

A large, stylized grey musical note graphic is positioned behind the word "Birmingham".

Birmingham Children's Choir

Handbook

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Introduction

The Birmingham Children's Choir (BCC) was founded in 1986 by Dr. Julie Skadsem as a result of a grant from the Alabama State Council on the Arts and the University of Alabama. BCC was incorporated in 2001 as a 501c3 non-profit organization. The aim of our program is to bring children from the greater Birmingham area together to develop musical skills, gain an understanding of singing as a personal means of musical expression perform locally and regionally, and form a life-long relationship with music for our singers and their families. This Handbook is intended to provide you with basic information about our program.

Mission Statement

The Birmingham Children's Choir is a multi-cultural, non-profit organization that celebrates diversity through the study and community-wide performances of choral music. BCC seeks to enrich the lives of children from all religious, racial, cultural and economic backgrounds. Our nurturing and professional staff is dedicated to helping children develop the skills necessary to enjoy a lifetime of choral singing.

Goals

- Provide a superior performing experience through the study of high quality choral literature.
- Develop a strong level of musicianship through instruction in vocal technique, music reading, and expressive sensitivity.
- Foster a commitment to musical and personal excellence through a progressively graded program that meets the individual needs of children.
- Promote a sense of community and understanding of children from all ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds through the universal language of music.
- Enhance the cultural environment of the community around Birmingham through a children's performing medium.

Program Description

BCC is a choral music program for children, consisting of three separate choirs.. The choirs study and perform a variety of secular and sacred choral literature including classical, folk, contemporary, world, gospel and jazz styles. Weekly rehearsals reinforce music reading skills, vocal techniques, stage presence and rehearsal etiquette.

Prelude Singers

This choir will focus on the needs and abilities of young boys and girls in Grades 1 and 2.. These. our youngest singers, will enjoy learning age-appropriate musical concepts through singing, movement, and musical games and activities..The emphasis will be to nurture a love of music in these precious youngsters. The Prelude Singers will perform in the annual holiday and spring concerts.

Intermezzo

This choir consists of girls only in Grades 3 – 5 and will focus on good singing, a development of basic rhythmic understanding, solfege, and the excitement of learning and performing music as a choir. The goal of this choir is to meet the developmental needs of upper elementary grade students. Intermezzo Singers will perform in the annual holiday and spring concerts as well as other occasional community performances.

Una Vocé

This choir consists of girls only in Grades 6 and higher. Singers in this choir will enjoy singing music of a challenging nature as they continue to learn and practice good singing and musical skills. The goal of this choir is to challenge and meet the musical needs of middle school, junior high, and high school students.

Auditions

Prelude Singers

Auditions are not required.

Intermezzo

New singers in Grades 3 - 5 are required to audition with the choir director.. The audition consists of vocalizing and singing a familiar tune of the singer's choice.

Una Vocé

New singers in Grades 6 and higher are required to audition for the choir director. The audition consists of vocalizing, singing a familiar song of her choice, imitating short musical phrases, and sight-reading.

Auditions are held by appointment June through August and again in early January. To make an appointment, please email the Artistic Director at director@birminghamchildrenschoir.org

Membership

Membership in BCC is intended to be a positive learning experience that our singers will carry with them throughout their lifetime. Our young singers will share wonderful music and social times together. It is our hope that all of our singers will take great pride in their membership in the BCC program.

The BCC season proceeds from August through mid-May. Singers are expected to make a full season commitment to BCC. Parents of singers who are admitted into the program are expected to carefully read and sign the *BCC Handbook, Membership Agreement, Code of Conduct* and *Medical Release Form*. Singers not abiding by the policies and expectations laid out in the *Membership Agreement, Code of Conduct* and *Handbook* are subject to dismissal from the BCC program. The BCC must enforce a Code of Conduct for all members.

