in New York by five other choruses from across the country, one of them directed by another former Chiles chorus director, Mary Biddlecombe. Each ensemble has spent months working through the music on their own. They will have only three opportunities to rehearse together before the curtain rises and Sullivan is confident his students will shine.

"What we're trying to do at Chiles is be prepared on our end. We'll get pitches and rhythms down pretty well so by the time we get to New York, Tucker can spend as much time as he needs to get us all to work together," said Sullivan.

Anna Edge is a 12th-grader and while she admits she's a little behind in studying the music, she's quick to add "I'll be ready, though. It's such a big event and you don't want to mess up." She joined chorus as a freshman and has been singing ever since. This year, Anna's in two choirs and the school musical which leaves her little spare time, but the experience is worth it. "Music is something that brings passion to me. The act of singing is really powerful."

Casey-Marie Halstrom is also a busy arts student. She has taken six chorus classes in the past four years and supplemented those with "about a billion other orchestra and theater classes." Opting to take many of her non-arts classes online freed up her schedule which allowed her to take more than a dozen arts elective credits in her time at Chiles. "The opportunities are endless if you're willing to work," she said.

Though "Lux Aeterna" is a challenging composition, Casey-Marie said "if you put enough rehearsal time into it, it's pretty manageable. But if you don't, the sight reading is a bit tense depending on the amount of dissonance you're comfortable with." She explained "it's like if you played two pitches on the piano right next to each other, it sounds wrong."

In an effort to make it sounds right, 12th-grader Conner Fabrega, is concentrating on passaggio or the transition area between the vocal registers. Conner is a tenor and he explained "a lot of it is really high so hanging up there for a while is not the easiest. I could easily have a voice crack at any time but I have to make a decision if I want to blast it or if I want to float it. If I blast it, it can be detrimental to my voice so I need to make decisions that are right for me."

In life, as in chorus, students are faced with many choices. Conner is in the process of auditioning for university music programs and he'll soon have to make some big decisions. He's already made one. "I want to study music education in college."

So it seems Chiles is preparing the next generation of music teachers, performers and enthusiasts. Regardless of what these students go on to accomplish, whether they decide to make a career out of music or not, they will forever carry the memory of the time they performed at Carnegie Hall.

*Amanda Karioth Thompson is the Assistant Director for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture ([www.tallahasseearts.org](http://www.tallahasseearts.org)).*