



shenandoah valley
children's choir

Guidelines

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*EASTERN MENNONITE UNIVERSITY
MUSIC DEPARTMENT*

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Introduction

Welcome to the Shenandoah Valley Children's Choir. The purpose of the guidelines is to provide you with general information about the SVCC. For new choristers, it is a valuable tool for understanding the practices and rules of the SVCC. For returning choristers, use it whenever you have a question and need to review the procedures and rules of the SVCC.

The Shenandoah Valley Children's Choir is a rigorous music education program for children who love to sing and value discipline and excellence. The choristers receive instruction in vocal production, diction, breathing, score study, musicianship, theory and performing skills with a strong emphasis on the Kodály approach.

Singing a capella as well as in 2 to 4 parts, SVCC choristers experience a broad range of choral literature including classical music, folk songs of many countries and cultures, and sacred and secular songs with an emphasis on love, peace, friendship and nature.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Shenandoah Valley Children's Choir is to foster artistry and excellence through musical study and performance.

We believe singing builds **community**. Music **enriches** all areas of a child's life. Children have tremendous capacity for aesthetic experience; they can be **profoundly moved** by music. All children can experience musical **excellence**. Quality choral singing builds individual **musicianship**. Children are naturally **artistic** and want to express themselves. Singing should be a **life-long** activity. Singing well builds **self-esteem**. Singing **quality** repertoire fosters musical excellence. Choral singing requires **discipline** and fosters commitment to the group.

We value artistry, excellence, musical **independence**, discipline, **potential**, beauty, high expectations, commitment, **joy**, soaring spirits, and the **preciousness** of each child.

We envision a world that appreciates musical **artistry** and excellence, where all children have an opportunity to sing, where singing **unifies** community and where choral music is **valued**.

Background

Shenandoah Valley Children's Choir began in 1992 under the direction of artistic director and founder Julia J. White. In eighteen years of music making, the program has grown to include over 140 children in three auditioned choirs and two early elementary classes.

Under Ms. White's direction the SVCC has performed at the American Choral Directors Association Southern Division Conference ('00, '02, '06), the Virginia Music Educators Conference ('96, '98, '04, '08) and at the Organization of American Kodály Educators National Conference ('01, '09) and the Children In Harmony Festival ('04). Collaborations include performances with the American Boychoir, The Washington Symphonic Brass, and with Plácido Domingo. The SVCC has sung with the Carnegie Hall Children's Choir Festival ('98, '07), the Tuscany International Children's Choir Festival ('01) in Italy and the Pacific Rim Children's Chorus Festival ('05, '09) in Hawaii.

The Choirs

Preparatory Choir

The Preparatory Choir consists of 35-45 choristers, ages 8-11, who have passed an audition and who are able to match pitch. The primary purpose is learning, not performing, although the Prep Choir performs at Christmas and Spring Concerts. Choristers learn the basics of singing, including breathing, diction, posture, vocal production, and performance. A weekly music theory segment includes ear training, sight singing (solfege), and note and rhythm reading. Unison and part singing is taught through great choral literature and rounds. The director will hear each child sing solfege exercises before rehearsal every other week. Preparatory Choir Director: Joy Anderson. Accompanist: John Fast.

The Preparatory and Treble Choirs rehearse jointly each week from 4:45 – 5:15 p.m. under the direction of Julia White. From 5:20-6:00 the Preparatory Choir rehearses individually with Mrs. Anderson while the Treble Choir rehearses with Ms. White.

Treble Choir

The Treble Choir is open to girls and boys ages 10-15 with a basic knowledge of musicianship skills, singing, and note reading. This intermediate choir of 35-40 members continues the fundamentals learned in the Preparatory Choir and includes singing in rounds, and 2-3 part singing. Vocal techniques and sight singing skills are continued. A weekly music theory segment includes ear training, sight singing (solfege), and note and rhythm reading. The director will hear each child sing solfege exercises before rehearsal every other week. The Treble Choir performs at the Fall, Christmas, and Spring Concerts. Treble Choir Director: Julia J. White. Accompanist: Maurita Eberly.