Rehearsals

Rehearsal Attendance

Because each singer holds a valuable place in the choir, **rehearsal is mandatory**. Attendance and participation in each weekly rehearsal is vital to the success of each singer and choir. Regular attendance provides a multitude of benefits for each singer such as camaraderie with fellow singers and teachers, consistent, sequential accomplishment of musical skills and literature, and preparation for wonderful performances. A tremendous amount of music is taught each week, therefore it is very difficult for singers to catch up on what was missed due to an absence. This impacts not only the absent singer, but the entire choir in its accomplishments in learning music and beautifying their sound. Rehearsals are expected to take a high priority in each child's life. BCC expects a significant commitment to consistent and punctual attendance at rehearsals. Thank you, in advance, for your support and cooperation in regard to rehearsal attendance requirements.

A maximum of three excused absences will be tolerated per semester. In order to be excused, the director must be notified prior to the rehearsal. Failure to notify the director will result in an unexcused absence. In the case of a planned absence, notice as far in advance as possible is appreciated. A pre-arranged absence form is available in the back of this Handbook and on the website.

Absences from Rehearsals

Parents must submit a written excuse for tardiness or early dismissal. A written excuse should include the child's name, the name of her choir, the reason for tardiness or dismissal and a parent signature. Excessive tardies will result in a parental conference with the director.

Singer Expectations

- Wear rehearsal shirt to each rehearsal.
- Treat the directors, fellow singers and the facilities with respect at all times.
- Take care of the music folder assigned to you and treat its contents properly.
- Exhibit appropriate behavior in all rehearsals and concerts.
- Miss no more than 3 rehearsals per semester.
- Treat all BCC assigned uniforms with respect and arrive dressed appropriately for all performances.
- Adhere to BCC Attendance Policy.
- Attend all required performances.

Grounds for Dismissal

- More than 3 absences per semester
- Disruptive behavior during rehearsals
- Unexcused absence from a required concert

Rehearsal Shirts

The rehearsal shirt policy is designed to create a uniform look among the singers in the event that publicity personnel or other guests visit a rehearsal. It also instills a sense of belonging and discipline within the choirs. Singers are required to wear rehearsal shirts to every rehearsal. Shirts may be replaced or exchanged for larger sizes at no cost as the singer grows. Shirts that have been damaged or stained will not be replaced; however, parents may purchase a new shirt to replace the old one. Parents may also purchase an extra shirt, if needed.

Rehearsal Times

Choir rehearsals are on Tuesday afternoons at Edgewood Presbyterian Church. Rehearsals begin promptly at 5:30 pm. Singers are expected to be seated in the rehearsal room when rehearsal begins.

Prelude Singers (Grades 1 - 2) Rehearsal 5:30 - 6:15 pm

Intermezzo (Grades 3 – 5) Rehearsal 5:30 – 7:00 pm

Una Vocé (Grades 6 and higher) Rehearsal 5:30 - 7:00 pm

Performances

As with any team, a great performance requires the participation of all its players. BCC performances are no different. We function as a team, and each singer is an integral part of the team through the music part they sing. As such, it is imperative that singers arrive prepared, and on time to each performance. To be excused from a performance, singers must notify their Choir Director in writing of anticipated performance conflicts at least four (4) weeks before the scheduled performance date.

All choirs perform a Winter and Spring Concert each year. Intermezzo and Una Vocé choirs perform throughout the community during the year. These performances have included events such as Children's Hospital, Bravo, Lights up at the Summit, Barons Game National Anthem, retirement communities, etc. These performances are vital, as they provide opportunities for community outreach and exposure for the BCC program.

Performance Attire

All choirs have formal concert uniforms and casual uniforms, that include the BCC rehearsal shirt. Each choir director will define which uniform is to be worn for each performance. In addition, an email will be sent to singers and families prior to all performances communicating concert uniform information. Singers should not wear perfumes or colognes for performances, as it may cause an allergic reaction for another singer. Hair should be pulled back away from the face.

Prelude Singers - Formal uniforms will be provided by BCC and will remain the property of BCC. Each singer will be assigned a uniform as close to a proper fit as possible. Parents are responsible for alterations, including hems and waist adjustments to achieve final fit. The choir will schedule an alterations professional on one day in August or early Sep-

tember, as a courtesy to our singers. Parents are financially responsible for all alterations. Guidelines for correct hem length, etc. will be distributed when uniforms are assigned. If a singer outgrows the uniform during the season, a new one will be provided, once the previously assigned uniform has been returned. Singers should clean and care for their uniforms properly throughout the year. At the end of the season, following the last performance, singers should bring regular clothing to change into before leaving the performance, so their uniforms can be returned for the year. Singers who fail to return their uniforms at the end of the season will be charged a \$60 uniform replacement fee. BCC will have all uniforms cleaned before the following season begins.

