



Meritage Vocal Arts Handbook

Revised July 2022

What Is Merit age?

The name Merit age is derived from a vintner's term which refers to the blending of fine wines -hence, in musical terms, the "blending of fine voices" with a diverse mixture of repertoire and styles.

Merit age Vocal Arts Ensemble is a vocal choral group of approximately 50 singers. Members of Merit age are highly skilled, experienced choral musicians, capable of performing a diverse body of repertoire ranging from polyphonic European concert music to the contemporary textures of American Jazz.

Merit age evolved out of the Cypress Camerata, a chamber choir founded by Dr. Ball in 1984. In the broader spectrum of this 25 year evolution, this ensemble has performed at innumerable Southern California venues, has been featured at several state and regional conventions of the Choral Conductors Guild, and performed for a variety of music organizations including the American Choral Directors Association, The Symphonians of the Music Center and the Los Angeles Da Camera Society. Reconstituted as a professional ensemble in 2007, Merit age continues to present local concerts, participates in regional music festivals, and serves as the firm foundation for the Southern California Master Chorale's large choral-orchestral performances. This larger "symphonic" chorus has performed frequently with the Long Beach Symphony, Golden State Pops Orchestra, and the Marina del Rey Summer Symphony.

Mission Statement

"Friends of Choral Music" (FoCM) dba Merit age Vocal Arts, is dedicated to and supports excellence in the performance of outstanding choral literature that engages and enriches our audiences, and celebrates and fosters the future of choral arts.

Core Values

To guide the success of the organization and its music ensembles, FoCM is dedicated to:

- Inspiring excellence in performance
- Eclectic, diverse musical styles and programming
- Enhancing the professionalism of its singers
- Elevating the art of choral music and best practices among the broader choral arts community, and preserving the legacy of FoCM accomplishments

- Educating and recruiting the next generation of choral musicians
- Effective and efficient non-profit board leadership

Welcome to Merit ge Vocal Arts Ensemble

Music is a living art. Choral literature has not survived because of museum exhibits or dusty library manuscripts, but rather through performances that keep the music fresh, vibrant and alive from one generation to the next. Congratulations on being part of the process, and welcome to Merit ge!

This pamphlet has been prepared by the Board of Directors of the Friends of Choral Music. Its purpose is to define your responsibilities as a member of the choir and to address any questions you may have regarding participation in one of Southern California's premier choral organizations.

Goals

The objective of Merit ge is the quality presentation of musical works selected from the finest examples of choral literature. Specifics include...

- Create a positive musical experience for audiences and singers alike.
- Demonstrate the highest possible levels of musicianship and unified singing.
- Perform a minimum of two Merit ge concerts per year.
- Serve as the foundation choir for the Southern California Master Chorale.

Expectations

All singers have the same basic responsibilities...

- Attend all rehearsals, performances and other scheduled events.
- Abide by the instructions of the Director and Section Leaders.
- Learn the music and perform it accurately and artistically.
- Dress appropriately according to the guidelines described in this pamphlet.
- Send information and invitations to family and friends re. concerts.
- Go "Beyond the Music" with volunteer efforts, family participation, etc.
- Have fun! The true value of wonderful music lies in its appreciation.

Participation in a quality choral organization is not a right. It is a privilege granted to singers who demonstrate appropriate skill levels, attend rehearsals, learn the music, and dedicate themselves to quality performance standards. The rewards are tremendous!

Auditions

Every member of the choir must complete an audition in order to validate basic vocal skills and to properly place their voice range. Scheduled auditions are a key element in establishing and maintaining the musical integrity of the choirs.

Costs

Costs for which you are responsible include the following...

- **Wardrobe.** Singers are responsible for appropriate concert dress. Specifics are covered in this booklet under *concert attire*.
- **Selected Major Scores.** At times, you will be asked to purchase your copy of major masterworks.
- **\$250 Dues per year.**

Music

You will be issued a numbered set of music by the Music Librarian. Excluding some major masterworks, music is loaned at no charge. You are responsible for your music and for returning it in good condition. If you lose your music, report it to the Music Librarian immediately.

- Mark music **in pencil** only. Do NOT mark music in ink, felt-tip markers or highlighters.
- You are financially responsible for the replacement cost of damaged or missing music entrusted to you.

Music will be collected after major concerts. Always turn in your music on time as it may be borrowed or rented.

Rehearsals

Without rehearsals, performances would be impossible. To get the most out of the choral experience, it is most important that you attend all rehearsals and that you arrive promptly and participate fully.

