

COMMON THREAD HANDBOOK

Common Thread Community Chorus of Toronto is a non-audition community choir that promotes community and social justice through music. Our repertoire primarily comes from multicultural folk music traditions. We welcome singers from a wide range of musical experience and cultural backgrounds. The only requirements for membership are the desire to sing and the time and commitment to attend regular weekly rehearsals.

We sing for recreation, for reverence, for learning and laughter, for struggle, for hope, and for understanding. If you enjoy singing and are interested in celebrating community and nurturing social justice, you have come to the right place! We have three main goals:

- To build a culturally diverse group that performs music in languages from around the world.
- To develop a sense of community within the chorus and between the chorus and the broader community
- To promote social justice through music.

The choir has four sections: soprano, alto, tenor and bass. New singers will be assessed to confirm which section you should be in.

The operation of the choir is overseen by a volunteer Board of Directors, who are elected at a General Meeting in December. We have four part-time contract paid professionals: Conductor, Assistant Conductor, Accompanist, and Administrator.

Section Music Leaders

Each section has one or two volunteer Section Music Leaders. They meet frequently with the Conductor and provide musical leadership for their section. Any questions or concerns about music should be first directed to the Section Music Leader.

Section Social Leaders

Each section also has a Section Social Leader who can be approached about any questions or concerns about things other than music. You should also let your Section Social Leader know if you will be unable to make it to a rehearsal.

Contact Information

e-mail address: info@commonthreadchorus.ca

website: www.commonthreadchorus.ca

mailing address: 58 Cecil St., Toronto, Ontario M5T 1N6

Choir administrator: info@commonthreadchorus.ca

Board President: president@commonthreadchorus.ca

Weekly editor: editor@commonthreadchorus.ca

Rehearsals

Cecil Community Centre 58 Cecil Street (Corner of Cecil and Spadina) Toronto 6:45-9:30 p.m. on Wednesdays from early September to the first week of June.

The Weekly

A weekly newsletter is emailed to members usually on the Monday of weeks there is a rehearsal. It is essential for members to read the Weekly to get information about rehearsals, songs to practice, and other important information.

If you are not receiving the Weekly it is probably because we don't have a correct email for you. Please check with the Administrator.

Membership fees

Membership fees can be paid either in one payment in September, two payments (in September and January) or monthly. Anyone wishing another arrangement must speak to the Administrator. Fees can be paid by cheque or cash, given to the Administrator, or through PayPal, from the link on the website.

Subsidy

We want to be financially accessible and anyone who cannot afford the full fee is encouraged to apply for a subsidy. Applications for subsidy are reviewed only by the choir administrator and by a member of the Board. We generally ask people to pay at least half the full fee but a higher subsidy is also available. We want to ensure that no one is discouraged from singing with us because of cost.

Tax receipts

Like other community choirs and similar organizations, membership fees are recognized as a donation to Common Thread, which is a registered charitable organization. Tax receipts will be issued early in the calendar year for the amount of fees paid in the previous calendar year. Members are responsible for contacting the Administrator if they do not receive a receipt.

Accessibility

Our goal is to make all activities fully accessible to members. We try to ensure that all choir activities are physically accessible. We can make music scores available in Braille and other accessible formats.

To support those with allergies and sensitivities, we ask members to refrain from using scented products during rehearsals, retreats, workshops, and concerts.

Guide dogs and support animals are welcome. Any member who has concerns such as allergies should speak to a sectional social leader, the choir administrator, or a member of the Board.

A multicultural calendar is used to schedule events, and every effort is made to avoid conflicts with important religious and cultural holidays. Since regular rehearsals are on Wednesdays, some conflicts are inevitable. If you have a conflict of this kind, please let your social section leader know as soon as possible.

Donations

There are no grants and contributions available to run Common Thread Chorus. We rely totally on fees, ticket sales, and our own fund-raising efforts to make it all happen each year. It cost around \$65,000 to run the chorus each year. Only about half of this comes from member fees. The rest we have to fund raise or receive through our concerts. We welcome you to consider making donations over and above your annual fees if you are able. You can donate directly by cheque or through www.canadahelps.org.

We usually have at least one fundraising activity during the year. We apply for grants from government funding agencies but they are difficult to secure.

Attendance and punctuality

Member attendance at weekly rehearsals, and at the fall and winter retreats, and at special rehearsals before concerts is required.

We recognize that from time to time people may have to miss a rehearsal because of other commitments. Please try to notify your Section music leader in advance. People who have to miss a rehearsal should find extra time during the week at home to practice the songs.