Concert Choir

The Concert Choir consists of 65-75 advanced choristers ages 11-18 and sings in 2-4 parts, languages, and more advanced repertoire. The Concert Choir continues with more advanced vocal techniques, sight singing (solfege), score study, and more dissonant intervals in the repertoire used. Weekly assignments build upon the skills learned in Prep and Treble choirs, including ear training, sight singing (solfege), and note and rhythm reading. The Concert Choir's schedule includes in and out of town concerts as well as tours. Concert Choir Director: Julia J. White. Accompanist: Maurita Eberly.

The Concert Choir meets from 6:30-8:15 p.m.

Curriculum

In the Shenandoah Valley Children's Choir, great music of all styles and historic periods is performed. The repertoire includes classical music, contemporary music, folk songs of many cultures, newly-composed works and sacred and secular songs with emphasis on love, peace, and friendship. Concerts are given both locally and in major centers of the United States and the world. Rehearsals are conducted with discipline with emphasis on regular attendance, preparation, punctuality, and excellence. Technical knowledge is imparted through practice and performance. Solfege-inspired teaching is at the heart of the rehearsals. Because learning to read music is an important part of SVCC participation, choristers receive weekly solfege instruction and will complete solfege memorization and homework and practice sight singing.

Daily Practice

Membership in the SVCC is an honor and a responsibility. The commitment to membership in the SVCC is also a promise to be prepared for rehearsals. **It is the student's responsibility to complete weekly memorization assignments.** Fifteen to twenty minutes of daily practice 4-5 times/week is expected from every chorister.

Additional Help

"PLAN FOR SUCCESS." It is our intention that every chorister is successful in the SVCC, is able to complete all assignments on time, and feels challenged and stimulated by assignments. If, however, a chorister/family finds that a particular song or language is difficult, we would like to know and want to help. We will be glad to arrange for additional help from a director, head chorister, or college student. Please do not be shy about asking for help.

Evaluation

Progression from choir to choir is based on vocal and skill level, commitment and preparation. Prep and Treble choristers will be evaluated every other week through sight reading and memorization of solfege exercises (Blue and Yellow lists). Concert Choir members' solfege will be evaluated during rehearsals. Choristers are expected to know all material covered during the year including music theory, musicianship, musical styles, and performance methods. Choristers shall be invited back the following year if they have been responsible members (memorization, attendance, etc.) and show enthusiasm for the group.

Solfege

Learning to read music is an important emphasis of the SVCC, not only because it helps the choristers to learn their choir music more easily, but also because it will allow them to be independent musicians for the rest of their lives. Teaching a child to love music without teaching him how to read it is like teaching a child to love literature without teaching him how to read words!

Solfege is one of the tools used in SVCC to help our choristers learn to read music. The syllables, *do re mi fa sol la ti*, and high *do*, the pitches of our major scale, were taken mostly from the words of a medieval hymn, and have been used since the middle ages to teach not only music reading, but also ear training and music theory.

SVCC choristers also learn handsigns which correspond to the solfege syllables. These signs were devised by English music educator, John Curwen, and modified by Hungarian music educator and composer, Zoltan Kodály (pronounced *Ko-dye*). The purpose of these handsigns is to add a visual and kinesthetic component to the auditory learning that is taking place. It is important that, when choristers practice handsigns, they do it while singing, not speaking, and that they make the signs at varying levels. Generally speaking, *do* should be signed just below belly-button level, *re* just above the belly-button, *mi* just below chest level, *fa* just above chest level, *sol* in front of the chin, *la* like an umbrella over the nose, *ti* at forehead level, and high *do* just above *ti*. The levels will be slightly different sometimes, for instance, in a minor key, but these guidelines are a good starting point.

Weekly solfege homework will include sight reading, memorization, and written theory. Challenge homework will be offered for students more experienced in music literacy and ear-training skills.

Solo Auditions

Soloists will be selected from the choirs for various performances. There are two methods of choosing soloists: selection by director or by audition. All interested SVCC members are invited to audition for solos. Auditions will be held at announced times at the beginning or end of a rehearsal. A three-week lead time will be given. It is expected that those auditioning will: 1) arrive on time, 2) have studied their solo/languages, 3) be confident of the music they are singing, 4) make arrangements with carpool members for staying late. It is appropriate to ask the director, assistants, or other instructors for assistance on solo preparation.