Intermezzo - Formal uniforms will be provided by BCC and will remain the property of BCC. Each singer will be assigned a uniform as close to a proper fit as possible. Parents are responsible for alterations, including hems and neckline adjustments to achieve final fit. The choir will schedule an alterations professional on one day in August or early September, as a courtesy to our singers. Parents are financially responsible for all alterations. Guidelines for correct hem length, etc. will be distributed when uniforms are assigned. If a singer outgrows the uniform during the season, a new one will be provided, once the previously assigned uniform has been returned.. Singers should clean and care for their uniforms properly throughout the year. At the end of the season, following the last performance, singers should bring regular clothing to change into before leaving the performance, so their uniforms can be returned for the year. Singers who fail to return their uniforms at the end of the season will be charged a \$60 uniform replacement fee. BCC will have all uniforms cleaned before the following season begins.

Una Vocé - Una Vocé singers purchase and own their own uniforms, consisting of a full-length black dress. Singers will be emailed information for ordering their uniform, including toll-free phone number and website, and style number. As of the date of this Handbook, the cost of the dress is \$55, plus shipping for children's sizes and adult sizes through 16, Adult sizes 18 and over, add \$10. Parents are responsible for any alterations, including hems to achieve proper fit. The choir will schedule an alterations professional on one day in August or early September, as a courtesy to our singers. Parents are financially responsible for all alterations. Guidelines for correct hem length, etc. will be provided. Singers who outgrow their dresses may feel free to let other Una Vocé singers know if they would like to sell them.

Tuition

Prelude Singers (Grades 1 - 2)	\$250 per semester (<i>see Payment Options</i>)
Intermezzo (Grades 3 – 5)	\$330 per year (<i>see Payment Options</i>)
Una Vocé (Grades 6 and higher)	\$330 per year (<i>see Payment Options</i>)

Payment Options

Tuition is non-refundable for any reason. Tuition may be paid in full on the first rehearsal or paid in three-monthly installments. The three-month installment plan allows families to pay one-third of the tuition on the first rehearsal, one-third on the first Tuesday in September and the final installment on the first Tuesday in October. All tuition is due by the first Tuesday in October. Checks are preferred, but if you would like to pay cash, please place it in a sealed envelope with the singer's name and amount on the outside. Late fees will be assessed to tuition balances that are unpaid as follows:

Late fee policy

- Accounts 30 days late will be assessed a \$10 late fee.
- Accounts 60 days late will be assessed a \$20 late fee.
- Accounts 90 days late, the singer will be dismissed from the BCC program.

Returned checks policy

Returned checks will be assessed a charge of \$20 in addition to bank fees.

Tuition invoices for past due balances will be prepared and mailed two weeks prior to the payment due date. Alternative payment plans prepared in writing and notarized are also acceptable for families who wish to use this method. Parents of children who are members of the Edgewood Presbyterian Church will receive a 50% discount on tuition as per the BCC covenant with EPC. Edgewood parents are asked to notify the BCC Membership Officer to adjust their tuition balance.

Please note that we do not refund tuition to singers who drop out of or are dismissed from the program.

Scholarships

Scholarship application forms are available for families with financial need. While no full scholarships are offered, one-third or one-half scholarships are typical. All scholarship requests must be submitted in writing and received by the Board not later than the first rehearsal in September.

Each application will be reviewed by the BCC Governing Board and applicants will be informed of the Board's decision. Potential scholarship recipients are asked to attend rehearsals during the application review process so they will not miss valuable rehearsal time.

Parent Involvement

Parent Expectations

- Please do not drop singers off before 5:15pm.
- Sign children in and out of rehearsal each week.
- All singers must be picked up promptly following their rehearsals.