Members who miss too many rehearsals may be asked if they feel able to sing in concerts because of the missed rehearsal time. A final decision about this is made by the conductor.

Rehearsal starts promptly at 6:45 with a warm up. The warm up is a key part of the rehearsal – not optional. Warm up includes relaxation, breathing exercises and techniques that prepare us to sing the music that we'll be working on. Participation in the full warm-up is necessary for the rest of the rehearsal to be effective. It is understood that this is not always possible and it is better to come late for a rehearsal than to miss it altogether. However, please try your very best to be at rehearsal on time.

We take a short break (about 10 minutes) for refreshments and socializing and members take turns bringing snacks for all to share. Please refrain from bringing snacks with peanuts as some members have allergies

Rehearsals end at 9:00 for most of the season but extend to 9:30 as we get closer to concert time. The times are posted on the calendar. Please stay for the full rehearsal.

Retreats

All-day retreats provide the opportunity to learn several new songs in one day, often those presenting more challenges. Sometimes special guests are invited to assist with work on lyrics or choral techniques. Retreats also provide a chance for us to socialize. We usually have two retreats, one in the fall and one in the winter. Details are on the calendar.

Music scores

Electronic copies of the scores for the season will be posted on the website as they become available. Members are asked to download and print the scores.

Scores should be printed double-sided so that there is less page turning at rehearsals and concerts.

Anyone who requires assistance with accessing or printing scores should ask for help from others in the section, the music or social section leaders, or the administrator.

Scores should be kept in a binder. At concert time, a slim black binder should be used for the scores that are to be sung and that are not memorized.

CT purchases a license to use all scores from music publishers. The license belongs to CT and not to the member. To ensure that we respect the rights of publishers and composers, members should not retain scores at the end of the season or make copies. Scores should be shredded or returned to the choir administrator.

Rehearsal Recordings

Rehearsal recordings are another way of helping choir members learn material and for practicing between rehearsals. The recordings are professionally produced and are available for download from the website. Usually, there are separate recordings for each section. Most people find the recordings to be extremely helpful and all members are encouraged to download them. Please don't hesitate to ask for assistance if you have any problem finding the recordings or downloading them. Songs that are easier for the choir to learn may not have a rehearsal recording.

CT Kids

In partnership with West Neighbourhood House, Common Thread supports CT Kids. The Kids practice at West Neighbourhood House. They usually perform at our concerts where they sing some of their repertoire and sing together with the adult choir on a few songs. Anyone who would like to volunteer to help with CT Kids, or who knows kids who might want to join should ask the CT Administrator.

Concerts

We typically perform at least three concerts a year. The main concert is at the end of the season, usually the last weekend in May. We typically have a smaller concert in November or December.

In addition, we typically sing at an event sponsored by another like-minded organization.

Concert dress includes black slacks or skirts, white tops, and colourful accessories (e.g. scarves, vests, sashes, ties, jewelry, hats that would not block anyone's view). Please wear black or very dark shoes. For concert performances, you will use a black concert binder that is used to hold only the music required for the concert. We ask you to supply your own binder.

Sing-along Appearances in the Community

Community sing-a-longs are informal activities organized by the Sing-along Committee, and they can be initiated by the invitation of a community group or a choir member. Sing-alongs support the choir's goal to develop a sense of community through music by bringing music into a group's activities and introducing the choir as a community asset.

Member contact list

Within the first couple of weeks of the season, a membership list by section containing names, addresses, phone and e-mail addresses is handed out to each choir member to help us keep in touch with each other. It is for internal use only. Please do not share it outside the choir. If you are moving or change any of your contact information, please contact the chorus administrator with this information. While leaving the decision for inclusion on this list to each member, it is most helpful to section leaders and work groups to have a full listing of choir members if possible. You may only use this list to contact members about chorus related matters. You are not permitted to use the list to contact members about personal requests or commercial activities, etc.

Social Membership

As part of its commitment to inclusiveness Common Thread provides for a Social Singer category for those who know that their attendance at full rehearsals will be periodic, irregular, or that their involvement will be substantially less than that which is being asked of a fully participating singer.

Social Singers will usually not participate in concerts. In every other way they are full members of the Common Thread singing community.

Leaving the Choir

If you find that you must leave the choir during the season, speak to your social section leader. S/he will want to know what information about your departure should be shared with the rest of the section and the choir and will help you with administrative details. The social section leader will inform the chorus administrator of your departure. The Chorus Administrator will ask you whether you will be taking a leave of absence (up to two years) or withdrawing.

After December 31, fees cannot be refunded because we issue a tax receipt for fees collected in a calendar year.

November 2016