

MEMBERS' HANDBOOK: MANCHESTER COMMUNITY CHOIR

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1) Welcome to Manchester Community Choir. Our repertoire includes songs from all over the world, both modern and traditional; generally their themes are equality, peace and respect. Our singing is acapella (unaccompanied) and we aim to have fun while we practise and perform.

2) Liz Powers is our talented, enthusiastic Musical Director, who has been our MD since 2008. She studied music at Dartington College of Arts, and studied Ethnomusicology at the School of Oriental and African Studies, before going on to qualify as a music teacher at Roehampton University. She has also studied Choral Conducting with the Association of British Choral Directors.

Liz's approach gently raises the standard of our a cappella singing, and prepares us for polished performances, while making rehearsals enjoyable and uplifting. Liz leads a number of other choirs, and sings with the award-winning White Rosettes.

3) Our Values

- (a) We welcome all-comers, irrespective of musical knowledge or experience and we don't audition.
- (b) We value community, cultural diversity, peace and freedom from all kinds of discrimination and oppression.
- (c) We are not a religious or political choir; we are open to members of all religions and political persuasions.
- (d) We don't discriminate against any individual on grounds of race, gender, religion, age, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability,
- (e) Members of the choir respect each other, our MD and the staff and audiences of rehearsal and performance venues.

4) Membership and subscriptions

As a member you can expect:

- an enjoyable and challenging singing experience
- a well-run choir with very good communications
- opportunities to perform at events in and outside Manchester
- your suggestions for the choir to be taken seriously

The Trustees decide the annual subscription rate before the beginning of each membership year, based on keeping costs as low as possible for members whilst fulfilling the aims of the Choir.

We have three rates of annual subscription, [The online registration form](#) gives brief guidance on which of our three rates you should pay, and how to pay. New members joining during the year pay a pro rata subscription, rounded to the nearest third.

More information about membership rules is on page 7 of this document.

5) Song Choices

Our MD decides which songs we sing, but she is always willing to listen to suggestions, particularly if they have an SATB arrangement attached! Although we

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are not a religious or political choir, we sometimes sing songs that have religious or political connotations, if they accord with our values and if our MD decides that they are good songs for us to sing. We occasionally add a classic pop song to our repertoire – just for the sheer fun of singing it.

6) Learning Songs

We learn songs by ear, so you do not need to be able to read music. Lyrics and mp3 recordings of the song parts are on the members' area of our website, to help you practise between rehearsals. We don't provide sheet music.

7) Events

We are a performance choir singing at events and organising workshops which accord with our values. We appear regularly in Manchester and further afield, including the annual Street Choirs Festival, and we like to have at least 60 members singing at each performance. There is a regularly updated Google calendar in the Members' Section of our website, showing details of rehearsals, performances, workshops and social events. No password is needed for the Calendar

Our **choir attire** for performances is plain black tops and bottoms plus plain bright green accessories. At our performances, photos are usually taken and video recordings are made, and these may be published

We expect members to memorise words for performances and we expect those performing to **be well rehearsed**, so that we can keep up our high standard. We ask you to practise at home, following Liz's sound tracks and her tips and advice. The two rehearsals immediately before a performance are very important, so please do try and attend those as well.

8) Rehearsals

We rehearse at least twice a month at Didsbury Baptist Church, Beaver Road, Didsbury, M20 6SX; entrance on School Lane.

Dates of rehearsals: There is a regularly updated Google calendar in the Members' Section of our website, showing details of rehearsals. Please check this calendar often, as sometimes changes or additions occur, especially in preparation for performances. No password is needed for the calendar.

Public transport to Didsbury Baptist Church: the Church is almost opposite the Didsbury Village Metrolink stop, and buses X57, 42, 142, 84, 171, 371 and 23 stop nearby.

Parking at Didsbury Baptist Church: there is parking on the adjacent roads, off School Lane and on other roads the other side of Wilmslow Road. There is a small parking area to the left side of the Church on Beaver Road which is for people with disabilities or large items of equipment.

During rehearsals we sit in voice part sections. Don't be scared of moving around until you find a section which suits your voice. Women are generally high (soprano),

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middle (alto) or low (tenor). Men generally sing bass (lower) or tenor (higher). Please speak to Liz if you are unsure which voice part is best for you.

Please make sure your **mobile phone** is off or on silent during rehearsals and keep chat to the absolute minimum. Photography is not usually allowed at rehearsals, except with the express permission of the Committee and the agreement of the members at that rehearsal.

Refreshments: At Sunday rehearsals we have a 30-minute break when hot drinks and biscuits are available. At other rehearsals there are no hot drinks available but we do have a brief comfort break.

Announcements

Announcements about choir events are made at rehearsals, so please bring your diary. These announcements are limited to MCC business, but leaflets and posters about non-MCC events can be displayed and we have a separate opt-in email list for sending out information about non-MCC events.

9) Communications

Website and social media.

