

# **CHOIR HANDBOOK**

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NOTE: The WCC Board welcomes suggestions for changes or additions to this guide.

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# Whitehorse Community Choir

## Welcome!

*A warm welcome to new and returning choir members.* Singing in the Whitehorse Community Choir is a highly rewarding experience and a commitment to the music, to the director, and to all members of the choir. It is the intention of the WCC to provide music that is challenging and enjoyable to choir members, and appealing to a wide range of audience interests.

Our members are a diverse lot! We are an adult choir ranging from age 16 and up, with a wide range of musical abilities. Some members are students, homemakers, employed or retired. We are proud to have members from a variety of cultural backgrounds. What we all have in common is a love for singing and performing and the dedication to make WCC the best choir ever!

The purpose of this handbook is to provide an orientation for new members and to be a refresher for our more experienced members. It provides information on rehearsals, expectations, and what to do if you have a concern. It provides a description of what happens to keep the choir running and highlights ways any member can get involved.

## But First...A Brief History of the Choir

Whitehorse Community Choir is a non-profit organization that was incorporated in 1993, although it actually existed since the 1950s in various forms. It includes up to 4 choirs at any one time (although one of the choirs may take “a rest” for the year).

The Big Choir was how the Whitehorse Community Choir (WCC) started. With roots in the Whitehorse Choral Society and the Golden Horn Musical Society, people who loved singing came together to create the WCC. Originally under the lead of Andrew (James) Wilhelm-Boyles, the choir of 35-40 people sometimes outnumbered the audience during early concerts. The choir has grown and evolved under the leadership of Music Directors Henry Klassen, Maurice Wearmouth, Rachel Grantham and our present director, Barbara Chamberlin. The Big Choir is open to any member of the public interested in singing and able to learn the music. The ability to read music is not a requirement. The choir welcomes members at all levels of experience and ability. We encourage participation in the joy of singing.

The Persephone Singers are an all-female choir, originally started by Rachel Grantham in 2000. The choir sings (and memorizes) a challenging repertoire of

music for treble voices in 3- or 4-part harmony. Although members come and go, the choir always provides a warm and welcoming environment to support women in music. Any woman interested in joining the Persephones is welcome to contact the music director to arrange an audition.

During her first year as music director in 2005, Barbara Chamberlin started the Neptunes Choir as a fun, low-voice choir for bass and tenor singers. In the spirit of equal opportunity, the choir has always included both men and women. The Neptunes welcome any low-voice singers to join their numbers. As the choir functions best when there is a membership of at least 12, they sometimes need to take a holiday while members rest up for the next season. ☺

The Chamber Choir started in 2008 as an auditioned mixed-voiced choir. This group does some of the more challenging choral works, with sometimes as many as 8 parts, for only 16 voices. Singers interested in joining this choir should contact the music director for an audition.

## **What To Expect at Signup and Your First Rehearsal**

### **Registration and Music Deposit**

After you complete your registration form (found on-line at [www.whitehorsechoir.org](http://www.whitehorsechoir.org)) you will be asked to pay a registration fee and a music deposit. The registration fee for each term is set annually by the WCC Board and is kept as affordable as possible. Registration for both the fall and spring terms can be paid in the fall, if desired. A music deposit is also required for each choir and each term. This is to pay the cost of replacing music if it is not returned or is damaged. The music deposit will be returned to you if all music is returned in good condition.

After you sign up and pay your registration and music deposit fees, you will be given a numbered packet of music, in which each piece has been numbered and assigned to you. This music is on loan to you for the term and must be returned after the final performance. See more about the music under the *Music Policy* section of this handbook.

### **Music folders**

You will have the opportunity to purchase a music folder from the music librarian and this is highly recommended as they are required for performances and are an efficient way to store and organize your music for practices. If you do not wish to purchase a folder, a limited number are available to borrow for use at performances.

### **Find a seat**

After you are registered and have your music, it is time to figure out where you sit in the choir. We have a large number of returning choristers who know where their section sits. If you know whether you are a soprano, alto, tenor or bass, ask

either the music director or past members of the choir and sit accordingly. If you do not know your voice placement, please talk to the music director as soon as you can and she will place you.

### **Attendance**

Attendance for each section will be taken weekly. If you know you will be away for any rehearsal, please advise your attendance taker. If you are absent for 3 or more rehearsals, the music director will assess you to make sure you know your pieces.

### **But I can't read music!**

Generally, this is not a problem! MP3s and CDs are prepared for each section to aid in practice. All are encouraged to utilize these tools to assist in learning music quickly and accurately. The music director has provided a companion sheet to this handbook that describes basic music theory.

### **Rehearsals at a glance**

Choir members are expected to attend rehearsals regularly. A rehearsal schedule is distributed at the beginning of each term; you can access this and any updates by going to the choir website, [www.whitehorsechoir.org](http://www.whitehorsechoir.org).

Big Choir rehearsals are held each Monday from 7:15pm to 9:15 pm at the Whitehorse United Church.

Chamber and Persephone choirs rehearse Wednesday evenings.

### **Sunday rehearsals**

Once per month, there is a Sunday rehearsal that ranges from 2 to 4 hours. On one of these Sundays we have a potluck (and it is always so good!). Please note that missing a Sunday rehearsal that is 2 hours in length counts as one absence; a missed Sunday rehearsal that is four hours in length counts as two absences (*see Attendance section above*).

### **Rehearsal agenda**

Please try to get to rehearsals a few minutes early to be prepared to start on time.

The weekly rehearsal will start with 10 minutes of vocal and physical warm-up exercises. While some of the exercises may seem a bit...strange, they are all designed by the music director with specific purposes in mind. Please embrace these exercises enthusiastically and you will find that your voice improves quickly.

The music director will then begin to work on the pieces. Sometimes the whole choir will sing together and sometimes the music director will work briefly with specific sections while the remainder of the choir sits quietly (no talking); this lasts about 45 minutes, after which there are announcements and 10-minute break.

As the weeks go by, the music director may add new pieces or take away some pieces.

The music director will advise on the content and format of the Sunday rehearsals at the preceding weekly rehearsal and also by email.

Please see *Rehearsal Attendance Policy* later on in this document.

### **Voicing**

Every term the music director voices people so that we have a better sound. If you've been voiced beside someone before, let the director know. If you are new, the director will place you. If you are placed in an awkward position either musically or personally, it is up to you to let the director know that and she will move you as she can.

### **Section leaders**

Each section (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) has a section leader. After the first few weeks of the term each section, under the guidance of their section leader, will have the opportunity to work on their section away from the full choir for about 20 to 40 minutes after the break. After this brief section practice, the section will return to the full choir for the remaining rehearsal time.

### **Post practice**

Please join the choir after the practice for some socializing. The destination will be announced by the music director but is typically at the Goldrush or the High Country Inn. This is an enjoyable time to get to know others, have some refreshment, and just generally wind down from a vigorous practice. Don't be shy!

## **The Choir Year**

Our year is divided into two terms: fall and spring. You pay a registration fee for each term and thus become a member of the choir with voting privileges at the WCC Annual General Meeting.

### **Fall Term**

Registration for the fall term begins in late August and ends after the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of rehearsals. Late registrants will be considered at the discretion of the music director. The term ends with our exciting, fun, and well-attended Christmas concert, usually held the last week of November or first week of December.

When joining this choir for the fall term, you are committing to performing in the December concert unless you have told the music director otherwise. You are also committing to the other events that the choir does during this term, which can include performing during a Remembrance Day ceremony.

You may also wish to become a "Carolling Chorister" for one or more

performances. This enjoyable group sings traditional carols at different events throughout the Christmas season to share our joy of music, to have fun and to raise funds for the choir.

### Spring Term

Registration for the spring term begins right away in the New Year, with rehearsals usually beginning the second Monday of the New Year. Late registrants will be considered at the discretion of the music director. The term ends with our fabulous spring concert, usually held the first week in May.

When joining for the spring term, you are committing to performing in the May concert unless you have told the director otherwise. You are also committing to the other events that the choir does during this term, which will include the Rotary Music Festival and may include performing in a concert in a community outside Whitehorse. Community concerts have been performed in Dawson City, Atlin, B.C., Haines Junction, Marsh Lake, Teslin and Tagish.

### Music Policy

The WCC librarian will ensure each member has a full set of music. All music belongs to the choir and is on loan to you. Please take care of it and return it at the end of the term. Always bring a pencil with you to mark the scores. **Do not use pen or highlighter on any music.** You can use a photocopied version if you need to highlight; photocopying for this purpose is legally authorized.

Please hand in music immediately after the last performance or, if you leave the choir early, please return it to our librarian.

The music deposit will be returned as long as your full music package is returned undamaged.

### Rehearsal Etiquette

**Please be on time!** Arrive ahead of time to get yourself organized, visit with others, and ready to start on time with your music in order. Late arrivals are disruptive and you will miss necessary information and warm ups. Doors are open at 7:00, so please arrive a few minutes early to get settled and do your socializing.

**Please be respectful!** Singing in a choir is a sociable pastime but please do not chat to your neighbors during rehearsals. This is disrespectful to the music director and disruptive to those around you and slows down rehearsals. If your neighbor is chatty to you, you have the right to politely let them know you are trying to listen.

Be silent and continue to listen when the music director is working with another section. What applies to one section often applies to another one.

Do not instruct your choir mates unless they ask you to do so. If someone around you is struggling, ask them if they would like your help; if they do not, refer them to the music director.

If you can't hear the music director, let her know. The music director provides a book in which to write your comments/questions so that she can address them when she has time. This helps to make rehearsals more efficient and ensures concerns are addressed and suggestions considered.

***Please refrain from using your electronics unless you are recording your part!***

**Please be prepared!**

- Have music in order ahead of time
- Have a pencil for making notes. If you use a church pencil, put it back
- Bring water in your own water bottle
- Bring comfortable indoor shoes
- Boots are to be removed immediately inside the front door during wet and snowy days so you may wish to bring slippers or indoor shoes during this time.

**Avoid wearing scents!** Please do not wear perfume and aftershave to choir rehearsals and performances. Many people are sensitive or allergic to the chemicals in scents. The deep breathing required in singing worsens the effects of perfumes and other scents.

## Communication

Every week, via email, you will be sent the schedule of the songs for the next rehearsal. Please put your songs in the order listed so that you have them at your fingertips and aren't scrambling during the rehearsal. Most of the time the music director will stay with the schedule, but will occasionally deviate from it. If you have any questions after the rehearsal, you can reach Barbara at [bcyukon@mac.com](mailto:bcyukon@mac.com) or a Board member at [whsecommunitychoir@gmail.com](mailto:whsecommunitychoir@gmail.com).

Any announcements or information of interest will also be sent out by email.

## Social opportunities

Choirs are very social. We have a break during rehearsals where you can socialize and as well, one of the Sunday rehearsals includes a potluck. We also meet somewhere after rehearsal on Monday nights to get to know people and chat, usually the High Country Inn or the Goldrush. All are welcome and much information is shared!

## Special Notes on Performance

### Performance week

Plan on additional rehearsals during “concert week”. The additional rehearsals are absolutely **ESSENTIAL** for a polished and impressive performance and include final voicing, timing the songs, sound and light checks, performance protocol, etc. And, at the end of the last performance, **WE PARTY!**

During concert week we collect cash donations to purchase cards and gifts for the music director, accompanists, and others involved in the concert. These are presented at the after-concert party.

### Dress Code: Black, Black, Black

For performances, unless otherwise stated, choir members are required to wear black, long to three quarter length sleeved shirts or blouses and black pants or skirts. The choir will provide scarves to the women and ties to the men; these are to be worn during the concert. Black socks or stockings and polished black shoes are required. Music should be in black music folders (available for sale at approximately \$30 or on loan from the choir).

## Behind the Scenes

### Governance

A Board of Directors (“the Board”) governs the WCC and comprises a president, treasurer, secretary, librarian and up to 6 directors that perform various functions. These positions are occupied by volunteers from, and elected by, the membership. The Board meets monthly from September to May to conduct strategic planning, manage operational activities, and make decisions that are in the best interests of choir members. By-laws and policy guide its operation; these are available for any member’s review. Minutes of meetings are also available for review upon request.

### Annual General Meeting

The Board holds an Annual General Meeting in October, open to all members in good standing. To be in good standing, a member must have paid their registration fees. Notice of the meeting will be provided in advance. The meeting will include a report of the previous year’s activities and elections of the Board for the coming year.

### Financial information

The WCC operates on revenues generated primarily by registration fees and by grants from the Government of Yukon and the City of Whitehorse. We also raise money through our concerts and fund-raising activities such as the Carolling Choristers.

Board members are volunteers from the membership and are not paid. The

music director and accompanists are contracted positions. Honoraria are also provided for visiting musicians and workshop leaders.

The choir also has expenses for the rental of rehearsal and concert venues, purchase of music, publicity, and administration costs such as rental of office space to both house our music library and conduct WCC business, equipment maintenance and repair, etc.

### **Volunteers**

It takes a lot to run the WCC! Please consider volunteering when help is requested. Volunteering is a great way to learn more about the operational aspects of the choir, and to meet and get to know people in ways not always possible during rehearsals. All members can also help out by encouraging friends and family to attend concerts and taking part in fund-raising activities. The work can be challenging, but is always rewarding. It takes a community...!

### **Dispute Resolution**

Despite the best intentions of the membership, problems sometimes occur. The music director and any board member are willing to assist to make your experience with the WCC rewarding and enjoyable. If you are unable to resolve a situation, please speak with any of them and they will address the matter in a timely and efficient way, respecting the dignity of all concerned.