Rehearsal attendance is mandatory. In general, Merit ge rehearses only once weekly (for three hours) rather than shorter multiple rehearsals each week. As such, every rehearsal is critical.

Rehearsals are closed (singers only). Please do not bring friends, family members or children to rehearsals.

Additional rehearsals may be periodically scheduled at the discretion of the Director. Such rehearsals will be noted in the Choir Calendar with as much advance notice as possible. For the most up-to-date information, go to www.Meritage-VocalArts.org and go to the Members page. (User Name: **Singer**, Password: **Singer**)

Arrive on time for all rehearsals. Allow adequate time for traffic conditions, parking, check-in, etc. At the designated start time (typically 7:15 PM. Tues) you should be in your seat ready to begin.

Rehearsals often begin with vocal exercises. This is part of the rehearsal and is not optional. Singers arriving during or after "warm ups" are considered tardy. Excessive tardiness may preclude your participation in the choir.

An attendance roster is provided at the beginning of each rehearsal. Make sure to check in when you arrive. Mark attendance for your name *only*. Leaving rehearsals at break is not permitted unless cleared in advance with the Director.

IF YOU CAN NOT ATTEND – it is your responsibility to call Chorus Manager as soon as possible.

- Work hard! Give the Director your *full attention* and avail yourself of the learning experience.
- Minimize talking during rehearsals. Side-talking is disruptive and quite annoying to others.
- Stand or sit as directed. If asked to move elsewhere, do so quickly without discussion. Carry only your music unless otherwise advised.
- Maintain good breathing posture at all times with both feet flat on the floor (no crossed legs).
- Hold your music high and flat such that you can watch the Director at all times
- Place your music in a black three-ring binder and bring it to all rehearsals. Singers may not "share" music. If you forget your music, see the Librarian immediately for a loaner set.
- A pencil with eraser is a necessary piece of equipment.
- Water is available for purchase at all rehearsals with all proceeds going to help support the group.
- Small recording devices (to facilitate home practice) are welcome at rehearsals. However, be sensitive to other nearby singers. Do not place recorders on the piano, near the Director, or anywhere where they may be a distraction.

- The use of cell phones is not permitted during rehearsals. Turn them off before entering the room (or better yet, leave them in your car). The director has been known to confiscate cell phones DURING rehearsal use if noticed.
- Be sensitive to others regarding fragrances, aromas, cigarette smoke, and personal hygiene. We are in close quarters. Avoid garlic and other "problem" foods. Remember that scented products, perfumes and colognes may be unpleasant to others and can even cause allergic reactions. Please avoid them.
- The Director will frequently rehearse individual sections. Whenever another section is running through their part, avail yourself of the opportunity to silently follow along and work on yours. However, please do not audibly "hum along." Doing so is quite distracting.
- Be prepared to immediately comply with the instructions of the Director, the Assistant Director, or your Section Leader. Such instructions are *not* subject to discussion. If you have comments, questions or suggestions, discuss them with your section leader at the break.
- If another singer is talking excessively or engaging in disruptive or inappropriate behavior, diplomatically bring it to his/her attention. Conversely, please accept such criticism graciously if brought to yours.

Many choristers visit local restaurants in a group after rehearsals. Feel free to join in! New singers are especially welcome. We'd really like to get to know you! Check with your section leader for details.

Absences

A full calendar of events will be made available as early as possible. If you have a legitimate conflict with any scheduled date, notify the Chorus Manager as soon as possible. Otherwise, it will be assumed that you will adjust your personal calendar to avoid conflicts with scheduled choir events.

In the event of illness or unforeseen emergency prior to any rehearsal, notify the Chorus Manager at least two hours in advance. If unable to reach, leave a brief message with the Director.

Performance attendance is strictly required (this is what the choir's all about!). Performance absences are unacceptable under all but the most extreme circumstances *and must be approved by the Director.*

Learning The Music

Many singers gained early choral appreciation in school where rehearsals are devoted to "teaching" the music. This contrasts with the methodology employed in more advanced choral organizations. Merit ge rehearsals are intended to shape and refine the music. The basic learning process of note and rhythm accuracy is up to you on your own time.

Personal rehearsing of music includes actual time reviewing notes, rhythms, dynamic markings, listening to recordings suggested during rehearsals, and if necessary, working in sections outside of rehearsal time.

Dress Rehearsals

"Dress Rehearsals" are held prior to major concerts and are noted in the Master Calendar. Unless otherwise advised, they do not require concert dress but are conducted on-stage rather than in regular rehearsal rooms.

Dress rehearsals are not open to the public. Please do not invite friends or family members. Children are not permitted at rehearsals.