The student who is selected will be one who is confident, has good tone quality, pitch, and tuning, and who possesses good stage presence. The soloist and understudy will be representing the SVCC and will be asked to do further work with the director or assistants to prepare for the solos. The student who is late or does not know the music will not be considered.

Only those who can accept not being selected should audition. Crying, bad attitudes, and complaining notes or e-mails to the director will not be tolerated.

Attendance

Membership in the Shenandoah Valley Children's Choir is a commitment to faithful, consistent and punctual attendance. It is expected that rehearsals take a very high priority in each child's life since each child is holding a valuable place in his/her choir.

Attendance at all rehearsals, concerts, tours, etc. is necessary if the choirs are to maintain their standards and achieve their goals. The only acceptable excuses are illness, intense study during final exams week, or a school trip that goes into the evening. School concerts will always be excused absences.

MANDATORY EVENTS: Dress rehearsals, most performances (see schedule), and day retreats are mandatory. Failure to attend these events will result in dismissal from the choir. Exceptions: School event for class credit or illness.

In the case of a planned absence, notify **the SVCC office** as far in advance as possible at (540) 432-4650 – leave a message if no one is there. **DO NOT PHONE THE DIRECTOR TO REPORT ABSENCES.** You should also call the office and leave a message if at the last minute you cannot attend rehearsal. Office messages will be checked before rehearsal begins.

If a chorister is absent more than twice during the semester for any reason, the chorister and parent must speak with the Director before returning to rehearsals.

Music

Choristers are required to take care of all music, considering it is expensive and difficult to replace. **Lost music charge is \$7.00 per piece.**

It is each family's responsibility to turn in music immediately at the end of each semester. Please do not make the Music Librarian and assistants call, send letters, and track down lost music.

Handling and Care of Music

- 1) Music must be brought to all rehearsals unless you are notified otherwise.
- 2) Never fold or roll music.
- 3) Never write on music without the permission of the director. Any markings should be done **lightly**, in **pencil**, and **only** at the direction of the music director. A sharpened pencil should be brought to each rehearsal. **Do not deface any piece of music.**
- 4) Blank pages or portions of the music are NOT for drawing pictures, writing personal notes, etc.
- 5) If for any reason a piece of music is in need of repair, please do so properly with clear tape OR bring it to the attention of your parent assistant.

Rehearsal Etiquette Procedure

Several Parent Assistants are assigned to help with each choir's rehearsal every week for the year. The parent assistants attend each rehearsal and performance, take attendance, maintain attendance records for the director, and make calls to singers who have not notified us of an absence.

The following procedures help us achieve the discipline and professionalism for which the SVCC is known. These procedures are enforced for the singers' safety, to ensure orderly rehearsals, and out of respect and courtesy for each other.

The SVCC learns a tremendous amount of music yearly and it is essential that each rehearsal moment be used wisely. Each chorister is required to:

- 1) arrive 5-10 minutes early to find seat, put on name tag
- 2) bring all music to all rehearsals in choir bag
- 3) bring two sharpened pencils with eraser heads (not red lead)
- 4) use rest rooms before rehearsals
- 5) have music in order before rehearsal begins--check black board
- 6) bring water bottle (with name clearly marked) for rehearsal. Singers need lots of water!

Rehearsal Schedule

It is important that the SVCC is aware that seminary classes are taking place at the same time as our rehearsals. Please be quiet as you enter, leave, and walk to the rest rooms at the seminary. We want to maintain a cordial relationship with the students, teachers, and administrators at EMU and the seminary. Thank you!

Mondays

Prep Choir w/ Treble Choir	4:45 – 5:20 p.m. in Martin Chapel	Ms. White & Mrs. Anderson
Prep Choir	5:25 - 6:00 p.m. in room 202	Mrs. Anderson
Treble Choir w/ Prep Choir	4:45 – 5:20 p.m. in Martin Chapel	Ms. White & Mrs. Anderson
Treble Choir	5:25 – 6:00 p.m. in Martin Chapel	Ms. White
Concert Choir	6:30 – 8:15 p.m. in Martin Chapel	Ms. White

Rehearsal Spaces

Our regular meeting place will be the Eastern Mennonite Seminary Martin Chapel. We will also be using classrooms in the long hall for Prep Choir rehearsals. IT IS CRITICAL THAT ALL SVCC MEMBERS AND PARENTS ENTER BY THE OUTSIDE STAIRWAY TO THE FAR RIGHT OF THE BUILDING, NOT THE ENTRANCE IN THE MIDDLE. We are fortunate to have an agreement with the Seminary to use their facilities; they have asked that we use only Martin Chapel, the outside stair entrance, the rest rooms, and the assigned classrooms.

