

Masterworks Choral Ensemble

Chorus Handbook (rev. August 2008)

Welcome to Masterworks Choral Ensemble (MCE)! MCE exists today because of the hard work of hundreds of dedicated volunteers over the past twenty-seven years. We thank everyone who has helped bring MCE this far. We also thank you for choosing to be a part of our organization, and we look forward to co-creating the timeless art of choral music with you for this season!

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MCE Mission Statement

The Masterworks Choral Ensemble is an adult Southwest Washington chorus dedicated to performance, community service, music education, and leadership in the arts. The mission is to perform sacred and secular choral, orchestral, and newly commissioned works; to collaborate with other arts groups; to participate in community service activities; and to provide a leadership role in developing, sponsoring, and broadening the vocal arts.

Non Discrimination Policy

Masterworks Choral Ensemble does not advocate, support, or practice discrimination based on race, sex, age, physical ability, sexual orientation, religious or political beliefs, marital or family status, national or ethnic origin. This applies to all of Masterworks programs and activities.

MCE Board

The Board of Directors is MCE's governing body that acts collectively to manage the business and property of the non-profit corporation. It is responsible for the organization's purpose, programs, and public accountability. Board members are volunteers. The board's responsibilities are many, including:

- Establishing the purpose of the corporation—the mission statement
- Ensuring that MCE adheres to its mission statement
- Maintaining the financial solvency of the corporation
- Electing Board officers
- Appointing the Artistic Director and Business Manager
- Approving annual budgets and long-range plans
- Supervising investment of assets & raising funds

Board Meetings

MCE's Board of Directors meets on the first Monday of each month starting at 7pm in room 222 at the First United Methodist Church. Board meetings are open to all MCE members. If you would like to become an MCE Board member, contact any current member and express your interest. A nominating committee is formed each spring to gather names of members interested in participating on the Board. Elections are held at the annual membership meeting in May. (See MCE By-laws for more information on the annual meeting.)

Committee Descriptions

Choral Operations. The chief duty of the Choral Operations Committee is to oversee all aspects of choral concerts and rehearsals. This includes development and administration of policies and procedures, responsibility for choir and concert needs, uniforms and costumes, maintenance of membership, music and MCE property. The Choral Ops Committee meets prior to the Board of Directors meeting on the first Monday of each month from 6-7pm in room 222 at the First United Methodist Church.

Budget & Finance. The chief duties of the B&F Committee are to develop and monitor MCE's annual budget and make recommendations for investment of MCE's assets. Budget and Finance meets as needed throughout the season.

Marketing. The chief duty of the Marketing Committee is to develop, administer and oversee publicity, promotion and marketing of all MCE activities and to develop, administer and oversee MCE's fundraising projects. The Marketing Committee meets prior to the Board of Directors on the first Monday of each month from 5:30-7 pm in room 222 at the First United Methodist Church.

Singers Administration. The chief duty of the Singers Administration Committee is to oversee and administer all organizational aspects of the Singers ensemble including auditions, uniform, gigs and fees, schedule and memorization. The Singers Administration Committee meets as needed throughout the season. See the MCE Leadership List for current members.

Harmony Sweepstakes. The chief duty of the Harmony Sweepstakes Committee is to oversee and administer all aspects of Harmony Sweepstakes A Cappella Festival, including the application and group selection process, scheduling, technical needs, soliciting judges, distributing and updating the rulebook, prizes and the rehearsal/mic and running the show. The Harmony Sweepstakes Committee meets as needed throughout the season. See the MCE Leadership List for the current chairs and volunteers.

Youth Music Talent Contest. The chief duty of the Youth Music Talent Contest Committee is to develop and administer all aspects of this annual contest including publicity, soliciting student contestants, awards and prizes, auditions and scheduling. The Youth Music Talent Contest Committee meets as needed throughout the season. See the MCE Leadership List for the current chairs and volunteers.

Section Leaders

Sections Leaders are volunteers who:

- Keep records on members' attendance
- Deliver weekly attendance reports to Attendance Coordinator
- Serve as a conduit for MCE information
- Are the "first contact" for members seeking information or needing assistance
- Help MCE contact members via phone calls and e-mail as needed

Roster

Each September, currently active members receive an updated roster with contact information for chorus members, section leaders, board members, director and accompanist. Updates are distributed in January. Please notify the Roster Coordinator (see Leadership List) with any changes to your contact information.

