

# A strand that can knot children globally is symphony

The little singers who sang alongside the famed Chicago Choir in the City are stars in their own right

By Seema Prasad

The cheery tunes of the 30-odd children belonging to Aerolux Government Model Primary School on Pottery Road called out to the skies and asked the angels of the heavens for their voices to be heard. The children have been practising the songs in the front yard of the school for over two months under the guidance of Rebecca Thomas, Musical Therapist, Bangalore School of Music. She was moved to tears when they perfected the lyrics of 'I Will Survive,' which is one of the four songs the children rendered alongside the Chicago Choir at Bishop Cotton Boys' School on February 2.

Anu Kapoor from Colours of Living who has conducted outreach programmes in the school for ten years has striven to create an atmosphere of a private school "we teach them the power of dreaming big and try to offer them platforms to achieve dreams. This is one such project which gives them an opportunity to learn, develop and shine on stage."

On surveying the children, there is little indication of the hard reality of their lives. Positive energy and warm exuberance envelope the yard, inspiring the teachers and students to learn better, musically and otherwise. The orphaned children are given adequate care at Mary Immacu-



**SONG TIME:** Students of Aerolux Government Model Primary School practising their songs under the guidance of Rebecca Thomas, Musical Therapist, Bangalore School of Music. DH PHOTO

late Orphanage and the hostel within the Aerolux school vicinity. The other children come to school every day from nearby slums. Each child has a special quality, but Shobha stands out most for her determination towards independent living. Shobha is a 12-year-old girl born with

polio. Her parents are separated and she seldom visits her father. Despite having no sensation in her right arm, she can walk, write and climb stairs alone. Her sister offers help in the rarest of occasions, making Shobha an undisputed model of resilience.

## Mentor's eyeview

Teacher Severine D'Souza is dedicated to nurturing and moulding the children of Aerolux school. D'Souza ensured Shobha's full participation in the Choir to further motivate the already driven girl. "My hobbies are only studying and reading" she affirms. D'Souza showers her with praises "Her enthusiasm to learn, regularity in school work and the obedience she shows make her a truly remarkable girl. In spite of knowing little English, she memorised the lyrics to be sung quickly and shows a keen interest in singing" Her favourite movies feature Tamil actor Dhanush and the songs played in them are her favourites. Shobha's ambition is to become a teacher like D'Souza, her role model, to give back to the world the blessings she has received through the medium of teaching.

The brightest student is multi-faceted 10-year-old Mahesh Kumar, who is a bundle of energy and is always eager to please the teachers with his varied skills. He displays excellence in a range of activities from sports, academia and arts." He consistently secures high marks and is an extraordinary student" adds teacher Severine D'Souza.

"I love drawing a peacock to express myself with different colours and strokes" he reveals, possessing the potential of an artist. 'I Will Survive' is Mahesh's favourite number to perform out of all the songs practised as he enjoys the exciting rhythms, which forms a reflection to his outgoing personality. Mahesh hails from Gandhigram slum and his parents are proud of him. Teacher D'Souza is concerned with his overall personality.

"Sometimes his temperature rises unexpectedly and it becomes worrying. Nothing can however deter the boy, he is mentally strong."

Mahesh's sister loves the graphical content of the apocalyptic movie, 2012. The profound reason behind the mature choice is unheard of from a 12-year-old "God created this world and the movie shows the power he has to control it," she says, showing an affinity for philosophy beyond her age. The fast-paced Epo song and Yankee Doodle are the songs she loves shaking a leg to, exposing the common love for high-energy music shared by the dynamic brother-sister duo.

When innovation and original thought are inculcated from an early age, the future of the country is secure. A group of them constructed a periscope with the assistance of teachers, which was dis-

played at a science fair in Agastya College. Lakshmi, one of the brains responsible for the creation, says "I love science. It gives me the opportunity to learn, invent and discover."

Shwetha is the youngest, at five years. Her ability to comprehend English is poor but there exists no barrier to embrace the universality of music and she learnt the words quickly. She is an unusually shy child, who coyly hides behind other children.

Prajwal, a tall 13-year-old is the prudent class leader who maintains the peace and decorum of this unique bunch. His leadership qualities reveal a maturity and self-assuredness that should take him places.

Words cannot summarise the teaching experience Rebecca Thomas had for the past two months. Not being fluent in Kannada has never

been an obstacle to teaching music. "I know the children understand me by observing their facial reactions and the improvements they make in their singing."

The collaboration between Chicago Children's Choir and several schools across India is an effort to integrate cultures through the language of music. The choir was founded in 1946 at the height of civil rights movement and continues to stand for the message of universal equality. They performed a song in Sanskrit and Kannada, promoting their support for Indian culture.

Children from Featherlite Pottery Town High School were included in the choir because the younger children are not fluent in English and to add a more wholesome feel to the show. Students were recommended personally by teachers unlike the Aerolux Model School whose choir

was open to anyone to join. The disadvantaged backgrounds of children from Chicago Children's Choir, Aerolux Model School and Featherlite Pottery Town School are the common ground shared by them, from which they can learn and grow.

There was a friendly feeling in the Bishop Cotton Boys' School auditorium. Despite not being able to communicate in the same language, the children from different cultures communicated the all-encompassing message of the song 'We shall overcome' which they sang together.

The Aerolux Model School was started by the Corporate company Aerolux. The school boasts of a few select students who have succeeded and become engineers. In this batch, future leaders are sure to emerge and make Mrs D'Souza proud.

## Music cleanses

Bangalore School of Music has conducted similar outreach programmes in Mother Teresa Home for the Handicapped, St Mary's Orphanage and Girls Crest - a development project for girls. Singing on stage is an empowerment process because it gives them the opportunity to feel special and increases their self-worth. "The standing ovation received by the children for the performance alongside Chicago Children's Choir escalated the confidence levels of the children. It is a psychologically cleansing process, there is a feeling of togetherness and unspoken camaraderie in a choir" says Mrs Aruna Sunderlal.

