

## The Boston Children's Chorus: Ambassadors of Harmony

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Everybody brings back a souvenir from a trip, a photograph or a knick-knack or some other little item to remind them of where they've been once they get back home.

For his recent trip to Jordan with the Boston Children's Choir (BCC), executive Director David Howse brought back the best souvenir of all - a memory he will always treasure, a memory of a young student standing up in the audience during the question and answer session following a performance and telling the choir that his heart was full of beauty after hearing them sing. Telling them that they "sounded like angels."



"I still get goose bumps thinking about it," Howse said. "It's those little moments of inspired love from the audience that make you realize how important what we are doing really is. It's more than sounding good and entertaining people. We're ambassadors of harmony bringing a positive message to people, particularly young people, at home and all over the world."

Inspired by a performance of the nationally renowned Chicago Children's Choir, the BCC was founded in 2003 by Hubie Jones, a civic leader who saw the choir as a way to inspire diverse audiences with the power of children singing, both through their sound and in the message of their music. Jones also looked at the choir as a way to help underprivileged young people find an artistic alternative to the pressures and temptations they face on a daily basis. (An important part of the BCC program is an active Parent's Association with a mission, among other things, to "consistently assess the needs of families and provide opportunities for support so that families can best prepare and engage their singers.")

Over the past six years, the choir has performed for thousands of people - millions if you count their historic performance at the nationally broadcast Martin Luther King Day celebration this past January. And as proud as he is of the concerts, it's the more indirect impact that the choir has on the people it performs for that Howse treasures the most. It was this audience interaction that led to the choir's historic trip to Jordan. As Howse explained on the choir's online blog, the BCC performed at an event at the Harvard Club in 2007 at which the western-educated King Abdullah of Jordan was in attendance. "I could see that the King was really into it and really inspired," Howse recalled. Following the performance, the King met with the kids. "He comes in in a regular suit, shakes every hand, talks to every kid, says 'I was really inspired by what you did, what you represent; this is how things should really work,' and vowed his continued support."

It took two years of steady work to get all the paperwork - and fundraising - done, but the effort paid off in ways that Howse said will

last a lifetime. "We do a lot of work ahead of time to make sure we understand the culture of the country and the people we are visiting. It not only makes for a better visit for us, but helps bridge whatever gaps may be between us as people. Sometimes just the simple act of knowing how to say thank you in a person's own language can make a difference," he said. "It's a lesson we should all remember whether we're part of the government dealing with other countries on a political basis or just a tourist visiting for a few weeks."

The work - and good manners - of the choir paid off; the tour was a great success and Howse said he would like to schedule an encore performance as soon as the BCC can raise the money. In the meantime, he added, he'll cherish the memories they made.

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