Auditions

Choral auditions are held each summer and winter. Other auditions may be arranged during the season as needed. To reserve an audition time, those interested should contact the New Member Coordinator (see Leadership List). Prior to the audition, prospective members receive a copy of the Chorus Handbook and a Season Schedule to help inform them about member expectations and responsibilities.

Choral auditions consist of:

- Warm-up and range check
- Tone quality check (singing of "My Country 'Tis of Thee")
- Two rhythm sight-reading (clapping rhythms) and two sight-singing examples
- Tonal memory check (repeating a sequences of pitches)

Audition results. The New Member Coordinator will contact auditionees by phone or e-mail within a few days following the auditions. If the coordinator is unable to contact the person directly, MCE will mail a letter with the audition results.

Auditions for solos. During the season, MCE holds auditions for members for various small solos and small ensembles as needed in concerts. These auditions are open to currently active MCE choir members. Solos/ensembles do not receive a performance fee. Our June Pops concert typically has the most solo/ensemble opportunities. The audition committee is made up of our Artistic Director and a panel selected by the Choral Operations committee. See the Solo Audition Handbook for more specific information. Note: MCE typically hires professional soloists when performing larger works with orchestra or works that require professional skills.

Dues

Annual dues help MCE defray, but do not completely cover, the costs of providing the following:

- All choral music
- Professional conductor and accompanist
- Theory, ear-training, vocal instruction
- Retreat, rehearsal and performance halls, and associated expenses
- Professional choral experience
- Professional orchestras and soloists
- Newsletters, informational handouts, etc.

All of these costs, with the exception of concert music, remain unchanged whether or not a member is singing in a specific concert or “half” of a season. In addition, there are many other member-related expenses. Because of this, dues are calculated by either the full season or half-season. Therefore there are only two dues options:

- **Full season dues: \$200**

Full season dues apply to anyone singing in all concerts and any combination of concerts in both halves of the season (example: October and April).

- **Half season dues—either Oct/Dec or Apr/June: \$100**

Half season dues apply to anyone singing in any combination of concerts in one of the two halves of the season (example: December only). Members wishing to sing in just one concert in the first half and one in the second half of the season pay full season dues.

Special note: When MCE has a three-choral-concert season because of a Choral Theater production in December, the membership dues remain the same for full or half season as described above. The first “half” of this type of season has just the December concert in it.

Members are asked to pay dues in full by the August retreat or pay a minimum of \$25 to start a payment plan. *MCE has established a payment plan schedule instead of using individual payment plans as in the past. If you want to initiate a payment plan, contact the Treasurer for more information.* Dues must be paid in full or a \$25 deposit/payment plan arranged prior to receiving music. Dues are nonrefundable.

In all cases, dues payment, or a \$25 deposit as part of a payment plan, and other required fees must be paid by the annual August retreat in order to keep Active Member Status (see By-laws) and to receive the concert music.

Masterworks Singers

The Masterworks Singers is a smaller performing ensemble composed of 12-24 singers. Open auditions will be held in Spring of each year for the following season. The Singers typically perform in MCE concerts and represent MCE in special performances around our community. When performing in MCE concerts, the Singers perform their music memorized and without conductor. For more information concerning the Singers, please refer to the Singers Handbook. Copies may be obtained from the Director, Gary Witley.

Member Expectations

Full Season Membership and Participation is the Goal!

MCE seeks members who are passionate about choral music, passionate about Masterworks, and who are committed to helping MCE continue to grow artistically. Our membership ideal is to have all members participate in all concerts in a season. This is our first priority. This type of membership will help build quality, increase the team experience, enhance the ensemble blend (as we sing with one consistent group), and reduce the organizational time and money costs that come with a constantly shifting membership.

Membership Status—Keeping MCE informed

Members are asked to respond in a timely manner to MCE concerning their membership status and other requested information. Prior to the end of each season, members are asked to indicate their level of participation for the following season using the Membership Renewal Form. To continue singing with MCE in the following season, this form must be returned by the deadline indicated on the form. Normally dues payment (in full or with a deposit as part of an installment plan) should be included with the return of the membership form. **However, the form may be returned without payment.** If you choose this option, payment or the start of a payment plan must be made at or before the August retreat.

Note: It is important that MCE receive your renewal form by the established deadline (with or without payment). Returning the membership renewal form, even if you are not singing with us, provides MCE with valuable membership participation information to plan adequately, efficiently and cost-effectively for the coming season.

