

Vocal Arts Ensemble Member Information (revised June, 2008)

We appreciate your dedication to the performance of quality choral music and your interest in singing with us. The Vocal Arts Ensemble strives to be an excellent group that challenges itself to sing a wide variety of beautiful and difficult choral music. The group typically goes on tour about once every four years – in past years we have toured and competed in England, Wales, Russia, Italy, Austria and Canada. The Vocal Arts Ensemble auditions EVERY SINGER annually, including returning members and potential new singers.

AUDITIONS

Auditions occur in September each year. The audition consists of singing a selected piece of music in an SATB quartet with one on each part. The auditions are tape-recorded with one singer on each of four microphones. The quartet will be asked to sing the audition piece at least once through, and possibly twice. The audition piece is posted on the VAE website each year (www.vocalarts.org), usually in June or July. Instructions for signing up for an audition quartet are also posted on the website, along with dates and times for any ad hoc rehearsals of the audition music.

During the audition, new singers will also be asked to repeat or sing back three and five note passages to determine tonal memory, do vocal warm-ups to determine range, and sing 60 seconds of an a cappella piece chosen by the singer.

While many people audition for the ensemble each year, not all those who audition can be accepted. Balance, vocal blend, and even personalities are taken into account when deciding upon who (and how many) are accepted as members of the Vocal Arts Ensemble.

MEMBERSHIP IN VOCAL ARTS – WHAT DOES IT TAKE?

Dedication: We memorize all our music, and we rehearse together every Tuesday evening during our concert season. The concert season is September through December for the Christmas concert, and January through June for our Pops and Spring concerts. Rehearsal times are 7 – 10 pm.

All members must be dedicated to learning the words and music between rehearsals, and putting the music together during rehearsal. The expectation is that each member learns their music at home. We come together to make music on Tuesday nights, not to learn the notes. Singers also need the dedication and the energy required to participate in intense rehearsals.

Responsibility: 1. Each member is responsible for attending all rehearsals and getting there on time (even a little early). 2. A memorization schedule is distributed at the first rehearsal of the season. Each member is responsible for learning both their words and their music at home as soon as possible.

Listening: 1. We strive to be a true choir, rather than a singing group made up of many soloists. Each member should be listening to the other members and actively blending their sound for the desired vowel color and pitch with the others as part of the group rehearsal. 2. Each member should listen (and not talk) when the conductor is giving instructions. All instructions should be noted in your music (bring a pencil to every rehearsal to mark your music). The expectation is that an instruction only has to be given one time.

Flexibility of Vocal Production: One of our major goals is the use of appropriate vocal production to match each style in our varied repertoire. For example: 1. The use of a thin light vibrato for Renaissance & Contemporary period music, and a heavy vibrato for music of the Romantic Era, and all variations in between may be required. 2. The conductor will decide on the lightness or darkness of tone quality for each of the

pieces we sing. 3. The conductor will spend a lot of time working with the group on the dynamic range (softness and loudness) of the music.

Repertoire suggestions for new music for the future concerts are always welcomed.

ATTENDANCE

Membership in the Vocal Arts Ensemble is a commitment to excellence in vocal quality and repertoire. This can only be achieved by consistent attendance by all members. Attendance is expected at all rehearsals except when the member has a contagious illness, family illness, or unavoidable professional commitment. Attendance is taken at each rehearsal. The Section Leader should be notified before the rehearsal when a member is unable to attend.

The Ensemble also holds an 8 hour, Saturday retreat about midway into rehearsals for each of the three concerts every year. We get lots of work done in preparation for the concerts during these retreats. Attendance is required at these retreats. The VAE Board has deemed that failure to attend a retreat is the same as missing two regular rehearsals.

Please consider the depth of this commitment before you accept membership in the Ensemble. Be aware that the rehearsal schedule gets more hectic as we get close to a concert and it is IMPERATIVE that every performer be in attendance, especially during concert week.

The VAE Board has established the following attendance guidelines: If a singer misses three rehearsals, his/her section leader will put the singer on notice. If the singer misses a fourth rehearsal, they must go before the Board and explain the reason for the fourth miss. A fourth absence requires a Board action on whether the member may continue. Arriving to rehearsal late or leaving early three times is equivalent to one absence. In the past a few members had planned three absences, then had an unexpected fourth absence and were not allowed to perform in the concert series. The section leaders will keep track of tardies as well as absences. An appointed member will also take attendance to double check for accuracy.