Dress rehearsals often include an orchestra. Many of our instrumentalists are paid professionals. We literally cannot afford to waste time. It is extremely important that all choir members arrive on time and do everything possible to ensure smooth, efficient rehearsals with no interruptions or delays.

Dress rehearsals are complex, stressful and time-consuming. Be prepared to stay late. The Director will coordinate the rehearsal. Direct contact with Director should only occur if absolutely necessary. If you have a problem or question, see your section leader.

- Arrive on time! Set-up and Call Times will be in the calendar.
- Participate in stage set-up and tear-down. *Everybody* can help!
- Be quiet! Talking interferes with communication with the orchestra.
- Be alert and ready to move on/off stage quickly when directed to do so.
- Observe all routine rehearsal guidelines (good posture, no cell phones, etc.).

For concerts involving multiple works, music order will be made available at the dress rehearsal. Arrange your music in order in an appropriate binder.

Notify your Section Leader if you have difficulty seeing or hearing. Sound and

lighting will be adjusted during the rehearsal.

Be mindful of obstacles (cables, instrument cases, microphones, speakers, etc.). If you encounter something in your path, go around it. Do not move anything that does not belong to you.

Leave purses, coats and personal belongings in your car or in the audience area in front of the stage. Do not carry anything on stage except your music.

While on stage, adjust your position slightly such that you can see the Director but do not change places unless told to do so. Move toward the *front* of the risers to allow room for others behind you. Make blocking notes (in pencil) in your music as to entrances, exits, etc. Know when & where you are supposed to be at all times during the concert. Don't rely on simply following someone else.

Concert Attire

Section Leaders function as our "Dress Police." If your section leader suggests a wardrobe change, please comply. Inappropriate concert dress is not permitted.

Men: Black tuxedo (no tails), white collared shirt, tie (must be purchased from men's wardrobe coordinator), black socks and black leather-soled *dress* shoes. Casual black shoes are unacceptable. No other color is permitted. Wristwatches and small stud earrings may be worn but no other jewelry is allowed. No pins are allowed except those awarded by the choir.

Women: Black floor-length dressy attire; no bare arms. Optional silver accented materials accepted. Jewelry is a personal choice. Wristwatches are optional. Black closed-toe shoes are required; low heels or flats are recommended. Wear appropriate make-up for stage lighting but avoid glitter.

Please refrain from "big" hairstyles - remember, people need to see over you. No visible bows or barrettes are allowed.

The choir's Dress Coordinator must approve each new outfit.

Concert Tickets

Merit age performs numerous times each year and ticket sales are, in large part, *your responsibility*.

Choir members are encouraged to sell at least two tickets to each concert.

Concert tickets are organized by the choir's Ticket Coordinator. Ticket envelopes will be provided to choir members in advance of each concert. Additional tickets are available on request.

The intention of selling tickets goes beyond simple fund-raising. The primary goal is to create an audience. As such, please don't just pay for tickets yourself to satisfy your obligation. Instead, place them in the hands of family, friends, co-workers, etc. who will attend the concert.

All tickets must be accounted for. Completed envelopes with proceeds and unsold tickets (if any) must be returned to the Ticket Coordinator no later than the final dress rehearsal. You will be financially responsible for any tickets that you do not either sell or return by the designated date.

Concert Posters, Postcards and Invitations

Generally, some sort of visual pre-concert printed media will be handed out for major concerts, but they are of little use unless people see them. Publicizing our concerts relies on *your efforts* in distributing our posters, postcards, and/or invites.

The importance of this cannot be over-emphasized. Start thinking *now* of whom you may send information and invitation to, and establishments that will be receptive to putting media out for the public. Don't wait until the last minute – but handle it as soon as you have received distribution materials. It is always helpful and more meaningful to add a personal message along with an invitation.

Your participation is the main way that we gather our audiences.

Performances

After hours of hard work and rehearsing, the music is finally shaped and perfected to performance standards. Enjoy!

Before reading about Performances, please re-read the sections on Rehearsals and Dress Rehearsals. Everything applies, plus the following...

Arrive on time dressed in concert attire. Bring only music being performed in a black binder unless otherwise specified. *Leave everything else locked in your car.* Consider a three-ring zipper pouch in your binder for keys or other small

items.

If you arrived with family or friends, direct them to the main ticket entrance. To avoid embarrassment, please don't attempt to bring them in the Artists' Entrance. The door guards will not accept tickets.

Report to the designated warm-up room (Location will be specified in advance). Participate in light vocalizing to loosen but not strain the voice.

Singers are not allowed in the theater lobby or halls from thirty minutes before curtain time until the stage is cleared after the performance.