Members who do not return their forms by the deadline will be placed on a waiting list to rejoin the group.

After the August auditions for new members, those on the waiting list will be informed of any remaining openings in the choir. Openings will be filled in the order the Membership forms are received until the section is filled. *Remember, a membership form can be returned without payment. Payment or the deposit as start of a payment plan can occur at the retreat.* Should a section be declared full, members will remain on the waiting list until the next opening occurs.

Inactive Members Must Re-audition

Members who do not participate in at least one concert during a season automatically become “Inactive Members” and must contact the Artistic Director about re-auditioning to rejoin the group when they are ready to return as an active member.

Concert Season

Typically, MCE has four one-night performances in October, December, April and June. MCE also hosts the Northwest’s Regional Harmony Sweepstakes contest in March. All events are held at the Washington Center for the Performing Arts in downtown Olympia. All MCE events start at 7:30 pm. Some concerts are preceded by a pre-concert lecture at 7:00 pm. Immediately following the April concert, MCE hosts a reception celebrating the season’s Salute to the Arts honoree and our donors and subscribers. See the current Season Schedule sheet for more specific details.

Attendance

Attendance and Punctuality Policy Statement

The goal for each concert is 100% "on-time/stay for the entire rehearsal" attendance. Attendance and punctuality are major factors affecting our cohesiveness as an ensemble, our ability to learn the music and quality of our performance.

However, we realize illness and unforeseen events can sometimes be out of one's control affecting both attendance and punctuality. Therefore, we have built into the attendance schedule the maximum number of rehearsals that could be missed and still allow participation in any given concert. See the following concert-by-concert summary of the maximum allowed absences:

ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENT: Members must not exceed the maximum allowed absences for each concert in order to participate a concert: the limit is 3 absences for the Oct., Dec., & June concerts; 4 for the April concert.

The importance of punctuality (arriving on time and staying for the entire rehearsal) is reinforced by this policy:

Arriving late or leaving early prior to the end of rehearsal will be counted as a 1/3 absence. Late is defined as arriving more than 15 minutes after the start of rehearsal. Leaving early is defined as leaving before the end of rehearsal. Three 1/3 absences equal one complete absence. Arriving late and leaving early for the same rehearsal would therefore equal 2/3 of an absence.

All section leaders have been informed of this policy to ensure uniform application to all members. If you have any questions about your attendance status, please speak first with your section leader and then if more information is needed speak with our Attendance Coordinator (See Leadership List for current names).

Rehearsals

Logistics. Generally, rehearsals are from 7-9:30pm on Tuesdays. When rehearsing with orchestra the rehearsal is extended to 10pm. Specific dates and times are listed on the Season Schedule. We currently rehearse at the First United Methodist Church on the corner of Legion and Boundary in Olympia. We typically rehearse downstairs in the "Great Hall." When you enter through the main entrance, read the posted sign to see if we are rehearsing in another room. Rehearsals begin with a vocal warm-up and sight-reading session.

Upon entering rehearsal, **please silence your cell phone**, read all posted information and pick up any handouts placed on the table. It is recommended that all members bring a water bottle with a closeable top to keep your vocal folds well hydrated during rehearsal. Due to members' allergies and sensitivities, please refrain from wearing perfumes, colognes, or scented toiletries (see Chemical Sensitivity, page 11). There will be organizational announcements just prior to a break approximately half way through the rehearsal. **Oral announcement time is for MCE events only. You may post any info about other community events on the white board or the table.**

In addition to Tuesday rehearsals, we typically rehearse the two Friday evenings preceding a concert. When we rehearse with an orchestra and soloists the schedule may change. See the Season Schedule for specific dates, times and any rehearsal location changes. The Season Schedule for the following season is typically provided to members to facilitate scheduling. Updates are given out as needed during the season.

Retreats. Attendance at the two annual retreats in August and January is considered crucial to a successful season. We use the extended time to accomplish things we do not have time for in a normal Tuesday evening rehearsal. Retreats count as one rehearsal (see next section). *Refer to the Attendance section for the policy about maximum allowable absences.*

At retreats we:

- Receive explanations, introductions and information about the season
- Explore and rehearse the new season's music
- Distribute music, collect dues and other fees (CD payments, etc.)
- Distribute (either in hard copy or electronically) the updated Chorus Handbook and current MCE Bylaws
- Distribute other informational handouts
- Explain new policies and procedures
- Take time to create the sense of team necessary for good ensemble singing
- Have extended vocal exercises

- Have time for questions and answers
- Introduce new choral and board members
- Share food and connect with old friends and make new ones

Retreat Attendance

Retreats in August and January count as one rehearsal. We believe that the retreats are crucial to the needed immersion to start each half of the season and are vital to team building. Therefore all members are urged to make every effort to attend and to not consider the retreat as “just another rehearsal.” The August retreat date, as well as concert dates, for the next season are published in MCE Notes each spring and in the current Season Schedule.

