

Singer's Handbook for the

*Southwestern Seminary
Master Chorale*

2014 - 2015

Blank page for printing purposes

Singer's Handbook for the *Southwestern Seminary Master Chorale*

This Handbook is intended to guide you as a member of the chorus in the Standards of Respect, Discipline, Dedication and Excellence.

Our Vision:

The Southwestern Seminary Master Chorale (“SWSMC”) will continue to pursue its long tradition of being recognized as one of the premier symphonic choruses in America, presenting beautiful, inspirational, expressive and exciting choral music.

Our Scope:

SWSMC consists of a wonderful alliance of singers from dedicated, volunteer musicians from the Fort Worth metroplex, coupled with students from Southwestern. Our performances serve not only the Southwestern Seminary School of Church Music but also the Fort Worth/Dallas community, including a long-standing partnership with the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra.

Our Core Values:

SWSMC is committed to upholding the following core values:

Purpose: Committing to excellence with the goal of advancing the Christian faith through music.

Dedication: Sharing the joy of choral music through our community of dedicated singers, educators and leaders.

Artistic Excellence: Achieving the highest standards in performance and practice through enthusiastic participation in a myriad of musical styles.

Collaboration: Fostering rewarding partnerships between the seminary, the community, local churches, and artistic and educational organizations.

Integrity: Maintaining a professional level organization that understands its role as stewards of its God-given gifts and talents.

Your commitment to this chorus means committing to these standards. The degree to which you commit to them will determine the quality of this chorus.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
I. <i>Who We Are</i>	1
A History	1
Seminary Connection	2
Structure of the Chorus	2
Auditions	3
Costs	3
Chorus Communications	4
II. <i>Rehearsal Standards</i>	5
Attendance	5
Conductor's Expectations	6
General Rehearsal Etiquette	6
Music	7
Severe Weather	7
III. <i>Performance Standards</i>	8
Scheduled Performances	8
Dress Rehearsal	8
Performance Warm-Up	8
Performance Time	8-9
Proper Concert Attire	10
IV. <i>Notes and Helpful Hints</i>	11
For Rehearsals	11
For Performances	12-13

I. Who Are We?

What is the Southwestern Seminary Master Chorale?

A History

In 1915 the music department of Southwestern Seminary (“SWBTS”) was founded under three governing principles: Spiritual and Evangelistic Fervor, Scholarly and Efficient Musicianship, and Practicality in Application. Beginning in 1921, a group named the Seminary Choral Club was formed under the leadership of I.E. Reynolds who began conducting the chorus in annual performances of Handel’s *Messiah*. (This annual tradition continues uninterrupted to the modern day).

In the early 1950’s the name of the choral club was changed to the Oratorio Chorus because of the notoriety of the principal literature being Handel’s *Messiah*. Incidentally, the orchestra that performed in the early days of the chorus was the Fort Worth Little Symphony Orchestra.

In 1988/89 Dean McKinney and Dr. David Keith made the decision to begin auditioning community singers to fill out the parts to enable the students to perform more major works. The relationship with the now bigger Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra (“FWSO”) grew over the 1990’s and includes numerous concerts sponsored by the FWSO and Southwestern, as well as several joint recordings¹.

The community portion of the chorus grew from 1989 so that a full compliment of 200+ SSAATTBB singers between Students and Community was eventually attained. The chorus has been a source of experiential education for the Student Assistants to the Director of the chorus, preparing them for ministry and music careers.

So, with recognition of the great history of the choral organization that has existed since 1921 and the change in focus from the singular presentation of Handel’s most famous oratorio to a much wider breadth of literature and venues, now under the direction of Dr. David Thye, along with support of Dean Stephen Johnson, faculty and administration and even the FWSO, in 2008 the chorus is now called the Southwestern Seminary Master Chorale.

¹ SWBTS Oratorio Recordings include: *Masterworks Montage, Dettingen Te Deum / In Terra Pax, The Majesty of Christmas, Christmas Tidings, Deo Gratias, Carmina Burana, Kvalite Boga, From Darkness to Light and Lux Aeterna, Come Ye Faithful* (with Morning Star), and two in conjunction with Broadway Baptist Church: *A Festival of Hymns*, and *Make your Prayer and Music One*, among others.

Seminary Connection

Our Conductor is a professor on the Seminary faculty, and the Master Chorale is one of the ensembles of the School of Church Music. As a member of the chorus, you should anticipate performing in concerts and venues that support the expression of the Christian faith through a myriad of choral literature.

