

Nashville Children's Choir

Handbook

Introduction:

The Nashville Children's Choir program is a not-for-profit organization, in residence and in cooperation with Belmont University, with a current enrollment of approximately 250 choristers in four choirs. Choir members range in age from eight to eighteen and are from varying racial, economic and religious backgrounds. The Nashville Children's Choir is dedicated to the philosophy that through the learning and performance of excellent choral literature, the lives of the choir members, as well as the lives of their families and the community, will be enriched both artistically and personally.

I. BACKGROUND

The Nashville Children's Choir was founded by Marilyn Shadinger and Frederica Braidfoot in 1989, in cooperation with Belmont University. Madeline Bridges joined Mrs. Shadinger as co-director in the fall of 1990. Upon Mrs. Shadinger's retirement in 2007, Madeline Bridges assumed sole directorship. The choir has expanded from a single choir of twenty-five singers to four choirs enrolling approximately 250 singers: the Preparatory Choir, Concert Choir, Touring Choir, and Nashville Youth Choir.

II. RELATIONSHIP WITH BELMONT UNIVERSITY

The College of Visual and Performing Arts of Belmont University provides weekly meeting space for the four choirs. Belmont faculty frequently guest conduct at special rehearsals and performances of the choirs and offer their expertise to the singers and directors of the choirs. The Choir Program functions as an ensemble of the university and could not exist without the support and encouragement of Belmont University's College of Visual and Performing Arts.

The Nashville Children's Choir is a part of the pre-college music program, the Belmont Academy. This organization provides private instruction in piano, string, woodwind and brass instruments, Suzuki string instruction, as well as choral instruction for children from grade 3 through high school.

The Nashville Children's Choir provides observation opportunities for Belmont music students, serves as a demonstration choir when needed for Belmont music education workshops, provides internship opportunities for graduate music students, and performs with university choral organizations at least twice each year.

III. GOALS

- To foster the personal and social growth of Choir members and promote their sense of self-worth, self-esteem, accomplishment and pride.
- To attain the highest possible level of excellence in performance.
- To make Choir membership available to children and youth of all racial, cultural, religious, and economic backgrounds.
- To contribute to the cultural life of Nashville and the nation, and enhance the quality of singing in area schools and churches by providing additional quality choral experiences.

IV. CURRICULUM

The Nashville Children’s Choir is a special learning environment designed to provide a rich and rewarding musical experience for each member. The choristers study and perform a variety of music from simple unison folk songs to more challenging choral literature. Concepts about music (melody, rhythm, harmony, timbre, dynamics, form, style and performance practice) and musical skills (singing, music reading, etc.) will be taught systematically throughout the rehearsals.

Since the best musical experiences for children are inherent in the finest music, the Nashville Children’s Choir repertoire includes the music of all musical periods, from the Renaissance through the 21st century. Fine arrangements of Broadway music, folk music, and patriotic music are also included. Commissioned works for the choir are also a part of its repertoire. The repertoire of NCC does include sacred music since much of the finest music from the present and past eras is sacred and because NCC choirs perform frequently during the Christmas season and occasionally in churches.

Singing is the major means of musical experience in the Nashville Children’s Choir. Singing is a wonderfully personal means of music expression. The choristers are taught the systematic use of their vocal instruments through exercises, posture, breath and tone production. Through singing, children and youth can experience the “inner life” of the music in a way that transcends the surface of notation and words. The ability to hear music, to conceptualize music, to perceive and respond musically develops naturally from the human voice. Singing is a way of “touching” the music and a way of being “touched” by the music. It is hoped that the experience of artistic singing will form the foundation of a life-long relationship with music for the singers and their families.

V. THE PROGRAM

The program consists of four separate choirs, Preparatory Choir, Concert Choir, Touring Choir, and Nashville Youth Choir. Each choir is dedicated to excellence in musical learning.

The **PREPARATORY CHOIR**, an entry-level choir for the young singer, includes students who have the ability to match pitch and have a desire to learn more about singing.

The **CONCERT CHOIR** includes choristers who exhibit ability and willingness to sing and who need more singing experience and vocal training to become part of the more advanced Touring Choir.

The **TOURING CHOIR** includes pre-high school choristers with advanced vocal and note reading ability.