- Keep formal concert uniforms and rehearsal shirts clean and in good condition.
- Attend two required, scheduled parent meetings per year.
- Pay tuition by scheduled deadline (no refunds).
- Provide written excuses for missed rehearsals.
- Provide written notice of intent to miss a required performance at least 4 weeks in advance.

Committee Participation

As parental involvement is vital to our program, parents will be asked to serve on a committee of their choice. The following committees are available: Communications, Membership, Music and Materials, Recruitment & Publicity, Fundraising, Uniforms, and Hospitality. Please review the committee opportunities and determine on which committee you would like to participate. Committee participation forms will be provided at the last rehearsal in August. Thank you, in advance, for your willingness to participate in the life of the BCC program!

Communications

Notices of BCC activities will be sent by email frequently throughout the year. We use our website to post scheduled performances and events. Please be sure to check it frequently. The website address is **www.birminghamchildrenschoir.org**. A marker board is posted at the front door with announcements and dates of upcoming events. Singers may also be given notes to take home to parents before performances and meetings. Information is also often posted at the Sign-In/Sign-Out Table. A roster of all BCC members will be distributed at the beginning of each season.

Fundraisers

BCC parents are asked to participate in one fundraiser per year to supplement the BCC annual budget. The time and type of fundraiser will be discussed at the first parent meeting in the fall.

Families may participate in other fundraising opportunities to supplement their singer's individual tour expenses. These fundraisers will be determined by the Fundraising Committee and information will be sent home with singers. The money raised by these fundraisers will be held by the Treasurer, and parents will receive periodic updates on the amount of money their singer has to apply to choir trips.

Photographs

Choir photographs are taken each year and may be used for publicity purposes. Parents will be given the opportunity to purchase choir photographs. Photographs, both formal and candid, may appear in BCC brochures, BCC website, performance programs, as well as newspapers, magazines, press releases, etc. Where appropriate, first names only will be used to protect the identities of our singers. A Photo Release form is a part of the Membership Agree-

ment. Parents not comfortable with their child's photo being used for publicity purposes should contact the Artistic Director.

Items for Sale

Several BCC items may be available for purchase throughout the year with price lists published at the time. Such items may include:

- BCC T-Shirts (youth and adult sizes)
- Concert CDs, Concert DVDs
- BCC Note Cards or Thank-You Notes

Choir Trips

Our goal for Intermezzo and Una Vocé choir members is to provide opportunities to grow in musicianship and performance skills through a variety of performance settings. These opportunities may include both local and out-of-town performances. Organizing tours requires the commitment and cooperation of everyone involved, including parents, singers, BCC staff and Board members.

Due to the costs involved with out-of-town tours, fundraising opportunities may be available to help defer some of the costs. Singers choosing not to participate in fundraising events are responsible for the full cost of their tour fare.

The following information presents BCC guidelines for funding out-of-town tours and the use of fundraising money.

- **Deposits** – At least 25% must be paid from personal funds. This is to ensure more of a commitment on the singer's part. If you have already raised enough money to pay for your entire trip, this is not required. You have already shown the commitment by raising the money and we will honor that commitment. Deposits are non-refundable.
- **Use of money raised through fundraising** – Singers have the option to use the money in their tour account to cover any touring expenses where they are performing as a representative of the BCC. This includes transportation, meals, lodging, registration fees, materials, and practice tapes. Families cannot use the fundraising funds to cover the expenses of other family members unless it is a parent accompanying the group as a chaperone and then only after the singer's costs are covered. Additionally, singers cannot use fundraising funds when participating in events and representing other organizations. An example is members that attend the Young Voices Festival as part of their school groups.
- **Additional fundraising funds** – Fundraising funds not used to cover the previously mentioned expenses will be held in the singer's touring account. Due to tax regulations as a 501c3 non-profit organization, we are not at liberty to use this money to cover other non-tour related expenses, such as tuition and lost materials. Any funds remaining in an account after a singer leaves the BCC will be rolled into the BCC General Tour Account fund.



Pre-Arranged Absence Form

Today's Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Singer's Name: _____

Singer's Choir: _____

Date of Absence: ____ / ____ / ____

Reason for Absence: _____

Choir Director's Signature:

