It's one of Lafayette's best kept secrets. It would be hard to find someone who hasn't at least heard of Chorale Acadienne, the city's premier choral group, which this summer performed at Carnegie Hall. But it's not uncommon to find someone who has never heard of the University of Louisiana Children's Chorus, which also took the stage this summer at Carnegie Hall.

And yet, the chorus has been performing in and around Lafayette, sometimes in concert with Chorale Acadienne, for almost two decades. "We've been around since 1988," said chorus director Norma Jean Luckey. "James Haygood, the director of Chorale Acadienne, approached me about the need for a children's chorus in the Acadiana area."

The UL Children's Chorus will hold auditions Monday and Sept. 19. The chorus draws singers from Lafayette and surrounding parishes. "Since I had children in school myself at the time, I thought what a wonderful opportunity it would be for children in the area — and my two children — to sing with the best singers from 30 schools in Acadiana," said Luckey, now a chorus teacher at St. Thomas More High School and member of the Bob Luckey Jazz Trio.

The purpose of the chorus goes beyond entertaining the public, Luckey said. "The main thing we're trying to do is get children involved in music and stay involved all their lives. I've seen music teachers come out of it, people who sing in Chorale Acadienne, people who have gone off to universities. We've had many music majors."

Among them is David Boudreaux, a 20-year-old music media major at UL, along with his siblings, Jacqueline and Daniel.

Boudreaux said he got more from the experience than just learning about music. "It definitely increased my understanding of ear training," he said. "But, it was also very much like being part of a group, like a basketball team, or whatever. It was very good socially. I was home-schooled, so any social events were very welcome to me. We had a lot of road trips, to New Orleans, Denham Springs and Galveston."

The UL Children's Chorus, which will hold auditions Monday and Sept. 19, has garnered an impressive résumé, making guest appearances with other choruses, including the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. The group was featured on a video produced by the Louisiana Department of Education and was chosen in 1998 as one of the top four at a national Kodaly convention. Kodaly is a method of music education.

The group consists of boys and girls ages 9 through 15, but most of them first belonged to the Apprentice Chorus, which accepts 7 through 9-year-olds. "This is the training choir," Luckey said. "We learn to read music and have a good time doing it. We don't perform very much, because this is the training choir. We perform about twice a semester at the public library and Angelle Hall and with the Community Concert Band."

Simple folk songs are the main musical fare for the apprentice chorus. The UL Children's Chorus goes a bit further. "We sing a variety of literature," Luckey said. "We keep a folk song base, but we sing classical music, choral literature and some new music — even jazz choral. We have a lot of fun."

When the touring chorus goes on the road, it is well chaperoned, Luckey said. "We have one chaperone for every five people — it's usually more than that. Most parents come along. We travel on a bus and then, there's a trail of cars behind us. When we went to New York, there were more chaperones than children."

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