

ENSEMBLE HANDBOOK:

Chamber Choir



Ensemble Setup:

The choir comprises:

Soprano	First Soprano Second Soprano
Alto	First Alto Second Alto
Tenor	First Tenor Second Tenor
Bass	First Bass Second Bass

Skill Set:

Typically, singers in Chamber Choir are grade 8 or above, or the equivalent, with significant singing experience in choral ensembles, and fluent sight reading skills. Chamber Choir is a solo ensemble, where all singers will have opportunities to perform solos within the ensemble, according to their aspiration and the decision of the director.

Auditions:

As with all Music at Reading ensembles, membership is drawn from students, staff, alumni and community members. All members of Chamber Choir are auditioned at the start of each academic year. Places are awarded on merit initially, and then to students, staff, alumni and community members in that order of preference.

The audition will comprise a performance of one piece of your choice, sight reading and singing in canon, and musicianship tests based on the sightreading.

Auditions are held in the first and second weeks of the Autumn term, and rehearsals begin with the membership of the choir fixed from Week 2, drawing on successful candidates from the audition list. In the case of performers being judged as a borderline candidate after an audition, these candidates will be invited to sit in with Chamber Choir for 2-3 weeks of rehearsals. The Artistic Director and Chamber Choir Director will make a decision, as follows, on the basis of their contribution to the Chamber Choir during their trial.

- (a) the performer should remain in Chamber Choir
- (b) the performer should be placed on the waiting list for Chamber Choir, and directed to join Academic Voices.

Throughout the year, places are likely to open up in the Chamber Choir. Auditions will only be opened to Waiting List members who attend Academic Voices. Additional performers with suitable credentials, who apply for Chamber Choir after the Autumn term audition period, will be directed to join Academic Voices and added to the waiting list, following the same selection process.

Membership Commitment:

Chamber Choir members are expected to commit to all rehearsal and performances in the period of time that they are a member, to arrive punctually and prepared for the rehearsal with their sheet music. Where attendance drops below acceptable levels (normally 90%) members may be asked to leave Chamber Choir, and membership fees will not be refunded. We strongly encourage members to join for the whole academic year, or at least for a term. Music at Reading will issue the schedule of rehearsals and performances for all Music at Reading Ensembles before the start of the academic year in order that members can plan ahead to accommodate their membership commitments with other activities.

Normally, Chamber Choir rehearses in L29 on Thursday evenings in term time, 18.30 - 20.30. Members should arrive by 18.20 to prepare for the rehearsal. Additional rehearsals will be held on performances dates, to allow for sound check and dress rehearsal at the venue.

Leadership:

Members of Chamber Choir are encouraged to develop a reflective attitude towards their playing in order to understand their contribution to the ensemble. Throughout rehearsals and after performances, the Director will encourage members to reflect on the following:

	What do I think of the way Chamber Choir sounds?
	What do I think of the way Chamber Choir looks and acts on stage in performance?
How are we singing as a Chamber Choir?	What do I think of the progress we are making in our musicianship skills?
	What could we do better in rehearsals, and what suggestions can I make to help us achieve this?
	How am I listening to and evaluating the sound we are making?
	What am I doing in rehearsals and performances to be a good team player?
What is my contribution to the Chamber Choir?	How can I be useful to other players in my section and the rest of the choir?
	What do I do to support my colleagues?
	What do I do to support the Director?
	How am I developing as a leader within my section and the choir?
	What is my track record with punctuality and attendance?
What is my commitment to the Chamber Choir?	What have I done to promote the choir among friends and family?
	How many people have I brought to our performances?
	Am I doing enough personal practise between group rehearsals?

Musical Leaders:

In the Spring term, Music at Reading invites members to apply for the Musical Leaders scheme. This is an enrichment programme for advanced performers keen to develop their skills in solo and ensemble performance, and ensemble directing. Musical Leaders are expected to be regular performing members of Music at Reading ensembles. They may choose to take additional leadership roles in their ensemble, such as sectional leader, soloist, and assistant conductor. In Chamber Choir, this could include warming up the ensemble, leading technical exercises and musicianship work, running sectional rehearsals, and directing the choir. It may also include singing written and improvised solos, and making arrangements for the choir to perform.

Musical leaders will model appropriate behaviours in terms of punctuality, attendance, self-organisation and personal preparation in rehearsals and performance. Being a Musical Leader can contribute towards the University RED awards.

Musicianship:

In rehearsals, musicianship training focuses on refining your voice, choral coordination, and exploring repertoire. The ensemble director will determine musicianship content related to the repertoire played; the broad outline for Chamber Choir is as follows:

Refining your voice	Facilitating you to develop a range of vocal tone colours and effects through technical exercises, and physical work focused on breathing and posture to develop vocal strength and nuance Sight singing all repertoire with solfa, with effective intonation
Choral Coordination	Consolidating harmonic and rhythmic hearing and reading through group rhythm, pitch and harmony exercises and games relating to the choral music sung, including contemporary classical harmonic language
Repertoire	Learning to sing choral repertoire by heart Communicating effectively through confident stage presence the fine detail of the interpretation of each piece of music, including the idiosyncrasies of the historical style and genre.