



Arnekua Jackson encourages her Hartsfield Elementary students to sing with confidence. AMANDA THOMPSON

Culture of cooperation

It takes a village to get chorus to Carnegie Hall

Amanda Karioth Thompson
Council on Culture & Arts

“Is music bland?” Arnekua Jackson asks her students rhetorically. “No, so put some sugar on it.” With those words of encouragement, her advanced chorus belts out lyrics to a new song they’re learning.

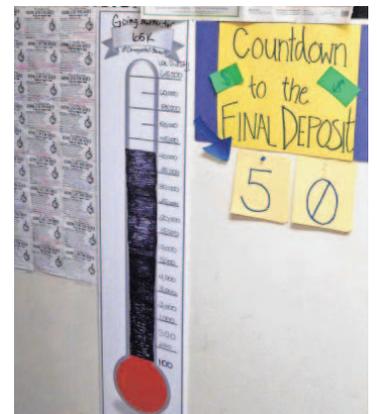
These days the young musicians are greeting every rehearsal with particular vigor as they’ve been invited to perform at the National Youth Choir during the Festival at Carnegie Hall. “They’re working their little tails off,” said Jackson.

As the music teacher and chorus director at Hartsfield Elementary School, she knows what an honor it is to play one of the world’s most well-respected venues. Her students do too, and they aim to impress. “The work ethic, the dedication, they don’t complain, not one bit,” shared Jackson, who is equally dedicated. “It’s something I wake up thinking about, I go to sleep thinking about. I’m dreaming about it and imagining how it’s going to feel.”

After three years in the chorus, Lariah Hagan is ready for her Carnegie Hall debut. “It makes me feel over the top of



Vocalists prove their enthusiasm, work ethic and dedication with Hartsfield chorus. AMANDA THOMPSON



The Hartsfield Chorus needs help from the community to make it to New York City. AMANDA THOMPSON

the roof because famous people have been on that stage and we are going to step foot on that same stage and the audience is huge,” said the fifth-grader. “It’s a big deal. Most kids don’t get this opportunity.”

The opportunity was earned through talent and hard work, but the Hartsfield Chorus will require a bit more help to

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Chorus

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make it all the way to New York City. “We need \$65,000 to get everybody there,” said Jackson. “I can be super goal oriented even though I may not see how we’re going to reach that goal.”

Not wanting her students to miss out on this experience, Jackson started a fundraising campaign soon after the invitation came. “I got some community leaders together and I told them what the dream was and all the right things started falling into place. We’ve raised little over \$40,000, so far.”

Chalay Williams is as confident in the ultimate success of the fundraising effort as she is in her own abilities. As a fourth-grader and first-year member of the advanced chorus, she shared her rationale for joining the ensemble. “I thought I was a really talented person and I can stick up enough to sing in front of a lot of people and get the chance to express myself. I like learning songs, breaking them down, and showing what we’ve learned through our performances. It’s been amazing.”

Jackson works to create a culture of cooperation and collaboration, especially as the group works toward Carnegie Hall, a place she’s never been herself. “To see it coming to fruition is unbelievable. Coming out of Leon County, this little Title 1 school. It’s going to be life-changing, for the parents too. I’ve seen so many



Singers greet rehearsal with vigor. AMANDA THOMPSON

people wanting to support the cause. People want to be a part of this, to know they were part of that initiative to send those kids up there. Our entire community is going to change because of this.”

To contribute, write a check to Hartfield Elementary Chorus and send it to 1414 Chowkeebin Nene, Tallahassee, FL 32301. Online donations can be made by going to the Foundation for Leon County Schools website at www.foundationforlcs.com/invest-1.

Fundraising efforts must be completed by Jan. 1, 2020.

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).