In past years, every VAE member was expected to sing in both Winter and Spring Concerts. However, the level of performance and the number of concerts has risen over the years. Some years we have as many as 5 different concerts (or concert series). Although we no longer require it, many members still choose to do all concerts. Members can opt out of singing in a series, as long as the director can maintain a balanced ensemble. Therefore, when you audition, indicate on the form for which concerts you would like to be considered. If accepted, your presence at those concerts will be expected. If you know in advance of any reason that you have to miss any rehearsal during concert week, please do not sign up to perform in that series. YOUR CONTINUATION IN THE GROUP WILL BE DEPENDENT UPON YOUR ATTENDANCE, YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF YOUR MUSIC BY MEMORY, AND YOUR MUSICAL SUCCESS IN THE CONCERTS.

OTHER OBLIGATIONS AS A MEMBER

Because the VAE is a volunteer organization, each member of the group is expected to be on one or more committees and to participate in the group's fund-raising events. This is in addition to being an active singer in the group. At the beginning of the concert year and at other times, as needed, a sign up list will be passed around. Be thinking about how you can assist the group as a Board member, riser crew, helping in the library, bringing refreshments, uniform committee, distributing posters (publicity), getting program advertising, serving on the tour committee, display work at the County Library and PAC lower lobby display case, etc. Singers earn points toward tour subsidies based on the number of concerts performed and their participation on committees and in fund raising events.

DUES: VAE has membership dues. \$40 per series is to be turned into the VAE Treasurer by the fourth rehearsal of each series. If this is a financial burden, you can ask, in writing, for a scholarship from the VAE Board.

PROBATIONARY MEMBERSHIP: If you are accepted into the group as a new member, you will be a PROBATIONARY member for one or two concert series. After the concert, our director, with the aid of the section leaders, will critique your rehearsal and performance level, and your level of commitment as evidenced by your mastery of the music, attitude, rehearsals missed, and punctuality. He will then invite you into the group as a member for the year, keep you on probation, or release you from responsibilities to the group.

CONCERT DRESS: Men wear tuxedos for concerts. The tux winged shirt, "band" bow tie, jacket and pants must be purchased by you. The approximate cost to purchase a tuxedo is between \$100 and \$250. They may also be rented for an approximate cost of \$35 for a weekend. See your section leader for catalog "deals" when purchasing a new tux. Women have a long-sleeved concert dress for the Winter Concert and a short-sleeved concert dress for the Spring and Pops Concerts. Each of these dresses cost approximately \$55 to \$90 and must be purchased by the member. The women also wear uniform necklaces and earrings which cost approximately \$20. Please check with your section leader about the uniform.

REHEARSAL GUIDELINES

1. Be on time! (even a little early) Warm-ups are an integral and important part of the rehearsal as a time to listen, blend, and tune-up our ears. In addition, it is very distracting to the conductor and the choir to have the door opening and people walking in late.
2. PLEASE TRY NOT TO TALK DURING WARM UPS AND REHEARSALS. Write your questions down and pass to section leaders.
3. Bring a pencil. Any suggestions for dynamics, tempo, breathing, etc. should be noted in your music. Any mistakes you make in rehearsal should be circled and worked out by you at home.
4. Breaks are provided for socializing. During rehearsal, however, talking and comments should be kept to a minimum.
5. PRACTICE AT HOME. Don't use rehearsal time for learning your music when the fundamentals can be done on your own. Rehearsal time is to be used for bringing the group together and for making music!
6. Everyone is expected to help move chairs and risers when requested.

CONCERT GUIDELINES

1. Dress should be uniform (that's why we have them). If scarves or other decorative items are worn, they should all be worn the same way, etc. This can be agreed on before the concerts.
2. During concert week, we typically have two or three extra rehearsals, usually in the evenings. We also do a run-through of the music on concert days, a couple of hours prior to the concert. Please do not schedule any trips, or major energy-expending projects (e.g. pruning your orchard, all-night trial preparation, moving into a new apartment, etc) during concert week. The concert week schedule is announced well in advance for planning purposes.
3. Work on communicating with the audience. Look involved and excited.
4. Perfumes and after shaves can be stifling under hot lights. Have consideration for your neighbor.
5. Each concert offers different logistical problems involving getting on and off the risers, etc. A stage manager will be appointed to give directions before concerts and after intermission. Please stay calm and listen to directions.

6. During intermission, please return to the rehearsal area, rest, rehydrate, and wait to line up for the second half. Intermissions should be brief, and visiting with members of the audience should wait until after the concert.

7. EVERYONE IS EXPECTED to help move chairs and flowers, set up risers and return things after concerts. Your help is expected and always be appreciated!