Informational Handouts. Each Monday during the season, an informational handout, called Masterworks Notes, is distributed by e-mail to all members. A copy is posted on the rehearsal white-board and a hard copy is placed on the name-tag table to be picked up by any member without e-mail access. It is vital that members read and save these handouts for reference. This improves communication, increases understanding, reduces announcements to a minimum and allows for a more efficient use of rehearsal time. MCE Notes and other handouts are kept for a few weeks in the MCE cabinet. It is the responsibility of each member who misses a rehearsal to gather any appropriate handouts when they return. Please ask your section leader if you are unsure how to find back copies.

Notes for non-email members: It is the responsibility of members without email to ensure that they get their weekly copy of all handouts. If absent, members without email should arrange for a friend to pick up any new materials for them. Lastly, non-email members should talk with the Communications Liaison if help is needed getting your materials.

Decorum. Please arrive at least five minutes prior to the rehearsal start time to get your nametag, new handouts and read the white-board. This will help us start on time. We will always end on time. During rehearsals, please work to stay focused on the music and keep side conversations to a minimum. **Please refrain from humming or singing along when a passage is played as an example. Cell phones should be muted at all times. If you must place or receive a call, please leave the rehearsal hall to do so.**

Announcements. Announcements during rehearsal time are limited to MCE business. If you have a non-MCE announcement, you are free to post this information near the nametag area or entrance area. Please refrain from using MCE time to promote non-MCE events.

Directions from the Conductor. Write all marks, breaths, dynamics, measure numbers, and all other information in your score as directed by the conductor during rehearsal. **If you miss a rehearsal, please call either your section leader or a friend to acquire this information prior to your return.** This is essential for all members because changes or edits occur in every rehearsal.

Dress Rehearsals. We define dress rehearsals as the last rehearsal for a concert that takes place in the performance hall. Unlike theater, we do not normally wear our performance attire. If there is an exception to this, it will be announced. Members are encouraged to wear comfortable clothing and be prepared to be patient as the various concert elements; such as sound, staging, guest artists, orchestra, etc. are combined and refined. Remember to enter through the backstage door of the Washington Center for dress rehearsals and concerts.

Binders and Folders. Masterworks uses one of two types of binders in performance: an octavo folder (with elastic strings) or a black 3-ring binder. These folders are provided by MCE to all new members. Continuing members must replace their binders as needed at their own expense. Members should always bring both types of folders to all retreats and rehearsals. Please remove staples from photocopied music and place in your 3-ring binder. MCE has a 3-hole

punch that can be used at rehearsals for any music not pre-punched.

Learning Music

Members are expected to do everything they can to help themselves learn the music between rehearsals. Information will be provided about appropriate recordings to purchase. In some cases, learning CDs may be supplied by MCE. At a minimum, members are expected to acquire and listen to:

- A professional recording (if available) of the work we are rehearsing
- A “part-learning” recording (if available). One excellent resource can be found on this web site: <http://www.songlearning.com/>
- Part-learning CDs generated by MCE.

Expectations

Each member is expected to do the following:

- Start working as soon as possible on any required memorization
- Practice pronouncing the text in rhythm (especially important for foreign languages)
- Know the vowel sound for each note you will be singing
- Read through the text to get an understanding of the meaning of the lyrics. You can't communicate to the audience if you don't know what the piece is about
- Highlight your part so you can follow your part easily
- Analyze your music. Look for passages that are identical or similar
- Ask questions if/when you encounter things you don't understand. Please bring musical questions directly to the conductor. Remember, if you have a question, others probably have that same question. E-mail, letter or phone calls will help the conductor incorporate your needs into the next rehearsal plan.
- Study to understand and integrate any changes that have occurred in the recent rehearsal(s)

Additional things members should do as fits their skill level

- Bring a portable tape recorder and record rehearsals for review later in the week
- Play your part at home on the piano or any other instrument
- Play tapes/CDs/MP3s in the car while you drive
- Get together with friends in your section and rehearse your part
- Get together with someone who sings a different part. Work to be able to sing your part without getting distracted by the other parts

Concert Etiquette

Here are a few of the standard practices associated with concerts. Feel free to give us feedback when you discover other things that would be helpful for new members to know.

