

Hangeul school children's choir to perform at Carnegie Hall for first time

On 10th anniversary of its founding, choir sang at White House and U.N.,
'finding identity and spreading Korean culture through song'



Hwang Hyun-joo, director of the New Jersey Children's Choir and principal of the New Jersey Korean School

The New Jersey Korean School Children's Choir will celebrate its 10th anniversary with a special performance on June 21 at Carnegie Hall in New York City, a world-renowned music venue.

This is the first time that students from a Hangeul school have performed at Carnegie Hall since it opened in 1891. The children's choir will perform Korean and American songs, nursery rhymes and classical pieces with choreography.

"Although we are not professional musicians, we are very proud that our children will be able to perform on the Carnegie Hall stage," said Hwang Hyun-joo, choir director and principal of the New Jersey Korean School.

This is not the first time the New Jersey Korean School Children's Choir has performed on a big stage. Hwang had always dreamed of one day performing at the White House

in front of the presidents of the United States and South Korea, and that dream came true sooner than expected in April 2023, when the choir was invited to the official welcome ceremony for the U.S.-South Korea summit at the invitation of President Joe Biden, where they dressed in "hanbok" and performed "Arirang Alone" in Korean.

"That experience made me realize once again how important identity education is for our children," he said.

That's not all. The choir has also performed for ambassadors of the United Nations three times, promoting Korean culture to the world. After the White House performance, the choir was also recognized for its solid skills, appearing on the KBS music program "Immortal Songs."

"With Hallyu spreading around the world, we are convinced that the next generation living abroad will value the greatness of Korean culture and build on it," Hwang said. "The choir will continue to do its best to promote Korean culture, communicate with the world and serve as a cultural bridge."

Last month, the children's choir also performed at Englewood Hospital in Bergen County, New Jersey, in advance of the Lunar New Year, hosting 300 Korean American seniors at a ceremony organized by Korean volunteer organizations in New Jersey. The children's choir sang "New Year," "Spring in my Hometown" and "Hunchback Grandma." Hwang reported that the event was meaningful and delivered joy for the attending seniors, with Korean doctors delivering a health seminar and "tteokguk" served to all the participants.

"When we sang Korean nursery rhymes and songs, we could see that the elderly were very happy to sing along," she said, adding that such activities help share Korean culture and build emotional bonds between generations.

The New Jersey Korean School choir was founded in 2015 with the goal of promoting Korean culture in the U.S. by inspiring the next generation to learn about their native

culture, build identity through choral activities and connect with other ethnic groups. It started with 20 members and has grown to more than 50 today.

The school opened in January 1983 and has about 650 students.

The New Jersey Korean School was founded in 1982 and opened in January 1983 in the northern New Jersey town of Tenafly, which is known for its excellent school districts, at a time when the Korean community was growing and becoming more economically established in the cosmopolitan city of New York. Today, the school enrolls approximately 650 students, employs 47 teachers and has nearly 900 alumni.

The name of a school that teaches Korean language and culture to the next generation of Korean children is commonly referred to as a Hangeul school. However, this school is called a Korean school because it teaches not only Hangeul but also places a particular emphasis on teaching Korean culture.

Hwang, who took over as principal 15 years ago after serving as a teacher, is now a 27-year veteran teacher at Paterson Elementary School in New Jersey and is known as the Pestalozzi of New Jersey.

“At the New Jersey Korean School, 45 minutes of each week’s three-hour class is devoted to Korean culture and arts, which is required for all students in each grade. Special subjects include Korean children’s songs, Korean dance, Korean painting, Korean art and culture, Korean history and immigration history to the U.S. In addition, we are constantly planning new programs, such as sports days, Korean holiday celebrations and making kimchi, to help students discover and nurture their talents in various fields.”

Principal Hwang Hyun-joo is ‘Pestalozzi of New Jersey’

The New Jersey Korean School provides a unique learning environment for students through a variety of programs and an experiential approach to education that sets it apart from other Korean schools.

“During holiday celebrations, we offer activities, such as folk games, making Korean sweets and making ‘songpyeon,’” Hwang said.

The school has also organized a Hangeul Day writing contest for Korean schools in the northeast region of the U.S. for the past 24 years in order to strengthen community connections.

In particular, the school offers special classes for students



Members of the New Jersey Children’s Choir greet the leaders of the two countries after performing at an official event between the United States and South Korea during a South Korean state visit to the White House in April 2023 at the invitation of President Joe Biden. When President Biden and first lady Jill Biden approached the children, held their hands and put an arm around their shoulders, refusing to leave, the White House press secretary suggested they “hear one more song,” so the children sang “Tomorrow.”



Members of the New Jersey Children’s Choir pose for a photo after their performance at the United Nations for ambassadors from around the world. Principal Hwang Hyun-Joo is in the back row on the far right.

who do not speak Korean at home and provides customized education to meet their individual learning needs. Furthermore, the school extends Korean language education to the local community by organizing “traveling Korean classes” at community hospitals and companies upon request.

“Our school’s vision is to ‘Grow into exemplary global citizens with a Korean identity,’” the principal said. “To this end, we aim to develop Korean language skills, understand Korean culture and history, and provide education that will help students develop emotional maturity.”

“We will do our best to instill in our students a sense of Korean identity and help them grow into globally competent human assets.” 