Our website is www.manchestercommunitychoir.org.uk . Some parts of the members' area on the website, including song lyrics and sound files, are password protected. The password will be emailed to you when your membership subscription fee has been processed.

See also our Facebook page [here](#), Twitter account [here](#), photos on [Flickr](#) (and videos on our You Tube account [here](#)).

Newsletter

Each month the Committee publishes an on-line newsletter, which is emailed to you. It features news about forthcoming events, feedback from recent concerts and workshops and alerts you to any changes.

10) Your views are important, so.....

....there is a comments folder at rehearsals and a suggestions button on the Members' Section of our website; we welcome your ideas and suggestions. They will always be considered by the Committee at the first available opportunity and you will receive feedback.

If you wish to contact the Committee outside this process, you can talk to committee members at rehearsals (they wear very flattering green t shirts) or if you prefer to send an email, please address it to the-score@manchestercommunitychoir.org.uk We hope you enjoy being a member of the Choir and that you won't hesitate to approach any member of the Committee to discuss any problems or issues

11) Helping with the Choir: The Choir is a voluntary organisation and depends on the goodwill and help of its members. Here are some ways you can help with the Choir:

- Helping with refreshments at Sunday rehearsals; talk to the refreshments team if you can assist.

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- Being a "buddy" to another member of the Choir e.g. offering someone without personal transport a lift to rehearsals; offering paper copies of MCC emails to someone without internet access, or offering to burn the song parts from our website onto a CD.

12) Social events: We normally hold a few socials a year, usually after Sunday rehearsals – please check the calendar on the Choir website and look out for email messages. They are good opportunities to get to know other members of the Choir.

13) Our CDs: The Choir has recorded three CDs; the first is completely sold out! The other two are usually on sale at rehearsals and performances; they really do make fabulous presents!

14) Choir Assistance Fund

We may be able to offer some financial help towards travel and associated accommodation costs to members who would otherwise be unable to attend rehearsals, performances, workshops and festivals with the Choir. More details in the Members' Area of our website, under "Travel and Other Assistance".

15) Our Constitution and proposed new one

This is the formal document which governs what we do as a registered charity. The current one can be read under "Business" in the "Members' Area" of our website.

We will be discussing a proposed new constitution at a Special General Meeting of choir members on June 3rd 2018. You can read it under "Business" in the "Members' Area" of our website. It is a model constitution devised by the *Making Music* organisation, for use by any choir, so the content is largely administrative. Therefore this Members' Handbook has been produced to sit alongside the proposed new constitution and to add information about our values and particular ways of operating.

16) Our Aims and Objectives

Section 2 of our proposed new constitution gives our overall objective as being *to advance, improve, develop and maintain public education in, and appreciation of, the art and science of music in all its aspects by any means the trustees see fit, including through the presentation of public concerts and recitals.*

Quite a mouthful, and within that overall objective, MCC's **aim** is to run our community choir as one which is accessible to all, irrespective of musical experience or knowledge.

17) Trustees and Committee

- (a) We have a management committee to administer the choir. We hope to get approval by the membership at a Special General Meeting on June 3rd 2018 to become a registered charity. The trustees would be elected by members at our Annual General Meeting and they would then act as the management committee for the Choir.

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(b) Sections 5 – 9 of our proposed new constitution describes the duties of trustees, how they are elected or appointed, how they can be removed and what their powers are.

(c) In addition, MCC would specify that Trustees can:

1. charge subscription fees to members in accordance with financial circumstances
2. employ Musical Director(s)
3. form contracts,
4. commission work
5. hire premises
6. devise methods of assisting members who require financial help to attend choir activities
7. receive monies and other forms of assistance to the choir, providing they are only used to further the work of the choir
8. undertake any other work to further the work of the Choir.

(d) We also have some specific rules about how our Committee is run, as follows:

1. The Committee will conduct its business in ways which reflect and are consistent with the values of the Choir.
2. The Committee will comprise at least ? six Officers including: Chair, Deputy Chair, Secretary, Membership Officer, Treasurer and IT Officer, with up to 14 additional Committee Members.
3. Officers and Committee members will be elected at the AGM.
4. Any member of the Choir can volunteer to serve on the Committee.
5. Nominations for any Officer post must be received no less than 7 days before the AGM.
6. A third of all the Committee members shall retire at each AGM. Any individual will be eligible for re-election, except that no trustee can hold the same Officer post for more than three consecutive years.
7. The Committee can co-opt any member as a full committee member until the next AGM, and may allocate an Officer post to the co-opted member. If the co-opted member takes up an Officer post, any period of service prior to the next AGM will not count towards the maximum time as specified in (f) above.
8. The Committee can establish working groups or sub-committees to deal with specific aspects of running the Choir, provided that
 - i. any working group or sub-committee includes at least one Committee member; and
 - ii. all proposals made by working groups shall be subject to approval by the full Committee.

18) More about membership rules

Section 3 of our proposed new constitution contains broad membership rules.