PARENTS MUST STAY WITH THEIR YOUNGER CHILDREN AND NEVER LET THEM ROAM INSIDE THE BUILDING OR RIDE THE ELEVATORS WHILE WAITING FOR CHOIR REHEARSALS TO FINISH.

Concert Etiquette and Procedure

SVCC Concert Etiquette

Membership in the SVCC brings with it respect for all arts and performing organizations. As a member of the SVCC, an organization of the EMU Music Department and Eastern Mennonite University, respectful and gracious behavior in concert and church situations is expected. All SVCC members have a special sensitivity to being in the audience because they know how it feels to have people listen or not listen. There are many students and adults who will look to SVCC members as role models regarding concert etiquette. It is our hope that SVCC members will keep the following in mind:

IT IS ALWAYS APPROPRIATE TO:

- 1) LISTEN intently
- 2) SIT quietly and move as little as possible
- 3) READ program notes/hymns/words pertaining to concert
- 4) ACKNOWLEDGE performance through applause, speaking to person(s) afterward, or writing a note of thanks.

IT IS NEVER APPROPRIATE TO:

- 1) Communicate with a friend--speaking, note writing, hand gestures, facial expressions
- 2) Eat and drink
- 3) Get up and down, go in and out, wiggle, drop things, etc.
- 4) Use cell phones for text messaging or calls.

Parent Involvement/Commitment

Part of the success of the SVCC has been the parent involvement. The SVCC needs continual assistance for larger activities such as long-range planning, development, and fundraising, public relations, music library work, retreat assistance, concert set-up, receptions, uniforms, carpooling, phone calling, office, and many other things.

As the choir continues to be invited to sing at various festivals, choir exchanges, and concerts, the parents will be called upon to help in various ways. Development and fundraising continue to be a focus as we seek to find ways to fund our program. Please be generous as you consider the ways you can assist through your ideas, time, and talent.

It is understood that EVERY student/family who has made the choice to be an SVCC member will have other activities arise that the member may wish to participate in. However, we expect, because of your commitment to the choir, that the SVCC activities will take priority. Before auditioning or signing up for other activities, worthy though they may be, check your SVCC calendar. If you mark SVCC events on your calendar now you will save

conflicts in the coming year. Please do NOT call the Directors to discuss schedule conflicts. The Choir Manager handles all schedule conflict situations.

Weekly Choir Notes

The SVCC is an active organization and it is essential that choristers and parents read carefully the weekly notes that are given out at the beginning of rehearsals. Notes are to be kept in order of the date given in the front of each chorister's folder. They will also be e-mailed to everyone. Choristers are responsible for completing assignments and for updating their own rehearsal/performance schedules. **Parents are responsible for reading all notes given. It is the responsibility of each family to communicate with one another!**

Tuition and Fees

Tuition is to be paid according to billing by the Business Office of EMU. After the initial deposit, bills will be sent in September, October, November, December, and January (see amount below). A 1.5% monthly finance charge will be assessed for any tuition that is not paid on time. Of course, anyone wishing to pay in advance is welcome to do so. Each year's tuition MUST be paid IN FULL before registering for the next year. Any questions regarding payments are to be directed to the Choir Manager.

Choirs	Tuition	Uniform
Prep Choir	\$623 (payments of \$178, \$89, \$89, \$89, \$89, \$89)	\$40 – one-time fee for new choristers
Treble Choir	\$693 (payments of \$198, \$99, \$99, \$99, \$99, \$99)	\$40 – one-time fee for new choristers
Concert Choir	\$791 (payments of \$226, \$113, \$113, \$113, \$113, \$113)	\$40 – one-time fee for new choristers

Tuition Assistance

Financial assistance is provided to qualified, interested children who would not otherwise be able to participate. If your family is interested in applying for tuition assistance for the 2010-2011 choir year, please print a Financial Assistance Request Form from our website (www.emu.edu/svcc), complete it, and return to the SVCC office with your chorister's registration forms. Assistance will be awarded based on need and the amount of money available at the time. Award money will usually not exceed one-half of tuition.