Arriving

- Do not park in the bank parking lot behind the Washington Center. You will be towed away!
- Leave valuables in your car (out of sight, in the trunk, etc.) and enter through the backstage door.
- Go downstairs to the dressing rooms, look for any posted announcements and pick up any distributed accessories as applicable to this concert.
- Bring your own water bottle with your name on it.
- Do not bring any friends or patrons in early with you. Only performers are allowed “in the house” at our call back time. This is a Washington Center rule and has to do with insurance liability.
- At call-back, please do not go into the lobby area or onstage unless you have a job to do. Stay in the dressing rooms. Members may normally enter the audience area to listen to the preconcert lecture, but should be back in the dressing room area at least 10 minutes prior to the scheduled concert start time.

During the concert

- Know where the exits are in case you need to leave for emergency reasons.
- Do not lock your knees when standing to sing. This may cause fainting and you may fall and be injured.
- If you feel faint or sick, try sitting straight down first. If you need to leave the stage during a performance, ask for a neighbor's assistance if you feel unsteady.

Standard Choral Practice

We use this term to apply to the things that choral members should always do, unless directed otherwise by the conductor. Here is a partial list. You can add to it during rehearsals.

- Never hum nor sing along when a part is being played as an example in rehearsal (unless asked to do so)
- Your embouchure (mouth position) should always be vertical (north/south) as opposed to horizontal (east/west)
- Stand tall, rib cage lifted, with legs slightly apart, weight on the balls of your feet
- Always finish a phrase on the rest following—this is the perfect place to put those final consonants (unless directed otherwise by the conductor).
- Elide (connect) final consonants with the next word within a phrase unless asked to do otherwise.
- Crescendo slightly to the high point of every phrase and decrescendo to the end—think of each phrase as an increase of energy followed by gradual lessening of energy
- Follow along when other parts are singing or rehearsing so you're ready to instantly join in
- Breathe **prior** to singing—don't wait until the last microsecond in a four-measure rest; use the entire time to get a full, deep breath
- Be aware of all other parts at all time so you can pull back dynamically on long held notes that are accompaniment to other moving parts. Know when you have the important melody or moving part so you can help "bring it forward." This is crucial to a good ensemble sound.
- Hold your music up and as flat as possible to allow you to see the conductor, the audience, your music and project your voice outward to the audience
- Remember, in the Washington Center, most of our audience is above you so look up at them when you perform. When they can see your face they can hear your voice. The opposite is also true.
- When standing on risers, move forward as far as possible, with your toes hanging off the front edge. This allows each person behind you enough room to hold his or her music in the correct position. This does not apply to standing on the larger platforms.
- Know where your "window" is between people in front of you. Place yourself in this window to keep visual contact with the conductor and the audience.
- Spend time to read through and thoroughly understand the meaning of the text/lyrics. The knowledge and insight you gain will facilitate your communication to the audience and enhance your performance.

Warm-up and Sight Reading Books

MCE initially supplies all new members with both a Warm-up and a Sight Reading Booklet. These booklets should be brought to all rehearsals and retreats. Continuing members received a copy at the start of the 2003-2004 season. Members must purchase any needed replacement copies for lost or misplaced books.

Uniforms

Participation in any performance is contingent upon wearing the approved concert uniform. Arrangements can be made for MCE to "front" the costs of uniforms, with payment plans arranged with the Treasurer. Scholarships are also available to assist with uniform costs. To request a scholarship, please contact the Board Vice-President. You will be given a scholarship form to put your request in writing.

Men. Black tuxedo jacket and slacks, black bow tie and cummerbund, red bow tie and cummerbund, black shoes, black socks, pure white shirt (not off-white, not ivory), MCE-designated boutonnieres (provided by MCE). No jewelry should be worn except watches (alarms turned off), wedding rings and stud earrings.