Structure of the Chorus

Conductor:

Dr. David R. Thye, D.M.A,
Robert L. Burton Chair of Graduate Conducting, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Chorus Master, Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra
P.O. Box 22000
George E. Cowden Hall #105
Fort Worth, TX 76122
(817) 923-1921, ext. 3140
E-Mail: dthye@swbts.edu

Graduate Assistants – 2013/2014

Bradley Anderson, Associate Conductor: Bradley.Anderson@email.swbts.edu
Bryan McDonald: *Assistant Conductor*
Marie Rogers: *Accompanist*
Christine Pater: *Accompanist*

SWBTS Office Contact:

(817) 923-1921, ext. 3179

General E-Mail: MasterChorale@swbts.edu

Website: <http://www.swbts.edu/academics/schools-programs/churchmusic/master-chorale/>

Board Members

Mike McDaniel, *Chairman/Men's Liason*: vmms@sbcglobal.net

Robyn Toler, *Soprano Liaison*: rbnsnest@swbell.net

Ann Treleven, *Alto Liaison*: anniemctree@sbcglobal.net

Auditions

Auditions may be required for all singers on an annual basis at the discretion of the conductor.

New member auditions will be held twice each year, in August and January (during student orientation each semester). Auditions will be heard by either Dr. David Thye and/or one or more of the Student Assistants.

Current members will be aware of good singers in their scope of influence and are encouraged to invite good quality choral singers with professional demeanors to call for an audition. The Board or SWBTS may also send invitations out for auditions. (Further details for joining the choir can be found on the website, <http://www.swbts.edu/academics/schools-programs/churchmusic/master-chorale/>).

Auditions may include sight singing, reading rhythms, oral pitch perception, a basic written theory test covering basic knowledge needed to sing in a professional chorus, as well as an expectation that the singer will perform two solo pieces of contrasting styles, preferably from the classical and/or sacred repertoire. Please bring music for an accompanist.

Current Chorus members may be asked to re-audition for purposes of part placement and/or at the conductor's request at any time during the season.

Costs

Southwestern Seminary generously supports the Master Chorale financially by annually budgeting for costs associated with our concert season. Their contributions allow the chorus to perform with professional musicians, use rehearsal space, be promoted in the community, etc.

There are incidental costs involved in being a member of the SWSMC as follows:

- Each chorale member will be assessed a **fee of \$20 per semester** per singer (to cover social events, administration costs, additional promotion, future recordings, etc.). Community singers will be billed separately for this fee, while students will be charged through the School of Church Music fee system. *Should this cost present a hardship for any singer, please contact the board chairman.* Members wanting to donate additional funds to assist fellow singers having difficulty with this bi-annual fee may make such donations anytime throughout the year to the Master Chorale controlled account.
- The **cost of the music** for each concert. An average cost may be \$15 to \$30 per concert; but if you already have the correct score (ex. *Messiah*), you will not incur additional costs (*Music must be purchased separately from fees for both community & student members*).
- **Performance attire** (see proper guidelines for attire on page 11)
- **Travel opportunities** for the chorus may be at additional expense to each member.

Chorus Communications

Emails will be sent out with instructions and information that need immediate attention, either from the Conductor, the Board Chairman or the Student Assistants.

Section Liaisons will be primarily representatives for community members of the chorus and will handle communication within the section concerning issues particular to that section, including maintaining open communication lines between the conductor, the board and the section. The liaison will assist in keeping track of his/her section, including monitoring attendance. *(Please keep in touch with your section liaison – see page 2 for contact information)*

Student Attendance will continue to be handled by the Student Assistants. A Student's grade is tied to attendance at rehearsals and performances; any questions regarding attendance policies should be addressed to the Student Associate Conductors.

The SWBTS website will post upcoming concerts, including how to obtain tickets. <http://www.swbts.edu/academics/schools-programs/churchmusic/master-chorale/>

II. Rehearsal Standards

Attendance:

Membership in the SWSMC comes with the understanding that it is a minimum 10 month commitment (August through May...June rehearsals may also be held depending upon FWSO performances). Rehearsals are every Monday evening from 7:00 to 9:30 PM. Other rehearsals will be scheduled as required.

Rehearsals are critical to the success of the ensemble and are not optional.

