

**We hope you enjoy singing with us. If you do, please tell your friends and encourage them to join!**



*Sittingbourne  
Orpheus Choral Society  
(SOCS)*

**Members' Handbook**

## 1. Overview

Sittingbourne Orpheus Choral Society (SOCS or “the Orpheus”, as we are variously known) first performed on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1944 under the baton of Frederick J. Tolhurst, who led the choir for the next 17 years. Our current Musical Director, George Salmon, joined us in February 2018.

The Society is a Registered Charity (No.274005) and is affiliated to Making Music ([makingmusic.org.uk](http://makingmusic.org.uk)).

The music we perform comprises both sacred and secular works from a wide range of styles. The Orpheus has always rehearsed and performed in and around Sittingbourne and we are proud to provide artistic and cultural input to the local community.

## 2. Annual Concert Programme and Other Events

The choir usually performs at least three concerts annually. The first, scheduled in Spring, is a concert of classical choral work, typically supported by a ‘scratch’ orchestra made up of local amateur musicians. Soloists tend to be professional singers, invited by our MD.

Our Summer Concert, usually in July, is of a lighter nature, commonly consisting of traditional songs and/or modern works, such as excerpts from West-end musicals.

Our third concert is held just prior to Christmas and includes seasonal music, with a chance for our audience to participate in some of the carols. Other events, such as singing days, may occasionally be fitted in between these three performances, depending on the number of singers available.

## 3. Rehearsals

Rehearsals are held at Tunstall School, Tunstall Road, Sittingbourne. They take place every Tuesday during school term time, from 7:45pm to 9:45pm with a short break for notices and socialising at approx. 8:45pm. Occasionally another venue may be used, in which case it will be announced well in advance

Attendance registers are passed round each section during rehearsal. Please ensure you sign in each week, so that we can keep an accurate record of members’ attendance and availability for concerts. If you are unable to attend, please try to notify the Membership Secretary or your Section Representative in advance. They would also like to know if any member is unwell for longer than a few weeks or will be absent from rehearsals for some time.

- **Phrasing:** Giving equal effort does not produce equal volume throughout the range of an individual’s voice. Usually, a rise in pitch will produce a rise in volume and vice-versa, which can be good to give natural shape to a phrase. However, in larger intervals, such as the octave, it is necessary to compensate to avoid notes standing out and disturbing the phrasing. Where possible, mark places where this may occur and practise them to ensure a smooth sound.
- **Diction:** Unless directed by the conductor, consonants at the ends of words should be placed on the beginning of the next beat. The most noticeable are 's' and 't', especially when the next beat is a rest. Crisp ends of words are the difference between polished and messy singing.
- **Breathing:** Where you need to take an extra breath, allow yourself plenty of time by missing out notes rather than breathing between notes. Aim to:
  - ◊ Choose somewhere in the middle of the phrase, rather than cutting the phrase short.
  - ◊ Try not to take a breath at the same time as the person next to you.
  - ◊ If you are in the middle of a word that ends in a consonant, don’t add the consonant!
  - ◊ Fade out gradually, rather than stopping abruptly, so that your breath goes unnoticed.
  - ◊ Take a silent, deep breath and fade back in slowly.
- **Legato (smoothly):** In **legato** singing the end of each word needs to be joined to the beginning of the next, taking care not to accentuate the beginning of that next word.
- **Rubato (flexible tempo):** Changes in tempo are usually progressive, in the same way as changes in volume – not a sudden increase in speed but a gradual quickening and relaxing of pace. The Conductor will lead the choir with this, so be sure to watch!

## 9.4. Care of musical scores

Only soft pencils should be used when marking musical scores. Please erase all markings before returning your copy. Hired scores MUST be handed in immediately after each concert – SOCS has to replace any damaged or lost copies and incur costs for any loaned scores that are returned late. Where appropriate, the Society will pass on these costs to any member defaulting on the return requirements.

## 10. General Notes on Choral Singing

- **Posture:** Try to develop good posture whenever you sing, whether you are standing up or sitting down. When sitting your legs should *not* be crossed. Your back should be straight but not stiff, and your neck and jaw should be relaxed so that you can produce the best possible sound. Hold your music out in front of you so you have the conductor in your line of sight even when you are looking at the score,
- **Singing together:** We can only sing as an ensemble if we watch the Conductor! When everyone is watching, the Conductor can guide the mood, phrasing, articulation and dynamics, so that we are working together to make beautiful music. This means:
  - ◊ When the Conductor raises their hands to begin, focus on what you are about to sing. Try to memorise the first few notes so that the first downbeat doesn't mean all heads immediately go down!
  - ◊ Look up frequently. Hold the music in line of sight with the Conductor, so that your eyes have to travel less distance between the two and you maintain good posture.
  - ◊ Respond to the beat you are watching.
  - ◊ If possible, learn the music, so that you don't have to spend your time with your head in the copy.
  - ◊ Be receptive to suggestions from those sitting near you that may help you to avoid making wrong notes.
- **Pitch:** When starting a new segment, accurate pitching can be helped by imagining the note in your head and throat before singing it – but try to avoid humming it out loud!
- **Dynamics:** Changes in volume make music more interesting and evocative. **Crescendos** (getting louder) and **diminuendos** (getting quieter) should normally begin at the dynamic at which you are currently singing and build gradually. It's important not to sing suddenly more loudly or quietly unless this is what is marked.