Women. The current MCE women's uniform is ordered by MCE and paid for by each member. It is composed of a black floor length skirts, black jacket, black shell, red shell, purchased from the company selected by MCE. Current cost for all four pieces is approximately \$165, plus shipping. In addition, the uniform includes black closed-toe shoes, black hose (provided by the member), and designated MCE accessories (provided by MCE). No jewelry should be worn except watches (alarms turned off), wedding rings, and stud earrings. Uniform order forms are available at auditions and from the Uniform Coordinator. There is a minimum order amount or additional charges apply, plus the uniforms take 6-8 weeks to arrive, so please make arrangements with the Uniform Coordinator as soon as possible.

Volunteering

All members are needed and expected to volunteer in some capacity to help MCE ensure the highest quality choral experience for both singers and audience. Since Masterworks is a volunteer, non-profit organization, we are constantly in search of new funds and additional volunteers to help meet our performance and organizational needs. We need as much volunteer time from each member as possible. There is always more work than volunteers. Members who volunteer tell us they feel they have more ownership in the organization.

What, specifically, are we asking? We need members to sell season subscriptions and individual tickets, make and solicit donations, sell ads, fund-raise, help PR spread the word about each MCE event, share the committee work load, set-up, tear-down and clean-up for rehearsals and concerts, and more. MCE remains committed to involving everyone in the workload of our thriving organization.

Buddies: An example of volunteering in action. We rely on continuing members to volunteer to be a "Buddy" for each new member. This is an important task in which you help the new person get acclimated to MCE, learn the ropes, and get to know other members. We always need volunteers to be buddies so please say, "Yes!" when we give you a call. You can also volunteer directly by calling the New Member Coordinator.

Masterworks Web Page

MCE's web page is www.mce.org. Our newly redesigned website will soon have a members-only section not viewable by the general public. The member password will be distributed at the appropriate time. Include the Masterworks web site address in e-mail to friends to help cultivate new subscribers/customers.

Fundraising

Without sufficient income, MCE would change from a non-profit arts group to a non-existent arts group. **Fundraising is every member's responsibility.** Fundraising is not the sole responsibility of the Marketing committee or the Board of Directors. All members must help MCE with its ongoing fundraising projects.

Three Zero-Effort, Super-Easy Ways to Help MCE Raise Money

1. **Stormans stores.** The local Thriftway supermarkets owned by Stormans, Inc. (Bayview and Ralph's) have a 1% rebate program for non-profit community groups. Get a special MCE rebate card from the Marketing committee. Present this to the cashier before they total your order and MCE receives a 1% rebate on your purchases. You can also take extra rebate cards and distribute them to family and friends. Stormans mails a rebate check to MCE quarterly.

2. **Megafoods stores.** The local Megafoods supermarkets have a 1% rebate program for non-profit community

groups. Get a special MCE rebate card from the Marketing committee. Present this to the cashier before they total your order and MCE receives a 1% rebate on your purchases. A rebate check is mailed to MCE quarterly.

3. **Amazon.com.** MCE has its own web page (www.MCE.org). We have a special rebate agreement with Amazon.com that costs you nothing and creates funds for MCE. Here's how it works. Go to MCE's web site and click on the Amazon.com button. MCE receives a 5% rebate on any purchases made at Amazon that start via the link from our web page. It's that easy! Tell all your friends and co-workers. It is a painless way to continue helping MCE's financial bottom line.

Communicating Appropriately

It is always appropriate to respectfully take a concern (or compliment) directly to the source. This applies to all MCE issues. If you are unhappy/happy with musical or artistic issues such as tempo, phrasing, conducting, text changes, rehearsals, etc., please take your concerns/compliments to the Director. The Director fully shares all concerns/compliments with the Board of Directors. If you have other non-musical concerns, please share them first with your section leader and, if not satisfied with the outcome, approach the Choral Operations chair. If you are still unhappy, please take your concerns to MCE's Board of Directors.

Timely Responses

We need all members to respond in a timely manner to our communications (mailings, emails, fliers, phone messages). This is especially important with the summer letter and Membership Renewal form (see Membership Status, page 7).

Chemical and Aroma Sensitivity

Some members of our choir have acute sensitivities to chemical aromas and body odor. Why is this important to know? All of us share the same limited airspace and are always being admonished to breathe deeply. If we can't breathe well we can't sing well. This applies to all fragrances, chemical or natural. We recognize that by raising these issues we are entering into touchy areas of individual lifestyles choices. We do so with respect about each person's dignity while at the same time acknowledging that individual choices about personal aromas can have drastic effects upon members of our choir. Here is how a member described the situation:

“Imagine that I have a glass of drinking water. Each member has an eyedropper with a few drops of a petrochemical. As they arrive, each member stops by my glass and puts a few drops of their petrochemical into my water. I have no choice but to drink this water during rehearsal.”