The conductor and the board do not intend to enforce your attendance, and understand you may have unforeseen circumstances that cause you to miss a rehearsal, (a work conflict, contagious illness, family emergency, etc.). However, it is the hope of the leadership that you possess ownership of your attendance. To keep us all accountable to the standards of the chorus, please be aware of the following guidelines for your expected attendance:

Please SIGN IN on the attendance sheets at every regular rehearsal, every dress rehearsal, and every concert. Attendance is monitored by these roll sheets, so it is the singer's responsibility to show evidence of attendance.

(1) Excused Absences *(Community Singers Only)*

(If you are a student singer, please be aware of the guidelines presented to you by the conductor and/or student associate conductors regarding attendance requirements.)

If you know you will miss a rehearsal due to an unavoidable scheduling conflict, please notify your section liaison by phone or email up to one hour before rehearsals commence.

Please attempt to limit your excused absences as much as possible. Should you encounter a situation where you experience more than **three (3)** excused absences between performances, the conductor or board chairman may ask you to forego singing in the next concert.

(2) Unexcused Absences *(Community Singers Only)*

Your absence will be “unexcused” if your section liaison receives no notification from you prior to rehearsal about your absence. The responsibility for reporting the absence before the rehearsal begins will fall on the singer.

There may be times when reporting your absence before a given rehearsal is impractical (medical emergency, travel delay, etc.). Communicating such a circumstance to your section liaison will allow for reported allowances to be handled on a case by case basis.

It is likely that a singer with more than three (3) unexcused absences will need to re-audition for the chorus and/or have a meeting with the conductor or the board chairman to maintain membership in the chorus.

(3) Other Attendance Matters

- Be on time and in your seat before rehearsal starts. Every minute counts.
- Again, chorus attendance is a 10 month commitment per year. Should you find that the upcoming concert contains music not considered your favorite, please default to your professionalism as a singer and commit to learn something new while maintaining a standard of attendance integrity.
- If you miss two (2) successive concerts you must meet with Dr. Thye before continuing to sing in the chorale for the season.

The goal of our attendance policy is not to be punitive, but rather to help create attendance accountability for all singers in the ensemble. The sound of a section may vary when you are absent, and practicing with the complete ensemble usually produces the most fruitful result. Remember, your attendance gives stability to the sound of the ensemble, so every member is important! Ultimately, regarding attendance, our professional reputation with the FWSO is crucial to uphold and merits your consistent attendance.

Conductor's Expectations:

- *Bring your scores and a pencil to every rehearsal.*
- Mark every score instruction immediately when given. Assume the instruction is being given for you. You cannot remember every instruction without marking your score.
- Singers are responsible for learning the notes once rehearsed, and for working out problem passages outside of rehearsal. This allows rehearsals to focus on refinement of the music – not chasing notes. This also allows you to watch more during rehearsals and performances.
- Look up as much as possible. Not only does this help you to stay with the conductor, but also it dramatically affects the sound that is heard by the audience.
- Study your music. The better you know your score, the easier it is to watch.
- Sing with vibrancy and energy. This applies whether you are singing pianissimo or fortissimo.

General Rehearsal Etiquette:

- Do not bring food to rehearsal.
- Drinks must be in covered containers. Water is the drink of choice.

- Remove any paper and trash you generate during rehearsal.
- Do not chew gum during rehearsal.
- Do not wear any perfume, cologne, or scented lotions at rehearsals. However, deodorant and frequent personal and oral hygiene are always appreciated!
- Turn off or silence any pagers, cell phones and watches during rehearsals.

Music

- Each singer will purchase his/her own music. Singers will not receive music until it is paid for. Music will be available at a pre-specified rehearsal.
- Marking your music is very important. Instructions will be given on markings. (If the conductor is talking, you are marking.)
- Once a piece has been introduced in rehearsal, each singer is responsible for working on it outside of rehearsal.
- Use paperclips or tabs to facilitate ease in moving through the music.

Severe Weather

In case of inclement weather, an e-mail will be sent to your supplied e-mail address as soon as possible before rehearsal. Be sure to check your e-mail. Alternatively you may look on the chorus website to see if the seminary has closed the buildings, however *it may not be possible* to post a timely announcement. Calling or e-mailing your section liaison is always a good idea. If it is after hours when the severe weather arrives, use your best judgment to be safe. Many singers travel to the Seminary from throughout the Metroplex, and weather may vary considerably.