Resignation

Each chorister is expected to fulfill his/her commitment to participate in the SVCC for the entire season. If, however, an extremely unusual circumstance occurs which would prohibit a chorister from honoring that commitment, a personal conference between the director and parents will be required before submitting a letter of resignation. If a student resigns, the parent is still responsible for the entire year's tuition.

Uniform Requirements

- ∞ Each chorister will wear their SVCC T-shirt for retreats and other designated rehearsals.
- ∞ Each chorister is responsible for obtaining a pure white OXFORD, long-sleeved, button-down collar shirt (preferably 50/50 blend rather than 100% cotton). DO NOT PURCHASE A BAGGY, OVERSIZED SHIRT! BUY THE SIZE THAT IS FITTED!
- ∞ GIRLS: need to purchase black knee-high trouser socks (opaque, not sheer, and non-patterned) or tights and black shoes (**clogs or slip-ons are not acceptable - shoes must have a closed toe and back and low heels**).
- ∞ BOYS: need to purchase black dress pants (a polyester blend is preferable because 100% cotton fades), black socks, black shoes (no tennis shoes). Pants should be hemmed to proper length.
- ∞ Vests, skirts, and bow ties are provided by the SVCC.

Uniform Closet

We collect outgrown white oxford shirts, black dress pants, and black shoes for others to use. If you have no further use for any of these items when your child is finished with them, please consider donating them to the SVCC for someone else to use. These items will be available for parents to look through at the beginning of the choir year.

Performance Procedures

It is the choristers' and parents' responsibility to make sure the hair of both girls and boys is out of the child's eyes and eyebrows for SVCC performances.

- ∞ The SVCC expects hair to be cut or styled ABOVE the eyebrows and out of the eyes and face. When singing choral music which has text, we express the meaning through the words of the music. The eyebrows help to show that expression, and when the eyebrows and eyes are covered the expression is covered.
- ∞ To test if hair is short enough, a chorister can stand in front of a mirror and raise his/her eyebrows. If hair covers eyebrows, then it is too long and needs to be trimmed.
- ∞ If a hair issue isn't taken care of by the dress rehearsal prior to the concert, the Parent Assistants will speak to the child privately and call the parents, alerting them that the hairstyle needs to be addressed.
- ∞ If a child comes to a concert or tour with hair in the eyes, the Uniform Coordinator, in consultation with the Manager, will offer the child several options:
 1. use hairpins to pin the hair out of the eyes
 2. use hair gel to cement the hair out of the eyes
- ∞ No perfume, hair bows, showy headbands, pierced body parts (other than stud earrings), ankle bracelets, or colored nail polish are permitted.

If none of the above last-minute solutions are acceptable, the child will not be allowed to perform at the concert. It is inappropriate for the staff and volunteers to be spending valuable music making time on hair and uniform issues in the precious moments prior to a concert, so we ask you to make sure these things are taken care of beforehand. Thank you for helping to make music and choral singing the focus of our program.

Concert Tickets

The SVCC is a professional arts organization and charges all choir families and the general public admission for its season concerts. The majority of the ticket sales and revenue help offset the costs involved with a large performance. More ticket information will be available on our website before each concert.

FAQs

Should my child take private instrumental lessons?

Each chorister is strongly encouraged to take private instrumental lessons with a reputable, degreed music teacher. Although private instrumental lessons are not mandatory, the Director wishes for each chorister to have an excellent skill level. It is hoped that all SVCC choristers are musicians as well as singers.

Should my child take private voice lessons?

Many choristers are anxious to study voice privately. It is the recommendation of Ms. White that students wait until at least the 10th grade to study voice privately, and that parents and students are extremely discerning in selecting a voice teacher. The SVCC staff and other middle and high school teachers are concerned that students are taking voice lessons much too early, and that advanced techniques that might damage the voice are being taught to very young singers. It is not the wish of the staff to have a middle schooler turned into an opera singer at ages 12, 13, or 14. Private voice study can be a wonderful thing, but only at the right age and with the right teacher.