- What happens to me: sneezing, runny, itchy nose/eyes, can't breathe, headache, chest tight, dry coughing.
- Worst offenders: strong laundry soap, scented dryer sheets, hairspray, all liquid perfumes (wax ok), aftershave

Here are some key points about chemical sensitivity

- A chemically sensitive person is not just annoyed by fragrance, but is actually harmed by the chemicals that make up the fragrance. Almost all artificial fragrances cause problems.
- The best or safest fragrances are made of completely natural ingredients. For example, the scent of a real orange or flower will not usually be a problem. The next best or safest fragrances are those from essential oils, though these are not completely problem free.
- Anything else that has the word “fragrance” listed as an ingredient, by itself, is made with potentially harmful chemicals. If not for the protection of trade secrets, these chemicals would be labeled as hazardous materials.
- If you put on a scented product but no longer smell it, that doesn't mean it's gone. Your own nose will deaden to a fragrance fairly quickly. Scented candles can also be harmful. If you have many in your home you will be wearing their fragrance.
- Fragranced cleaning products are harmful, too—often worse—because they contain other chemicals along with the fragrance. (Editor's note: However, there are alternatives to the top selling products. For example, one can

- purchase natural bleach that does not have the pungent aroma we normally associate with bleach.)
- Even deodorants billed as “unscented” will contain a fragrance. It’s apparently the specific chemicals used to create the “unscented” smell. To find a safe deodorant or product, look for the term “fragrance free” and check the list of ingredients to see that “fragrance” is not one of them.
 - Chemical sensitivity exists everywhere, not just in our choir.

Here is a best to worst scenario given to us by one of our chemically sensitive members

1. (Best) Take the issue seriously and use/wear no fragrance products ever.
2. Use/wear only natural fragrances, none on chorus days.
3. Use the tiniest amount possible of synthetic fragrances, but never on chorus days, and never wear clothes that you wore when previously wearing a fragrance on those days. Never use scented laundry soap or fabric softener.
4. Use scented laundry products but air out clothes for several days before wearing them to rehearsal.
5. Use scented products in the morning only.
6. (Worst) Ignore this issue.

Natural Odors

Body odor, while a natural scent, can be strong and cause others to have the same symptoms as chemical scents. Please note that if you have done some sweaty work, or if you simply have a strong natural odor, you should shower before coming to rehearsal. As with chemically based scents, your own nose may not pick up your body odor, so be careful even if you don’t perceive a problem. (*Dr. Science says: “One quick fix if you absolutely can’t shower; dab some rubbing alcohol or plain lemon juice under arms— it kills the bacteria that causes the odor”*)

Some Common Questions and Answers

1. What is the best way to communicate to MCE as an organization?

Come to a committee meeting or Board meeting and talk to us. You can also send us a letter, e-mail or call us (see the roster). Be ready for a follow up call so we can learn more about your issue.

2. Why do we pay an orchestra and not the choir?

The short answer is we need them and they don’t need us. While that is not entirely true, it is true that the orchestra players, especially those of the quality that we require, are in high demand in our community. We need them to perform our choral/orchestral works. The orchestra players have their own performing groups (Olympia Symphony, Olympia Chamber Orchestra). We call their payment an “honorarium” because the amount is so low. We pay them \$30 per three-hour rehearsal that comes out to about \$10 per hour. Luckily, they enjoy performing with us.

3. Why do we hire outside soloists instead of using our own members?

We use professional soloists when we need professional voices. This occurs most often when we perform with orchestra. Our own quality standards and the expectations of our audience require us to do so. Most often, our professional soloists have been invited to perform by our Artistic Director. On occasion, MCE has held open auditions for “professional solo opportunities.” If and when this occurs, anyone, including MCE choir members may participate in the auditions.

4. Why does MCE fund raise?

Unfortunately, ticket sales, ad sales, grants, sponsorships, dues, etc. do not cover our total financial needs. Therefore we are constantly looking for new and more effective ways to raise money for MCE. Like other arts groups nationwide, ticket sales typically only cover about 50% of budget needs.

5. What’s the budget breakdown of MCE’s revenues and expenses?

Request a budget from the Treasurer and/or attend the All-Committee meetings or Board meetings to better understand MCE’s finances and budget process.