III. Performance Standards

Scheduled Performances:

- As soon as the schedule for extra rehearsals and performances is published, please mark your calendar. BE AWARE: THERE WILL ALWAYS BE ALTERATIONS.
- If you must miss a performance or dress rehearsal due to unavoidable circumstances, please notify your section liaison as soon as possible.
- You must be at dress rehearsal to sing in the concert.

Dress Rehearsals:

- Dress Rehearsal is always casual clothing rather than true “dress rehearsal,” unless otherwise instructed.
- Follow all rehearsal instructions and Rehearsal Standards above.
- Arrive in time to be in your seat 15 minutes prior to scheduled time for the rehearsal.
- Do not wear cologne, perfume or scented lotions.
- No cell phones or ANY personal items on stage (we will have lockers available).

Performance Warm-up

- Be on time for the performance warm-up. Important instructions and changes are announced at these meetings.
- Check the seating chart; it may have changed since the last rehearsal.
- Be attentive and listen for instructions. Do not talk!! Warm-up time is short and it is crucial that you hear all instructions.
- Afterward please take care of personal needs as soon and as quickly as possible in order to get into your assigned seat.
- Turn off all cell phones during rehearsal. Absolutely no text messaging allowed.

Performance Time:

- DO NOT WEAR COLOGNE OR SCENTED LOTIONS.
- Place personal items in a locker, off-stage, or other secure place. Do not bring any personal items onto the stage.

- Do not bring a cell phone or camera onto the stage. Absolutely no text messaging during performances.
- The only thing you will bring onto the stage is your music.
- Show deference to the orchestra players in getting on and off stage.
- When entering the stage, hold your score in the hand away from the audience as you walk to your seat. Try to keep up with the person in front of you.
- Walk up the end of the risers until you reach your designated row, then walk across the row to your seat.
- Watch for sitting and standing cues.
- Sit and stand as quietly as possible. Prepare to stand by quietly placing your feet squarely in front of you, before standing.
- Stay alert.
- Do not “follow” soloists in your score as they sing. When you finish singing, turn to your next entrance and wait. The audience can see you turning pages and this distracts from the performance. Paper clips are helpful to find your next entrance.
- Turn pages quietly at all times. Choose your page-turns between movements or at a loud passage. Never turn a page at a quiet passage in the music. A small noise like a page-turn multiplied by 200 can greatly interfere with the music.
- Be aggressive with all consonants.
- Keep your eyes focused and attentive on the conductor during concerts. Turning your head and looking around during a concert is a huge distraction for the audience.
- Caution: the audience can see every move you make. Remain as still as possible.
- At the end, when the applause begins, close your music/folder and hold it down at your right side, even if there is an encore.

Remember that as a singer you are:

- 1/3 vocal technician
- 1/3 musician
- 1/3 actor,

And all three are required for a high quality performance.

Proper Concert Attire

Performance Dress is always as follows, unless otherwise instructed:

Men:

- Black tuxedo (single breasted, satin lapel preferred, no tails)
- Black tux pants (pants & jacket must match)
- Black Accessories (bow tie, cummerbund & predominately black studs)
- Black socks & shoes
- The only jewelry allowed for men is a watch.

Not allowed in Men's Concert Wear:

- Tux with tails - Vest - Non-black accessories
- Beeping watches - Necklaces - Visible body piercings, ear gaugings

Tuxedo Outlet, 5036 Trail Lake Drive (Ft. Worth), 817-263-5525, www.tuxedo-outlet.com. is a good source. They do give discounts to Master Chorale members.

Women: (*Contact your Section Liaison for the approved clothing vendor*).

- Long Concert Black Dress – must be purchased from approved vendor (see Board)
- Black hosiery at all times (including panty hose, knee highs or trouser socks)
- Black closed-toe shoes
- Jewelry:
 - A) Watches are permitted, along with wedding ring
 - B) Only chorus-approved pearl earrings & necklaces may be worn
 - C) Hair accessories need to be the same color of the hair or black and small/medium in size so that nothing protrudes from the head.

