

Nashville Children's Choir (NCC)
Handbook
2021-2022



Introduction:

Nashville Children's Choir (NCC) is a not-for-profit organization, in residence and in cooperation with Belmont University, with a typical enrollment of approximately 200 choristers in four choirs.* Choir members range in age from eight to eighteen and are from varying racial, economic and religious backgrounds. NCC 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.

*NCC stopped in-person rehearsals in mid-March 2020 as mandated by Belmont and CDC guidelines. Online rehearsals were held over Zoom, tuition-free, for the 2020-2021 school year, for those choristers who were interested. Because of room scheduling considerations for the 2021-2022 academic year at Belmont and for this year only, NCC leadership changed the rehearsal venue to Trinity Presbyterian Church, 3201 Hillsboro Pike, Nashville. Though off-campus, NCC remains under the auspices of Belmont Academy and Belmont University. Choir structures and rehearsal schedules will be modified as needed for this year. Nashville Youth Choir will meet on the Lipscomb University campus for the 2021-2022 academic year.

I. BACKGROUND

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. Elaine Bailey and Josh Wright now share directorship following the retirement of Madeline Bridges in 2019. The choir has expanded from a single choir of twenty-five singers to four choirs enrolling approximately 200 singers: 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. NCC 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.

NCC is a part of the pre-college music program, 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.

NCC 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 choristers with goals of promoting agency, teamwork, 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

NCC is a special learning environment designed to provide a rich and rewarding musical experience for each member. 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.) are taught systematically throughout the rehearsals.

Since the best musical experiences for children are inherent in the finest music, NCC repertoire includes music of all musical periods, from Renaissance through the 21st century. Worthy arrangements of Broadway music, folk music, and patriotic music are included. Commissioned works for the choir are also a part of its repertoire. NCC repertoire includes 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 NCC. Singing is a wonderfully personal means of music expression. 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, conceptualize music, and perceive music 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 singers and their families.

V. THE NCC PROGRAM

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

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.

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.

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

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.

*The number of choirs for fall 2021 will be determined by organization needs.

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 in two parts. Score reading is introduced, as well as solfege and rhythmic reading. 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, and directors increasingly emphasize music literacy skills such as score reading and music reading fluency. Concert Choir performs at the December and Spring concerts both separately and jointly with the other NCC choirs, as well as other occasional social and singing events.

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 Touring Choir. Touring Choir literature is more difficult, and a greater emphasis is placed on foreign language literature, advanced vocal technique, and accelerated music reading skills. 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: Primarily through a cappella literature, Youth Choir members gain experience in independent 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. 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 NCC. The choirs are meant to be positive learning experiences for choristers. Choristers 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

NCC Program Directors, Elaine Bailey and Josh Wright, oversee every aspect of the organization. Co-directors James Wells and Josh Wright conduct rehearsals and performances of the TOURING CHOIR. Music Directors Elaine Bailey, 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 NCC 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 who 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 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 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*(\$100) for the fall semester only must accompany the acceptance forms confirming choir participation. The balance (\$70) of the tuition may be paid on or before October 18. Alternatively, the fall tuition may be paid in its entirety (\$170) with acceptance forms. Spring semester tuition will be paid in the spring and will be a total of \$170 each semester.

Families with more than one singer enrolled in NCC will pay full tuition for the first child and half tuition for each additional child. A limited amount of financial assistance is available. Scholarships are granted at the discretion of the choir directors. A scholarship application may be requested when initial deposit is submitted.

Tuition fees do not cover all of the operational expenses of the NCC. Donations are always accepted and welcomed.

* Please email Robert King for more information about Nashville Youth Choir tuition payment schedule.

XII. REHEARSALS

Schedule:

For the 2021-2022 year, choirs rehearse simultaneously each Monday afternoon at Trinity Presbyterian Church. Touring Choir will meet from 4:30-5:45 and the Foundations Choir* will meet from 4:30-5:35.

*The Foundations Choir has been given a temporary name to indicate both the nature of the choir and to accommodate smaller numbers of choristers this year as we resume our program.

Attendance:

Membership in NCC is a commitment to faithful, consistent, and punctual attendance. It is expected that rehearsals take a very high priority in each chorister's life. 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. Typically, choristers should expect to miss no more than two rehearsals per semester. Due to COVID-19, we ask choristers and families to err on the side of caution this year concerning chorister attendance when feeling ill. However, choristers should plan to attend ALL rehearsals when illness is not a concern.

Covid-related policies and procedures:

Because the COVID-19 vaccine is not available to children younger than 12 and because choristers in our treble choirs are often younger than 12, NCC plans to implement the following policies in our treble choirs for Fall 2021 to prevent and mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in our community:

- NCC will adhere to CDC and Metro Health Department guidance regarding COVID-19.
- NCC plans to rehearse at Trinity Presbyterian in Green Hills for the fall semester in order to utilize their large indoor spaces (sanctuary, fellowship hall, and choir room).
- NCC plans for each choir to utilize the outdoor spaces at Trinity Presbyterian while the weather is nice for part of each rehearsal so that choristers do not remain in the same indoor space for the entire rehearsal.
- Choristers are expected to remain masked at all times.
- Choristers are expected to remain socially distanced during rehearsals.
- Chorister families are expected to act responsibly if a chorister has symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough, etc.) and keep their chorister home from rehearsal.
- Chorister families will be expected to notify NCC if a chorister tests positive for COVID-19.
- NCC will utilize assigned seating to better identify choristers who may have been in close contact (sitting immediately beside, behind, or in front of) with a chorister who tests positive for COVID-19.
- If NCC is notified that a chorister has tested positive for COVID-19, NCC will notify the families of choristers who may have been in close contact with the chorister who tested positive.
- All NCC staff are fully vaccinated and will be masked for rehearsals.

It is too early to make decisions about concert venues and formats, but NCC will follow CDC recommendations regarding audiences and live performances as we get closer to December.

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 families through email regarding rehearsals on days when weather is questionable. NCC does not take most of the holidays that most school systems take. Please take note of the calendar in the acceptance packet. All NCC holidays will be indicated on this calendar. Any other school holidays (teacher in-service days, etc.) are generally NOT holidays for NCC unless noted.

Rehearsal Procedures:

Choristers should arrive at least five minutes before rehearsal, mark attendance on the roster, go directly to the assigned seat, and 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, 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.

Performance Uniforms:

Performance uniforms will be concert black for all choristers. Families may choose appropriate clothing for each chorister. If a dress or skirt is worn, legs must be covered with opaque black tights. If pants are worn, plain black socks and plain black belt (if needed) are to be worn with a solid shirt or top. Long or three-quarter length sleeves are preferred. No black t-shirts or polo shirts are allowed. Black low-heeled shoes (not athletic shoes) are to be worn by all choristers. All black clothing must be free of design, pattern, and embellishments. Please see an NCC director if you have any questions about the uniform policy or about a particular selection.

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 audience members’ ability to hear and enjoy 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 photography is allowed during performances.

XV. PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

The parents of choristers are vital to the success of NCC! 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 as chaperones for tours (once they resume). Directors will let parents know how they may help in these ways.

XVI. FUNDRAISING

NCC typically holds fundraisers each year to help offset expenses of the choir not covered by tuition. Due to COVID-19, fundraising activities will be limited.

XVII. FEES AND HONARARIA

All fees and honoraria earned as a result of a performance contracted by NCC become property of NCC.