You are encouraged to practise the music yourself, outside of rehearsal times. Ideally, you should revise the work covered at the previous rehearsal, as well as looking ahead to the following week. Our MD commonly provides web links to various resources to help with this. If you miss a rehearsal, try to find out what was covered and listen to the music before the next rehearsal.

## 4. Social Activities

We hold several types of activity to help raise funds for the choir, such as bring-and-buy sales, raffles, quiz nights, and auctions. Committee members are always pleased to hear of any more fund-raising ideas!

## 5. Subscriptions and Other Fees

The annual subscription is decided at the AGM in September each year. It is payable to the Treasurer annually, or in three payments – one at the start of each term. If this commitment will be difficult for you to meet, please speak to the Treasurer. For those joining part-way through the year a reduced payment can be negotiated. Members who are UK taxpayers are asked to complete a Gift Aid form, allowing the Society to reclaim some of the monies.

Our music scores are usually hired and the costs of that hire are met from Society funds. Members are, however, asked to make a small contribution (currently £2 per concert) towards the cost of any additional hire or printing, payable on receipt of your copy. In addition, members are required to supply or purchase their own copy of *100 Carols For Choirs*. These can be ordered via our Librarian, who may be able to arrange a bulk discount. Any music purchased in this way must be paid for in advance.

Folders carrying the SOCS logo are used in our concerts. On joining the Society you will be given a folder, which you are expected to keep in good condition and relinquish if and when you leave us. Ladies are asked to purchase a SOCS brooch, to be worn at concerts. This is yours to keep.

## 6. Communication

We ask all members to provide a telephone number and, where possible, an email address. This enables the committee to keep everyone up to date with news, dates and changes to the schedule, and allows our MD to circulate web links to help us practise that term's music. Notices are also posted on our website, [www.socs.info](http://www.socs.info), and our Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/Sittingbourne.Orpheus>.

## 7. Committee

The Committee is elected at the Annual General Meeting. The Officers – Chair, Vice-chair, Treasurer and Secretary – are elected individually, per the constitution. The committee meets once a month and makes operational and funding decisions on behalf of the choir. Section Representatives will raise matters to committee members on your behalf to be discussed at committee meetings. Alternatively, you are welcome to contact a committee member directly, at any time.

## 8. Friends of SOCS

Friends of SOCS support our work with financial contributions. This provides a valuable addition to our own subscriptions, ticket sales and fund-raising activities, enabling us to cover the general running expenses of the choir. Friends are listed in our concert programmes and enjoy early booking privileges, a reduced ticket price and one free programme per concert.

New Individual and Business Friends are always welcome. If you, or anyone you know, would like to become a Friend of SOCS please contact our Friends Secretary.

## 9. What we expect of you

Members are expected to take part in the three main concerts each year and to attend as many rehearsals as they can. In the event that you think you may not have attended sufficient rehearsals to be able to perform well you should discuss this with the Conductor. In addition, you are expected to adhere to the following etiquette.

### 9.1. At rehearsals

- Aim to arrive in good time, so that we can start at 7.45pm sharp.
- Please return to your seat and be ready to restart promptly after the break.
- Please keep conversations to non-rehearsal time, as a mark of respect to the MD and other choir members and to ensure efficient use of rehearsal time.
- Try to concentrate on the rehearsal, follow the Conductor, listen and take note of what is being said, even if it doesn't apply to your voice part. A lot of direction applies to all voice parts, especially regarding dynamics and voice production, and you will be aware of when to start singing if you are watching the Conductor!

- Always bring a soft pencil and a rubber to note details of any changes the Conductor may make to the music, dynamics, breath marks etc.
- The Conductor follows a rehearsal plan and only has a limited time in each rehearsal to get through the material. If something is worrying you other than the notes being practised at that time, please speak to the Conductor during the break or at the end of rehearsal, rather than interrupt the flow of rehearsal.

### 9.2. At concerts

- SMILE! It makes the audience feel welcome and improves our singing.
- Please follow the directions for seating and sit where the Concert Manager asks you. Often the seating order has been carefully planned by the Musical Director and needs to be adhered to for us to give our best performance. Any concerns should be directed to the Concert Manager.
- During sections where you are not singing, look interested in what's going on. Quietly find the next page you will be singing and watch the Conductor, so that you know when to sing again.
- Pay attention to the Conductor regarding when to sit and when to stand. It looks so much smarter and more professional if we all do this together.
- Take care, when you finish singing at the end of a piece, to remain still and continue to hold your copy up until the Conductor lowers their hands. It is especially important not to turn the page until the orchestra or accompanist has finished playing, so that the music is not spoiled by the rustling of pages.
- You may bring a small bottle of water with you on to the stage, but you will need to take it with you when you leave the stage area during the interval and at the end of the concert, so that the stage remains uncluttered.
- It is appropriate to applaud the orchestra and soloists whilst you are sitting, but not when you're standing – that is when *you* are receiving applause!
- Smile!

### 9.3. Concert dress.

- Dress for the Summer Concert tends to be informal and may have a theme. For the Spring and Christmas Concerts the dress code is as follows:
- Ladies: Long-sleeved black top; black ankle-length skirt or formal trousers; black shoes. Discreet jewellery may be worn. SOCS brooch to be worn on the right shoulder.
- Gentlemen: Black dinner jacket; white shirt; black bow tie; black shoes.