Douglass Kostner
Larchmont's Music Man

By Feen Sneedekee and Rosanna Hansen

Westchester Children's Chorus with Douglass Kostner, Amanda Gundling and Sanee Miyazaki at left

Larchmont has long been recognized as a "happening place" for music and the arts. One of the key people in the vibrant Larchmont arts scene is Douglass Kostner, music director at Larchmont Avenue Church—and passionate supporter of community music-making.

Douglass is best known as conductor of The Westchester Chorale, which was based in Scarsdale until he coordinated with its move a decade ago to become the Larchmont Avenue Church's choral-in-residence presenting two concerts per year for the benefit of the community at large.

"I like the Chorale's programs to be open, accessible, and welcoming," says Douglass. This is why the Chorale often joins forces with other groups who delight in his leadership, such as the Westchester Children's Chorus, the Larchmont Symphony, and Larchmont's Dave Brannon's Jazz Quartet. For many in the Larchmont community, these concerts are the only local live music events they ever attend.

His widely acclaimed work as accompanist for Larchmont/Mamaroneck public school choirs has enlarged and uplifted those groups. Chatsworth School's music teacher Eric Zimmermann says that he is the most talented musician she has ever worked with.

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Erica benefits from Douglass's inspiring musical leadership in two other settings: The Westchester Chorale with whom she sings and the Westchester Children's Chorus for which she is a conductor. She says further: "With his breadth of knowledge of all styles of music from Broadway to pop to classical to contemporary, Douglass makes rehearsals fun and effectively prepares the choirs for concerts which are enjoyed by the community at large."

Douglass founded the Larchmont Symphony in 2007, working with Nicole Sharrow of the Larchmont Music Academy. The group got its start with three young string players, and today boasts a core membership of 15 adult and student musicians. The Symphony now presents two Larchmont concerts a year, in addition to programs at Larchmont Avenue Church, the Larchmont Library and other community venues.

Douglass is also widely admired for his work as a vocal coach for such groups as the Soundettes, a Larchmont-based a cappella ensemble. Ellen Dungan, Soundettes' musical-director, remarks, "It's remarkable how much Douglass has achieved to enrich our music community."

The Westchester Children's Chorus was founded in 2015 by Amanda Gundling, choral conductor and music educator in Larchmont/Mamaroneck public schools. Amanda says that her chorus has blossomed since moving to Larchmont Avenue Church at Douglass's invitation.

The Chorus holds weekly rehearsals at the church, with Douglass and Sanee Miyazaki as conductors. Thanks to Douglass' ability to draw from musical resources within the Larchmont community, the Chorus has swelled to 60 members (mostly Larchmont residents) consisting of three youth ensembles who present concerts and workshops and often join the junior choir at church services.

Amanda credits much of this growth in numbers and talent to Douglass's skill at helping the Chorus shape a wider vision of its capacity. To celebrate the Chorus's growing skill, Douglass has composed "Shropshire Lad": a work of ten movements variously dedicated to the group's choral conductors, the children and their families. Staying tuned for the debut of this new masterpiece in a community workshop this fall and a concert next spring. Or stop by Larchmont Avenue Church on a Sunday morning to hear Douglass' glorious organ playing.

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