

ALNWICK & DISTRICT CHORAL SOCIETY - Handbook for members

INTRODUCTION

Alnwick Choral Society offers a friendly welcome to members who enjoy choral singing and the challenge of learning new music. We aim to perform high quality concerts and to promote music in our community.

Whether you are new to the Choral Society or are an existing member, we hope you will find this information useful. The section representatives (SATB) will welcome new members and try to answer any questions. You can also find out more about the Society on our website and on Facebook, along with some great photographs and details of past and current programmes. If you have access to the internet, do try and find time to have a look.

We are very fortunate to have the services of talented and patient musicians, our Music Director Peter Brown, Accompanist Alan Gidney, Assistant Chorus Master Veronica Gilbert and Assistant Accompanist Margaret Watchhorn, to guide us (and occasionally cajole us) on our musical journeys.

I hope you enjoy your time with the Choral Society, giving and receiving as much pleasure from singing together in the future as we have done in the past.

Karen Carlson (Chairman)



Alnwick Choral



AlnwickChoralSociety.co.uk

BACKGROUND

The society has a long history: it was founded in 1933, but records show a choral society in Alnwick going back to the middle of the nineteenth century.

Many of our concerts take place in St Paul's Church, a wonderful space with a rich acoustic and a versatile organ. We also perform occasionally at other venues, including Brinkburn Abbey, Alnwick Playhouse, Alnwick Gardens and with other choirs at the Sage.

We sing music from six different centuries. Sometimes we sing unaccompanied, sometimes with organ accompaniment and sometimes with orchestra and soloists. Composers range from Byrd to Bernstein and from Rachmaninov to Rodgers. As well as large scale works such as Handel's Messiah and Haydn's Creation we also sing many secular choral pieces by composers like Elgar and Vaughan Williams.

OUR MEMBERSHIP

We are a well-balanced mixed choir of about seventy singers. It is the music that brings us together, but also the company, the humour and the challenge of performing great music as well as we possibly can.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

The annual subscription may change, but for 2023-2024 is set at £100 and is payable at the start of the season. If for any reason this is difficult to manage, please contact the Treasurer or the Chairman confidentially to come to a mutually convenient solution. Payment can be made by cheque, cash or by bank transfer to:

Alnwick and District Choral Society Sort code: 30 90 13 Account number: 22483760

REHEARSALS

Rehearsals are held on Wednesday evenings at Swansfield Park Primary School, The Avenue, Alnwick, NE66 1UL. Please arrive early enough to start promptly at 7pm. This is particularly important at the beginning of term when there may be music to issue. There is usually a short break around 8.15pm and we finish at 9pm.

The season is divided into 3 terms in line with the school year. However we may have additional rehearsals if the work requires it and members should be prepared to practise between rehearsals to ensure familiarity with the music.

ATTENDANCE

Members are expected to attend rehearsals regularly and minimum attendance levels may be set for performing in a concert. If you will be absent due to other commitments, please let your line representative know. Please do not attend if you feel unwell and might be infectious. Members need to feel safe when attending rehearsals and not to be put at risk of catching colds, flu or especially Covid. For this reason the committee will take suitable measures to keep the hall well ventilated.

ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT

As well as arriving in good voice, it is very useful to bring:

Current music

Pencil

Rubber

Water



Sometimes you will also need a black folder which will be provided by the librarian.

MUSIC SCORES

Music is normally provided by the librarian. This may have been borrowed from the County Library, from other choirs or from our own extensive library. We may buy copies in if this is more appropriate. While we try to keep costs to members to a minimum, there will be occasions when we have to ask for a contribution, or to ask members to buy their own copies. We also regularly use three particular books of music that members are asked to provide for themselves.

These are:

100 Carols for Choirs - edited and arranged by Willcocks & Rutter, OUP - usually referred to as "The White Carol book" costing approx £14 -£16.

European Sacred Music - edited by John Rutter, OUP and costing about £18.

Messiah - Handel, preferably the Watkins Shaw edition.

The librarian sometimes has stocks of new or used copies available to buy; it's always worth asking. All are widely available from music shops or online.

Each member is given a library number which identifies their music. Members will be advised when they need to return music and should do so promptly to avoid the Society incurring additional hire or postage costs. Music should never be marked with anything other than soft pencil and should not be used as a diary or for shopping lists! If library copies are damaged, please talk to the librarian - don't try to fix it yourself.

PERFORMANCES

Details of concert arrangements are on the website and will be announced in rehearsals. Normal dress for concerts is:

Women - Choral Society standard white overblouse (see your line rep or the librarian), a full length black skirt or trousers, black shoes, black socks/stockings/tights.

Men - Black (dinner) jacket, black trousers, white shirt, black bow tie.

This dress-code may vary, but you will be advised in advance.

Setting Up - Wherever performances are held, there is always a need for physical help to set up staging, move chairs and generally prepare the venue in advance. Members will be asked to assist to smooth this process and ensure the right environment for a successful performance. Similarly, help is needed after the concert.

SOCIAL EVENTS

In addition to its musical activities, the Choral Society has a lively and active social side managed by the Social Secretary and the Committee. This may include an annual dinner, a ceilidh, a summer party, or visits to the Sage Gateshead. New ideas and offers of help to organise events are always welcome. Please speak to your line rep or to the Social Secretary if you would like to contribute.

THE COMMITTEE

Each year in early October we hold our Annual General Meeting, at which the committee is elected by the choir. This takes place at the start of a rehearsal, to give all members the chance to vote. The committee comprises the Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Librarian, Social Secretary, Friends Secretary and a representative of each of the four sections of the choir.

FINANCES

The Choral Society is almost entirely funded by its members' subscriptions and audience ticket sales, supplemented by donations from the "Friends" and the hire of music to other choirs. Our ambitious plans are carefully tempered by our ability to pay for them. We regularly engage excellent professional soloists and orchestral musicians for our concerts, all of whom are paid out of Society funds. Alternative sources of funding, including grants and sponsorship, are constantly being sought and all avenues explored.

AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLICITY

There is little doubt that a full house encourages the very best performance. Please do invite family, friends and neighbours to come along, giving us the pleasure of singing to an appreciative audience, as well as raising essential funds.

Members can also help publicise our events by putting up posters in their local areas, placing flyers in local shops and notices in local magazines.

FRIENDS OF THE SOCIETY

The Society's Friends are not necessarily members of the choir, but are people who want to support us in our music making. Being a Friend is a way of showing appreciation for the work of the Alnwick and District Choral Society, and their performances of choral music by the world's greatest composers. Having a large number of Friends is helpful when the Society applies for grants, because it demonstrates to the fund providers the Society's inherent popularity and worth within the community. Their donations are a great help in meeting the costs of running the Society, making it possible to engage professional musicians when required for our most ambitious concerts, where we need orchestral players and solo singers to perform with us.

The Society likes to show its appreciation by naming the Friends in the concert programmes, unless asked otherwise, and will keep them informed of all concerts and other activities. To become a Friend of the Society, please make an annual donation of £15 or more (£25 for a couple). Please contact the Friends Secretary through the website, or by speaking to any member of the committee.

