



## MEMBER HANDBOOK

“Enriching the lives of youth in the region through a program of vocal music education and through the performance and study of the world’s great choral literature”

## MISSION

It is the mission of the Mountain Empire Children's Choral Academy (MECCA) to enrich the lives of youth in the region through a program of vocal music education and through the study and performance of the world's great choral literature.

## WHO WE ARE

The Mountain Empire Children's Choral Academy serves young people throughout the Tri-Cities region by operating choirs at multiple levels. Choristers is open enrollment, with no audition required. All other MECCA choirs require an audition. Potential members should be recommended by their music teacher or choir director and be willing to commit themselves to at least one full school year of membership. Students who are accepted and remain in good standing may continue in their choir without re-audition. Current singers progressing to a more advanced choir will audition for their new choir.

- Choristers is for children in grades 1–3
- The East Tennessee Children's Choir (ETCC) is a treble-voice choir for grades 4–8
- Da Capo is an advanced choir for ETCC singers in grades 7–8
- The Highlands Youth Ensemble (HYE) is a mixed choir for students in grades 9–12 and changed male voices in 8<sup>th</sup> grade
- Bella Voce and MECCA MEN are ensembles composed of HYE singers.

## STAFF

- MECCA Artistic Director and conductor of ETCC, Da Capo, and HYE choirs: Jane DeLoach Morison – janemorison1@gmail.com
- Choristers Director: Amy Potterton
- Choristers Accompanist: Beth DeLong
- ETCC & HYE Accompanist: Christopher Yoder
- Administrator: Nancy Hopson – nanceehop4@gmail.com

NOTE: Qualifications and information about our staff are on the website.

<http://meccacademy.org/staff.html>

## GOALS

The goals of MECCA Choirs are to:

- Provide children and youth an unforgettable, exemplary choral experience with a broad range of repertoire and styles.
- Build a foundation of proper singing technique that will allow a lifetime of singing involvement
- Develop music literacy utilizing the Kodaly tradition of music instruction.
- Supply an experience in non-competitive team behavior drawing out the best in each person.
- Enrich the music programs of area schools and churches through the leadership that experienced MECCA singers will provide.
- Enhance the Mountain Empire's appreciation of children's fine choral literature.
- Encourage lifelong participation in the arts by the singers, their families, and the larger community.
- Share our music with others in regional, national and international concerts.
- Encourage singers to express their musical and artistic skills.

## TUITION and FEES

Tuition is non-refundable

<b>Choristers</b>	\$180.00 for the year* Installment plan: \$190.00 – \$47.50/month x4
<b>ETCC</b>	\$260.00 for the year* Installment plan: \$270.00 – \$67.50/month x4
<b>Da Capo</b>	\$40 (in addition to ETCC tuition) for two semesters
<b>HYE</b>	\$345.00 for the year** Installment plan: \$355 – \$88.75/month x4

*\*These prices do not include uniform items*

*\*\*Price includes music for HYE students.*

- The installment plans are payable in four equal payments for August through November, payable by the last day of the month. A \$10 service charge is included.
- A late fee of \$25 is charged to outstanding accounts, not utilizing the installment plan, after September 30. The deadline for students enrolling in January is February 28.
- 10% discounts for families with multiple children in MECCA choirs are applied to the lesser-priced tuition fees. Da Capo tuition and HYE music is not discounted.

## OTHER CHARGES

- When MECCA choirs sing in their own concerts, there is no official admission charge, but donations are accepted. When singing in other venues, those venues may include an admission charge. Those desiring to attend are responsible for their own admission.
- HYE singers keep their own music. The music purchase is included in their tuition fee.
- There may be other incidental costs associated with some MECCA choir activities during the year.
- Singers are responsible for purchasing their own uniform items. (See UNIFORM REQUIREMENTS)

## TUITION ASSISTANCE

NOTE: Various organizations use similar terms in different ways. For MECCA, “tuition assistance” is financial aid; “scholarships” are merit awards given without regard to financial need.

- MECCA wishes to provide musical opportunities to all qualified children in the Tri-Cities region, regardless of their financial situation. In order to enable participation of all eligible students, MECCA will provide tuition assistance to families with financial need.
- MECCA will help qualified families on a sliding scale ranging from partial to full tuition assistance.
- The level of MECCA tuition assistance may be limited based on available resources.
- Parent or legal guardian submits a letter to the Artistic Director asking for financial assistance prior to (or at the time) when tuition payments come due. They should briefly describe their financial circumstances and the reduction amount they wish to receive.
- A request is valid for one term only. If financial need persists, a new written request is required for each term.
- MECCA shall treat requests for tuition assistance with due confidentiality.
- The Artistic Director shall review the applications and in each case, make a determination together with the Administrator based on MECCA’s financial resources.
- The Administrator will inform each family in writing of the amount of tuition assistance granted.