Should we continue with our School and Church Choirs?

It is encouraged that all SVCC choristers maintain membership in school and/or church choirs. We hope that all SVCC members are choir leaders and advocates for the school and church music programs and directors.

How can we help spread the word about SVCC?

Shenandoah Valley Children's Choir members and families are the best at public relations! In order to continue increasing our audiences and community awareness about the SVCC, families are asked to tell friends, families, schools, churches, music teachers, and others about the program all year round! Most SVCC members heard about the choir from friends. **Please wear SVCC T-shirts and sweatshirts out in the community!**

How can families support the choir to ensure its future? Do you have fundraisers?

There are several ways to help the choir to be financially solvent while sharing about the choir in the community. First, concert ticket sales are important to the budget of the choir and are also a way of inviting community members to our concerts. We also have ongoing CD sales (new Christmas CD to be released fall 2009), the SVCC cookbook sales (to be released fall 2009), and our Sally Foster fall fundraiser, from which the SVCC receives 50% of total sales of the high quality gift wrap and other gift items. You will receive a catalog and information about this fundraiser at one of the beginning rehearsals in September. **Participating in these volunteer-led projects are ways the families can help the SVCC budget.**

Many people know that we have held a major fundraising event in the spring with a dinner and live and silent auctions for many years. Recently it has become increasingly difficult to find volunteers with the time and interest to carry out the major parts of this endeavor, such as acquisitions for the auction and securing sponsors for the event. Since the fundraiser is mostly attended and supported by choir families, we have decided to take the advice of parents who have encouraged us to add to tuition the financial commitment that has been required from the fundraiser and eliminate the event entirely.

Although EMU provides services to SVCC, we do not receive money from them. All our fundraising is carried out by volunteers.

What is the advantage of solfege over other pitch-reading methods?

A scale is like a musical ladder with uneven rungs, not even ones. Scales are made up of whole steps and half steps. The intervals, *mi* to *fa* and *ti* to *do* are half steps. The other steps in the scale are whole steps. The Curwen/Kodály handsigns are designed to emphasize where the whole and half steps fall. When singers learn solfege and handsigns, their ears learn where the whole steps and half steps are in the music, and it helps them to sing much better in tune. This is the great advantage that solfege has over the use of numbers in music reading.

What is the reason for solfege memorization homework?

When singers memorize songs using solfege, the intervals in each song become more solidly internalized. When the singer sees, for instance, *do-sol* on the staff, the ear will automatically know what that should sound like, because the singer has memorized that interval in many other songs.

Why do the lessons seem to be in such an odd order instead of just beginning, “do, re, mi, fa, sol, etc.”?

In SVCC, lessons begin with songs and exercises based on the “pentatonic” (five-tone) scale (*do, re, mi, sol* and *la*). This scale contains no half steps, and so is easier to sing in tune. A large body of our music is based on this scale, and the sounds are familiar. Often, singers who learn music reading beginning with all stepwise lessons (eg. *do-re-mi-fa-sol*) have difficulty when encountering skips (eg. *do-mi-sol*) later on. Singers who encounter skips right away usually read them more successfully and have no trouble with steps.

Should I play the piano (or encourage my chorister to play the piano) to help with sight-reading homework?

NO! Sight-singing is only sight-singing if the singer can sing what is on the staff without help from another instrument. It is fine to use the piano to check what the singer has read, but the first reading should be done with no help, except for a starting pitch.

What about rhythm reading?

Rhythm is another important component of SVCC’s musical literacy training. Reading will be done using rhythm syllables and numbers. Rhythm reading is usually somewhat easier for choristers, and easier for parents to understand, so it has been given less attention than pitch reading in these guidelines.

SVCC Staff

Julia White, <i>Artistic Director and Founder</i>	
Joy Anderson, <i>Assistant Director</i>	
Maurita Eberly, <i>Accompanist</i>	
John Fast, <i>Prep Choir Accompanist</i>	
Yvette Peake, <i>Choir Manager</i>	(540) 432-4650 (office)