In addition to what the proposed new constitution says, MCC has adopted a number of its own rules, as follows:

- (a) Membership of the Choir is open to any individual of age 16 or over, who supports the values of the Choir.
- (b) Musical experience or knowledge are not conditions of membership, and the Choir does not audition prospective members.
- (c) No individual employed by the Choir is eligible for membership.
- (d) The Treasurer, Membership Secretary or a nominated Officer of the Committee keeps a full record of all members' details and subscriptions paid.
- (e) The names of members shall be made available to any member on request, **but not their addresses or other details**, in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Section 4 of our proposed new constitution gives details of how and why a person's membership may be terminated.

19) Safeguarding

MCC's members can be any age from 16 upwards, so young people and vulnerable adults may be attending rehearsals, concerts, workshops and events that take place outside Manchester and may involve overnight stays.

The Committee will appoint a named individual responsible for safeguarding issues in MCC. All queries and concerns relating to safeguarding should be referred to that individual in the first instance. Any projects, events or other activities that will involve young people or vulnerable adults will be planned with that individual's involvement and will be in line with the *Making Music* policy and guidelines.

20) Health and Safety

MCC is committed to providing a healthy and safe environment for all those involved in the musical activities it organises, in line with the *Making Music* health and safety policy for choirs

- This includes but is not limited to; members, staff (including freelance), volunteers and members of the public.
- This includes but is not limited to; rehearsals, concerts and fundraising events.

We have up to date risk assessments for rehearsals and for busking and we expect the organisers of concerts and other events in which we appear to have due regard for our health and safety.

21) Meetings

Sections 14, 15 and 16 of the proposed new constitution contain the rules governing Annual General Meetings and Special General Meetings.

In addition MCC has adopted a number of its own rules about meetings, as follows:

I. Annual General Meeting

The business of the AGM will include:

- Election of Committee Members and Officers
- Chair's report
- Musical Director's report
- Financial report
- Reports from other officers, if appropriate
- Any formal proposals from members

II. AGMs and Special General Meetings (SGM)

- Only members who are registered and have paid their subscriptions in full (unless exempt from subscription charge) are allowed to vote.
- Voting will usually be by a show of hands, unless a proposal to use a secret ballot is proposed, seconded and passed by a simple majority.

III. Committee meetings

Section 10 of our proposed new constitution gives the detailed rules governing how the Committee operates, including rules about the numbers making up a quorum for decision making.

In addition MCC has decided that the Committee can sometimes make decisions **between** meetings, using electronic means such as email. When they do so, a record of the decisions is kept and incorporated into the minutes of the following Committee meeting. The quorum for electronic decisions is the same as that for Committee meetings.

IV. Records of meetings

- i. The Secretary or a nominated member of the Committee will keep a record of all Annual General Meetings and Special General Meetings and all meetings of the Committee.
- ii. Minutes of committee meetings are subject to the approval of the Committee at the next Committee Meeting. Final approved minutes will be made available to all members via the Choir website.
- iii. The Secretary or a nominated member of the Committee will keep a record of any confidential decisions made by the Committee.
- iv. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting will be made available to all members via the Choir website in draft form, and will be subject to approval at the next AGM,

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after which final approved minutes will be made available to all members via the Choir website.

- v. Minutes of any Special General Meeting will be made available to all members via the Choir website in draft form, and will be subject to approval at the next AGM, after which final approved minutes will be made available to all members via the Choir website.

22) Finance

The rules governing the Choir's finances are contained in section 9 of our proposed new constitution. MCC has adopted a number of additional rules about finance:

- I. Bills will normally only be paid by cheque or electronic payment from the bank account. The Committee will decide, and the Treasurer will instruct the bank from time to time, which signatures or authorisations can be accepted. No cheque or electronic payment will be valid without at least two signatures. No cheque will be counter-signed before all other details are completed.
- II. Cash payments will only be made in exceptional circumstances and on the authority of the Treasurer and one other officer. Any such cash payments of £25 or more must be endorsed by the next committee meeting.
- III. No Committee member will derive any financial benefit from the group, other than the payment of reasonable expenses, which may include travelling and dependent care expenses, for them to take part in Committee activity, as agreed by Committee.
- IV. Any Committee member who carries out an activity with prior written agreement of the Committee or agreed at a Committee meeting, will not be personally liable for debts, and will be entitled to be indemnified from the Choir's funds, provided that no payment will be made, or obligations entered into which cannot be met from the Choir's funds.
- V. A copy of the Choir's most recent bank statements will be made available at the request of the Committee at any time.
- VI. The Choir's financial year will run from 1st September to 31st August.
- VII. Each AGM will receive a written financial statement for the preceding year, examined and approved by a competent independent person chosen by the Committee, but not a member of the Committee.

23) This document

The Trustees will ensure that this document is available to members in electronic and paper form, and the Trustees will update and change it as necessary, informing the members of any substantial changes. It will be available on the MCC website in the "For Members" section and a paper copy will be available for consultation at each rehearsal.

Version May 11th 2018