## SCHOLARSHIPS

NOTE: Various organizations use similar terms in different ways. For MECCA, “tuition assistance” is financial aid; “scholarships” are merit awards given without regard to financial need.

**Purpose:** MECCA Merit Scholarships serve as incentives and rewards for excellence and are awarded to outstanding students regardless of their families’ financial situation.

**Process:** MECCA students submit an application letter to the Artistic Director, describing what singing means to them and why they think they deserve a Merit Scholarship.

### **Evaluation:**

- The Artistic Director shall review the applications and in each case, make a determination based on merit, commitment, and promise.
- If needed, she/he will consult with a scholarship committee.
- Scholarship award decisions are final.

## UNIFORM REQUIREMENTS

### **All Choirs**

Uniform items are to be clean and neatly pressed; hair is to be worn securely off the face. All hair accessories are to be simple and black or matching the hair color. No watches or bracelets/wristbands unless for medical reasons. Please no perfume, cologne, or scented lotions.

At the beginning of the year, the Parent Coordinator for each choir will send ordering information for the choir’s uniform pieces.

### **Choristers**

#### *Formal – Boys*

White dress shirts, long black pants, black uniform vest, long red tie, black socks, and polished black dress shoes (no sneakers or athletic shoes).

#### *Formal – Girls*

Black uniform jumper, white uniform blouse, tights and black shoes. Neckwear is provided.

#### *Casual- All*

Blue Choristers polo shirt, blue jeans, socks and casual shoes

### **ETCC and Da Capo**

#### *Formal – Girls*

Black pleated uniform skirt, red uniform sweater vest, white long-sleeve collared dress shirt, solid black tights (no hose or knee socks), black shoes (closed toe). Neckwear is loaned from the uniform coordinator. Small, modest stud earrings only.

#### *Formal – Boys*

Black dress slacks, red uniform sweater vest, white long-sleeve dress shirt (not oxford style; *no button-down collar*; worn buttoned at neck), long solid black necktie (no print), black dress socks, polished black dress shoes (no sneakers or athletic shoes)

#### *Casual – All*

Red ETCC polo shirt or purple polo for DA CAPO, blue jeans, socks and tennis shoes

### **HYE**

#### *Formal – Women*

Short-sleeve black uniform dress, closed-toe black dress shoes, flesh-tone hose, uniform pearls and pearl earrings. Natural looking makeup only.

#### *Formal – Men*

Tuxedo (per ordering instructions from Parent Coordinator), black bowtie, black socks, polished, black dress shoes (no sneakers athletic shoes)

#### *Casual – All*

Black HYE polo shirt, blue jeans, socks and tennis shoes

## PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Parents are vital to the success of MECCA Choirs. Their most important duty is to have their child at every rehearsal and scheduled performance. However, assistance to the organization is needed in many areas, some of which are described below. Contact the Parent Coordinator or the Administrator to give your energy to the organization. The list below is a sampling.

- **Auditions:** Be present to help prospective members and their parents fill out appropriate paperwork.
- **Concerts:** Supervise children before performances and during intermission. Assist them with their attire. Help guide children on and off stage, as needed or requested by the conductor. Assist administrator in collecting donations and handing out programs.
- **Library:** Place music in rehearsal folders, according to the director's instructions, at the beginning of each semester. File music at end of each semester.
- **Program/ads:** Coordinate the sale of ads at the beginning of each semester.
- **Rehearsals:** Help with taking roll; assist with other administrative work as needed.
- **Retreats:** Assist in serving and cleaning up lunch at fall and winter retreats.
- **Uniforms:** Assist with organizing uniform purchase and distribution. Help with the sale of polo shirts. Assist singers in being properly attired for each performance.

## SUPPORT

Individual and corporate support supplies nearly half of the organization's budget each year. Please consider joining the generous group of those who make this musical experience available to children in our region. Your support makes it possible for families to participate who might otherwise not be able to afford the tuition.

Because MECCA is a 501(c)(3) organization, your contribution is eligible to be tax deductible. Contributions in the following categories will be recognized in the choirs' concert programs throughout the season.

Many businesses offer a matching program with their employees. Please inquire if you think your employer offers such a program.

