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ENTERTAINMENT

GTA choirs head off to compete in World Choir Games

By **Bob Spence** Special to the Star

▲ Tue., July 3, 2012 | 🕒 4 min. read

A children's choir from Oakville is among 362 choirs from six continents that are raising their voices in song in intense competition in Cincinnati this week and next at the [World Choir Games](#), the Olympics of the choral world.

This is the seventh World Choir Games, but the first held in North America, which is raising the profile of the Games here. Cincinnati, with its deep musical roots and somewhat central location in the U.S., beat out 20 other cities from various parts of the world for the right to host.

Just like the top athletes at the [2012 Olympic Games](#) in London that start later this month, the highest-scoring choirs, as rated by a panel of international judges, can earn gold, silver or bronze medals or certificates — but in this case, even winning your category may not be enough to earn gold. A choir must score very high on the judges' cards to earn gold or another medal or certificate, regardless of how the other choirs perform.

While choral competitions have been very popular in Europe for many years, interest has been growing in North America. "This is part of a renewal of interest in singing today," said Sarah Morrison, artistic director of the [Oakville Children's Choir \(OCC\)](#). "There is something so basic in singing with others . . . sharing the joy of singing."

Just to get to the World Choir Games takes a lot of planning, fundraising and practice — the OCC usually shuts down rehearsals after its major concert in mid-May, but this year continued all the way through May and June preparing for the Games. And you have to be accepted by the organizing committee. To get into the higher of the two levels of competition, the championship level, a choir must provide the organizers with a list of its accomplishments at other choral competitions and a performance tape. The other level, the open competition, still attracts talented choirs, but some of these do not yet have an extensive competitive record at the international level.

An earlier version of the OCC's senior choir won a gold medal at the third World Choir Games in Germany in 2004, but all of those choristers have graduated. As only 12 members of the current senior choir have experience competing internationally (winning three silver medals at the International Choral Festival in Preveza, Greece, two years ago), the choir is competing at the open level, as a potential stepping stone to the championship level in the future.

At a practice shortly before they left for Cincinnati, the young choristers were full of anticipation at the thought of being on the world choral stage.

"Having a chance to represent our country, to show what we can do, is awesome," said Jessica Cooper, 16, one of the members of the OCC choir that won three silver medals in Greece.

Alex MacIsaac, 17, another member of that 2010 triple medal-winning choir, said that competing in an event the size of the World Choir Games is "awesome, inspiring. Just to be a part of it . . . is so special."