The **NASHVILLE YOUTH CHOIR** is a mixed choir of grades 9-12 and changed male voices. This choir builds on the foundation of the younger choirs and performs four-part literature including a cappella compositions.

VI. INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS

PREPARATORY CHOIR: Children at this level have demonstrated an ability to match pitch. They will improve their unison singing skills and begin singing two parts. Score reading is introduced, as well as sol-fège and rhythmic reading. The Preparatory Choir performs at the December and Spring concerts both separately and jointly with the other NCC choirs.

CONCERT CHOIR: Children at this level have demonstrated an ability to sing in parts. Note reading and basic score reading are stressed. The Concert Choir performs at the December and Spring concerts both separately and jointly with the other NCC choirs, as well as takes a one-day mini tour of area elementary schools each spring and presents other occasional performances during the year.

TOURING CHOIR: When a child can sing comfortably in parts, is becoming proficient in vocal technique, and shows evidence of music reading skill, he or she will be eligible for the Touring Choir. The Touring Choir literature is more difficult, and a greater emphasis is placed on foreign language literature, advanced vocal technique, and accelerated music reading skills. The Touring Choir performs in December and Spring concerts, takes an annual spring tour and participates in numerous other performances throughout Middle Tennessee.

NASHVILLE YOUTH CHOIR: Through a cappella literature Youth Choir members gain experience in independence of singing. Emphasis is placed on the ability to hold pitch, unsupported by an instrument, and to develop an ensemble sound through uniformity of vowels and tone production. The Youth Choir performs in December and Spring concerts as well as additional concert opportunities.

VII. MEMBERSHIP

Children and youth, ages 8-18, are eligible to audition for membership in the Nashville Children's Choir Program. The choirs are meant to be positive learning experiences for choristers. The members of the choirs should learn the meaning of "commitment" and "responsibility." Enrollment into NCC is for the season (August-May) and each member is

expected to remain active and committed to the program for the entire year. These young people will share wonderful times together both musically and socially. Children who enter in younger choirs are encouraged to stay in the program for multiple years so that they may progress in musical skills that will allow them to move up to the next choir.

VIII. STAFF

The NCC Musical Director, Madeline Bridges, oversees every aspect of the organization. Madeline Bridges and co-directors James Wells and Josh Wright conduct rehearsals and performances of the TOURING CHOIR. Associate Music Directors Elaine Bailey-Fryd, Roberta Rodgers, and Robert King conduct rehearsals and performances of the PREPARATORY CHOIR, CONCERT CHOIR and NASHVILLE YOUTH CHOIR respectively.

IX. AUDITIONS

Open auditions for the pre-high school choirs in the Nashville Children's Choir Program are held in the spring for the following school year. Special auditions may be arranged by contacting the NCC directors. Every attempt is made to place every singer that auditions and meets the musical criteria into one of the choirs in the program. However, when choir positions are filled in each choir, choristers not accepted into the choirs initially are placed on a waiting list and contacted if a position becomes available in August. Auditions for the Nashville Youth Choir occur in August for that school year.

X. COMMITMENT TO SCHOOL AND CHURCH MUSIC PROGRAMS

The success of NCC will be dependent in large part on the support of music teachers and church choir directors of the choristers. NCC singers are expected to remain in their school and church choirs and are to be leaders in these ensembles.

XI. TUITION

A tuition deposit* must accompany the acceptance forms confirming choir participation. The balance of the tuition may be paid in one of two ways:

1. Tuition balance may be paid in its entirety in September.
2. Tuition balance may be divided into 3 payments due the first rehearsals in September, October, and November.

Families with more than one singer enrolled in the NCC organization will pay full tuition for the first child, half tuition for each additional child. A limited amount of financial assistance is available. Scholarships are granted at the discretion of the directors. Scholarship students are expected to pay a small portion of the tuition to be eligible for scholarship funds. Requests for scholarships may be submitted after a chorister is notified of acceptance.

Tuition fees do not cover all of the operational expenses of the Nashville Children's Choir. Donations are always accepted and welcomed.

* Nashville Youth Choir tuition is paid in four payments due the first rehearsals in September, October, November, and December.

XII. REHEARSALS

Schedule:

All choirs rehearse simultaneously each Monday afternoon from 4:30-6:00 PM in the lower level of the Massey Performing Arts Center on the Belmont University campus unless otherwise noted in choir communication. A roster of choristers will be issued to facilitate transportation arrangements. Expect the following additional events and rehearsals:

- An extra rehearsal prior to each major concert (fall and spring.) Occasionally, additional rehearsals are necessary during the year. These will be communicated to families through semester calendars, email, or phone calls so the extra events may be put on family calendars.
- In addition, the TOURING CHOIR has a three-day camp in mid-July; a Friday afternoon/Saturday overnight retreat early in January; an extra rehearsal prior to each major concert (fall and spring), and additional rehearsals as necessary during the year.

Attendance:

Membership in the Nashville Children's Choir Program is a commitment to faithful, consistent, and punctual attendance. It is expected that rehearsals take a very high priority in each chorister's life. Each semester includes approximately 15 Monday afternoon rehearsals. Missing one rehearsal in a semester is comparable to missing more than a week of school in a semester. Every rehearsal is critically important to the individual and to the choir. Much can be learned by being present in rehearsal, even if the choir member cannot actively participate due to laryngitis, sinus problems, and other non-contagious conditions. Parents are expected to notify the director in advance if a choir member will be absent from rehearsal. More than two absences in a semester greatly hampers a choir member's contribution to NCC. Patterns of lack of attendance (missing more than 2 rehearsals per semester), lack of punctuality (numerous tardies to rehearsals), and habitually leaving early from rehearsals do not demonstrate commitment to the choir and will result in probation and possibly dismissal from the choir.

Final rehearsals, sometimes called Dress Rehearsals, are mandatory! An absence, for any reason, from a final rehearsal may result in the singer not singing the corresponding performance.

Snow/Holiday Policy:

NCC generally follows the Metro-Davidson County snow day policy. Exceptions are made when most roads are clear. A staff member will notify chorister and families regarding rehearsals on days when weather is questionable. Nashville Children's Choir does not take all of the holidays that most school systems take. Please take note of the calendar that is sent in the acceptance packet. All NCC holidays will be notated on this calendar. Any other school holidays (teacher's meetings, etc) are generally NOT holidays for NCC unless noted.

Rehearsal Procedures:

Arrive at least five minutes before rehearsal, mark attendance on the roster, and go directly to the assigned seat. Begin studying music or complete early arriver activity as planned by the director.

XIII. DEPARTMENT

It is expected that all choir members display a positive and encouraging attitude. Common courtesy, appropriate behavior and good manners to each other and to directors and other adults are expected at all times (rehearsals, performances, retreats, trips, and other choir activities.) Inappropriate behavior will be reported to parents immediately and may result in probation or dismissal from the group.

XVI. PERFORMANCES

Attendance:

Attendance is required at all scheduled performances. If a major conflict occurs, the absence must be discussed as far in advance as possible with the director.

Uniforms:

Uniforms will be worn by each chorister in NCC. Each choir has a specific uniform. Details of the purchase of uniforms will be sent to each choir member in the acceptance packet. Nashville Youth Choir will determine concert attire at the beginning of each semester with input from the choristers.

Preparation for performance:

Singers are asked to rest prior to each performance in order that concentration and singing ability will be at the highest level possible.

Performance manners:

During a performance, a calm and respectful audience will evoke the best efforts of the singers. Families with young children who may choose to “vocalize” during a performance are asked to sit near an exit so that the child may be quickly removed to not interfere with other audience members’ ability to hear and enjoyment of the performance. We also request that there be no moving in and out of the performance venue while a choir is performing, and no flash cameras are allowed in performances.

XV. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

The parents of choristers are vital to the success of the Nashville Children’s Choir! Parents are encouraged to assist choristers in punctuality, rehearsal attendance, and performance responsibilities. The organization will need volunteers in the areas of: refreshments, publicity, fund-raising, transportation, and chaperones for tours. Directors will let parents know how they may help in these ways.

XVI. FUNDRAISING

The Nashville Children’s Choir holds fundraisers each year to help offset expenses of the choir not covered by tuition. Full participation of each family will assure the success of the activities.

XVII. FEES AND HONARARIA

All fees and honoraria earned as a result of a performance contracted by the Nashville Children’s Choir become property of the Choir.