<i>Friend</i>	\$25+	<i>Bronze Baton</i>	\$750+
<i>Contributor</i>	\$50+	<i>Silver Baton</i>	\$1000+
<i>Supporter</i>	\$100+	<i>Gold Baton</i>	\$1500+
<i>Sponsor</i>	\$250+	<i>Concert Sponsor</i>	\$2000+
<i>Benefactor</i>	\$500+	<i>Grand Benefactor</i>	\$5000+

## ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

The Artistic Director is hired by the board to provide musical leadership and guidance in all matters pertaining to the MECCA choirs. The Artistic Director conducts one or more of the MECCA choirs and supervises the work of other MECCA conductors. More information about current Artistic Director Jane Morison may be found on the MECCA website.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Board of Directors holds the ultimate responsibility for carrying out the mission of MECCA. The Board secures funding, approves budget, sets policy, hires staff, evaluates the organization's progress, and elects future board members as provided for in the MECCA bylaws.

## HISTORY

The late Dr. Carl King founded the East Tennessee Children's Choir in 1987. He retired from conducting the choir in spring, 1990. In 1994, Beth Perkinson McCoy was named Music Director for the choir. Upon her retirement, Jane Morison succeeded Beth McCoy in 2009.

The organization has commissioned new musical works from noted composers, including Kenton Coe, and has been the recipient of several grants from the Tennessee Arts Commission and the Arts Build Communities program of the Johnson City Area Arts Council.

Over time, MECCA has added additional choirs: Highlands Youth Ensemble began in 2002 with Choristers, Da Capo, and Bella Voce following. More detailed historical information may be found on the MECCA website.

## FUND-RAISING

The Board of Directors has established a formal policy regarding fund-raising activities. Copies of the policy are available on request, or through the MECCA website.

## AWARDS

In May, singers receive certificates, and awards in accordance with their attendance and participation.

## PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE

Each of the MECCA choirs participates in MECCA concerts near the end of each semester. In addition, each choir may occasionally perform independently. A complete schedule is maintained on the MECCA website, and will be distributed to the singers and families at the beginning of each term.

Every attempt is made to ensure that all events are on this schedule. Occasionally it is necessary to add additional rehearsals, particularly when collaborating with another organization, such as Symphony of the Mountains, or the Johnson City Symphony Orchestra.

## REHEARSAL SCHEDULE AND LOCATION

- An all-day orientation rehearsal/retreat is held on a Saturday near the beginning of the school year and in early January. The retreat culminates in an informal performance. Times and dates will be announced.
- Choirs meet during spring breaks and Monday holidays, such as President's Day and Martin Luther King Day, but do NOT meet on Labor Day Monday.
- In the case of inclement weather, ETCC and Choristers rehearsals are cancelled when the school system *in the city where the rehearsal takes place has cancelled school for the day*. HYE weather decisions are NOT tied to any school district, but are made on an individual basis by the Artistic Director and communicated via email.
- Choristers, ETCC, and Da Capo rehearse at Central Baptist Church, 300 N. Roan Street, Johnson City, TN. Choristers and ETCC meet from 4:00 - 5:30 p.m. Da Capo meets from 5:40 - 6:15 p.m.
- HYE rehearses at Central Presbyterian Church, 301 Euclid Avenue, Bristol, VA from 7:15 - 9:15 p.m.

## MUSIC

**Choristers, ETCC, Da Capo** – Music is supplied by MECCA, usually in a notebook. Singers are expected to take care of their notebooks, music, and pencils and to turn in all supplies in good condition at the end of the season.

**HYE** – All music will be ordered by MECCA and purchased through tuition fees (so that singers may keep their music), and kept neatly in a plain black notebook (also purchased by the

singers). HYE singers are expected to keep their notebooks, music, and pencils for marking music organized at all times.

## ATTENDANCE

In order to build a cohesive choral ensemble, it is necessary for all the singers to be present. Individuals with excessive absence – even if for good reasons – undermine the ensemble, and may be asked to sit out the concert for which those rehearsals were preparation. When the singer is prepared to attend regularly, he or she can be re-admitted to the choir.

- **Promptness Is Essential.** Many schools are willing for the singers to be dismissed a few minutes early so they can arrive on time. Two times being late 30 minutes or more constitutes an absence.
- Three excused absences are allowed for illness and/or irreconcilable schedule conflicts per semester.
- Singers must submit the Request for Excused Absence form as soon as they are aware of a conflict. The form must be submitted no less than two weeks in advance.
- In the case of last minute illness, ETCC and Choristers are to email/call their Parent Coordinator. HYE members are to contact the director by 2pm.
- Absence from mandatory and dress rehearsals can result in the child's not participating in the particular performance.
- Attendance at ALL concerts is mandatory.
- More than three excused absences OR one unexcused absence may result in the child being asked to withdraw from the group.
- At the discretion of the conductor of the choir, singers may be required to perform a "music check" to ensure that they have worked on their own to learn material covered in a missed rehearsal.
- Parents are urged to pick up their children promptly at the conclusion of rehearsals. Choir leaders often have other rehearsals to lead, and cannot be responsible for children whose parents are late in arriving.
- After a long day at school, the children need a healthy snack and a bathroom break before coming to rehearsal. No snacks are allowed in the rehearsal building.
- There will be a short activity break during the rehearsal, and members will be excused only in case of an emergency. Because rehearsal time is most valuable, there will be no scheduled bathroom break.

## BEHAVIOR

Choir members are expected to be on their best behavior at all times, thus requiring no need for disciplinary measures. If a child has a problem, the director will discuss it with the individual and will contact a parent only if the problem persists. Choir members also are expected to be helpful upon arrival at the rehearsal hall, assisting the director with room and music readiness. Continued disruption of any nature, whether by students and/or parents, of the mission of MECCA constitutes grounds for dismissal.

## NON-DISCRIMINATION

MECCA does not discriminate with regard to race, gender, creed, ethnicity, or sexual orientation in the hiring of staff or selection of singers. Musical factors may be a factor in decision-making.

## DISMISSAL

Failure to comply with the MECCA Handbook and its standards could result in dismissal from MECCA.

## MECCA CODE OF CONDUCT

In an effort to ensure the safety and welfare of all participants at Mountain Empire Children's Choral Academy, we require every member to follow our MECCA Code of Conduct during all MECCA activities. This is to ensure the highest respect and courtesy toward one another. Violating the Code of Conduct can result in immediate disciplinary action at the discretion of the director and/or board, up to and including dismissal.

- Appropriate attire must be worn at all times. Vulgar language or images on clothing is not appropriate.
- Inappropriate behavior of a physical or sexual nature including lewd behavior and/or unwanted advances during MECCA activities is strictly prohibited.
- No public display of affection.
- Harassment including verbal, physical or sexual is unlawful and prohibited. It is a serious act of misconduct and is subject to disciplinary action, and possibly criminal prosecution. This unlawful discrimination includes harassment by/of members, staff, parents, and board members of MECCA.
- Bullying is prohibited. Bullying is intentionally aggressive behavior including verbal, physical, sexual, social/relational/emotional, cyber bullying or any combination of these abuses. Bullying can consist of one person bullying another, a group of people ganging up against one lone person, or one group of people targeting another group.
- Smoking or drinking or being under the influence of alcoholic beverages, drugs, or other substances during MECCA activities are strictly prohibited.
- Use of illegal drugs or substances is not acceptable and is prohibited. Possession of unauthorized firearms or other weapons is prohibited.
- Removal or destruction of MECCA property or the property of someone else without his or her prior consent constitutes theft of property.
- Verbal abuse, swearing, profanity, fighting, and arguing are not acceptable and are considered inappropriate behavior at MECCA activities.
- Lack of respect to staff or other members is not acceptable and will result in suspension and/or termination of membership privileges.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **Where can I pay my child's tuition?** The Administrator will collect HYE tuition at the first parent meeting. All monies to be paid after this time must be mailed to the MECCA post office box number 3021, Bristol, TN 37625. Tuition for ETCC and Choristers will be collected at the Fallfest and first rehearsal in August. All other monies after this time should be mailed.
- **Why does my child need to arrive early?** Kids, like adults, love to visit and talk. Once choir starts, all that must stop.
- **Cell Phones?** Must not be on during rehearsals. Phones may be collected at the beginning of rehearsal and returned when rehearsal ends. This prevents the temptation of wanting to look at it during our time together.
- **What if my child is going to be absent or late?** In case of sudden illness, ETCC and Choristers singers should email or call their Parent Coordinator. HYE singers should contact the director. In order to be excused because of an irreconcilable schedule conflict, the Request for Excused Absence form must be submitted as soon as you are aware of the conflict, and no less than two weeks in advance. See Attendance Policy.
- **Where do I order my child's concert attire?** Ordering information will be sent out at the beginning of the year by the Parent Coordinator.
- **Is there a charge to attend a concert?** There is not a charge but a suggested donation of \$5 per person or a cap of \$15 per family is posted at the door.
- **What if my child needs to drop? Can we get our money back?** Students sign a contract at their formal audition stating they will make MECCA a priority.

*From the contract: As a member of the East Tennessee Children's Choir, under the umbrella of Mountain Empire Children's Choral Academy, I agree to make singing in the choir a high priority, to abide by the rules stated in the MECCA Handbook - which can be found on our MECCACADEMY.org website, and to be a member for the entire school year. It is very important that the students continue on in the choir throughout the spring semester without any interruption of instruction.*
- **Does MECCA take holidays?** Yes, Labor Day and Christmas break are scheduled holidays for MECCA.
- **Does my child have to re-audition after being accepted into a MECCA choir?** Auditions are only required for the first year of each choir, except Choristers. No audition is required for this young choir.

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