Not allowed in Women's Concert Wear:

- Bare legs showing - NO Perfume or Scented Lotions
- Non-approved Necklaces - Bracelets - Spike high heels highly discouraged
- Beeping watches - Purses or bags, irrespective of size

IV. Notes and Helpful Hints

Rehearsal:

- If you are ill but no longer contagious, come and sit in. This allows you to hear instructions and mark your scores, even when you can't sing.
- If you are ill and still contagious, please do not attend rehearsals or performances. However, please contact your section liaison so that you will be aware of what was rehearsed, and so that seating changes may be accomplished for performances.
- Children should be left at home. If they must come to rehearsal, due to babysitting cancellations or similar problems, please make sure they remain seated, still and quiet during rehearsal; this may especially difficult for younger children.
- Do not hum any pitch prior to singing it. If humming your pitch is crucial to you, then do SILENTLY, without making any sound.
- Listen for instructions and corrections ...do not talk. Talking is a sign of disrespect. The chorus is a group effort; if you seek individual attention, there are other activities that can be found where that is acceptable.
- Save visiting and jokes for break times, and before and after rehearsal.
- Do not talk, sing or hum when the conductor stops the rehearsal for instructions.
- Mark your score with the conductor's instructions. If you are unsure how to mark it, raise your hand and ask, or speak with your section liaison during break or after rehearsal.
- Do not tap your foot, snap your fingers or "conduct" along with the conductor.
- Keep purely negative comments and complaints to yourself.
- Never make suggestions to the conductor during open rehearsal. If you have a purely positive comment or suggestion, offer it after rehearsal or during a break.
- Act, speak, and sing in ways that will build up the chorus.
- Please turn off all cells phones & any other text devices during rehearsals.

SING WITH SENSITIVITY

- Never sing so loudly that you can't hear your neighbor on each side.
- Ensemble singing must be a unified sound, rather than a group of soloists. Never try to "carry" the entire section by yourself.
- Sing without or with little vibrato in general. A controlled narrow vibrato may be utilized in louder passages. Use vibrato only sparingly to "warm" the tone. Since vibrato is a variation of the pitch, a wide vibrato is impossible to tune and unpleasant to hear. When a straight tone is requested, give a true straight tone. If you can't sing with a straight tone when requested, simply stand attentively or lip sync.

- Be aggressive with all consonants and articulations.
- If a note is out of your vocal range, stand and watch the conductor attentively or lip sync, rather than make an approximation of the pitch or an unmusical sound.
- Generally, all notes should be sung into your soft palate while also being redirected into your lower dentals (into a yawn). Lower notes will resonate in the chest; the central part of your range resonates in the pharynx (throat and mouth); conversely the higher notes in the range should resonate back and up into your head (soft palate area) where the sound needs to be more covered and dark.
- Sing only the notes written, unless otherwise instructed by the conductor.
- Do not sing notes an octave below pitch, unless requested to do so by the conductor.
- While singing, sit up straight and hold your score out in front of you at an angle so that only your eyes need to move between the score and the conductor.
- Sit attentively. Avoid crossing your legs and slumping, as this interferes with good singing.

Take care of yourself and your voice.

- Eat properly and drink lots of fluids. Get as much rest as possible, especially before rehearsals and performances.
- Avoid loud coughing and clearing of your throat -- this isn't good for your voice.

Performance:

- Plan your schedule in advance, so that you may attend each performance.
- If you are contagious or cannot control your cough, your absence would be appreciated and understood. Please contact your section liaison or student assistant to report your inability to perform at any concert.
- No food or gum is ever permitted on stage.
- Never wave to anyone from the stage before, during or after a performance.
- Never talk, clap, stomp or make noise during a performance. You are a part of the performance, and these distract from the professionalism you must present.
- Never stomp on the risers, hit your chair, clap, shout, whoop or make noise when any performer or the conductor is being recognized at the end of a performance. You may congratulate other participants in the performance privately after it is over.
- Look up as much as possible. Not only does this help you to stay with the conductor, but also it dramatically affects the sound to the audience.
- Stand up straight and hold your score out in front of you at an angle so that only your eyes need to move between the score and the conductor.

- Sing with vibrancy and energy. Involve your eyes and eyebrows, cheek bones, and exaggerated articulators.
- As much as possible, avoid touching your face, glasses or hair during the performance, or other movements that bring attention to yourself.
- Avoid coughing or loud clearing of your throat. If you cannot avoid these things, perhaps you are too sick to perform. If during a performance you must cough, wait until a loud passage or between movements.
- If you feel ill during a performance, sit down and rest until you feel better.
- When leaving the backstage door, be friendly and positive to your audience. Avoid negative comments around them.

Southwestern Seminary Master Chorale Singer's Handbook, Revised August 2014