All electronic devices (cell phones, recorders, etc.) are strictly forbidden during performances. Leave them in your car. Please do not attempt to record the concert. Doing so may violate our Union contracts.

Have another singer "look you over" before going onstage, and return the favor. Make sure everything is snapped, buttoned, zipped, etc.

Line up for stage entrance *quietly* when asked to do so. If moving from one side of the stage to the other, do so quietly and stay out of sight. Do not attempt to see the audience from backstage. Remember, if you can see them, they can see you!

Carry your music closed in your left hand as you enter the stage. Walk calmly but quickly to your place on the risers, maintaining pace with the person you are following. Once in place, face the audience *and freeze*. Never gesture or wave to anyone in the audience.

Once on stage, you will be highly visible. Do *not* talk or otherwise engage other singers in any way for the duration of the concert.

You will be under hot lights. If you feel faint, *exit the stage immediately*.

During the concert, raise/lower your music and stand/sit when indicated by the Director or appointed person (this will be resolved during Dress Rehearsal). If seated, hold your music closed on your lap.

The choir never applauds. If acknowledgment is warranted, it is customary to tap your foot. Do not "stomp" or pound your feet loudly.

At intermission, exit the stage in reverse order. A break area will be designated. Singers may not interact with the audience during intermission.

At the end of the concert, exit offstage and wait for the audience to clear. Then,

return to the stage to assist with tear-down (*everybody* can help -with full participation it only takes a few minutes). When the stage is cleared, we can all go to the lobby to greet our guests.

After the performance, most singers attend a post-concert dinner at a local restaurant. You and your guests are welcome to attend!

Involvement "Beyond the Music"

Operating an ensemble is expensive. Costs are *not* fully covered by ticket sales. Much of our operating capital is generated by Friends of Choral Music, a California non-profit corporation dedicated to the support of *your* choir.

We have a few expectations and suggestions that we ask you to consider.

- If you have special skills and/or are willing to volunteer your support, please notify the Director right away. We need your help!
- Enlist family members. The choir is even more rewarding when the entire family is involved. We always need concert volunteers to work with the house manager to take tickets, serve as door monitors, sell refreshments, etc.
- Join the Stage Set-up Crew if you are physically able. You may get your hands dirty but the more that share the necessary burden helps to get the job done safely.
- Volunteer for fund-raisers and other special events, specialty concerts, music festivals, etc.
- All donations and sponsorships are most welcome. Let the Director or board president know of your interest. Donations are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.
- Assist in advertising our events where ever you can. Put info in bulletins and other group newsletters whenever allowed.
- Consider direct involvement as a member of the FoCM board of directors. See the Director or Board President for information regarding expectations and the nominating process.
- Participate with friends and family in our special fundraising events. We try to make them fun and engaging for all who attend. Outside participation is the key to success financially.
- Your vocal contributions are important but there are many additional tasks that are equally necessary. If everyone limited involvement to singing, the ensemble could not exist.

How can I help to keep Merit ge going?

Just a few minutes can make ALL of the difference. In order to keep on singing – we need to pay the bills and just as importantly *WE NEED AN AUDIENCE*.

1. PLEASE mail out any advertising (postcards, etc). Put a special note with it!
2. Advertise our concerts and fundraisers within any publication, group bulletin, board, or social networking opportunity you participate in. These are people who may be interested.
3. Facebook us! Tweet us! Share notifications with your circle of friends and family – *AND do it often!*
4. Donate unused gift cards and certificates to be used within our fundraiser collections.
5. Notify us that you have kids who need volunteer hours to assist in program support.
6. Provide “goodies” for sale/or use at concerts providing an intermission or reception.
7. Let us know *what you think, or what we could do better, or how you can help.*
8. Take a minute to get to know our new “family” members. Cohesion in a group just makes it more fulfilling and always is obvious in a performance.
9. Support financially to the best of your ability. It is not fair for some to always carry the burden for others. We just ask that you *honestly* do your part.
10. Share information about **Starlight Carolers** to any organization, business holiday party, local nursing or assisted living facility that may enjoy/need seasonal entertainment. See the Caroling page on the website or call (714) 519-6370.
11. Consider gifting **Starlight Carolers** to a facility you may have loved ones within.
12. Help us build our site by adding email addresses of those in your circle that may be interested in receiving information.
13. Be proactive with selling your tickets. We all know the difficulties - just give it an honest try.
14. Sign on to “The Patch” e-news. “LIKE” our concert advertising. Notify the Director if you don’t see the advertising.
15. Learn your music. Enjoy the learning and the *gift of music* we can share with others!