

### Who we are

Island Bel Canto Singers is an auditioned women’s community choir that has been singing together since 1997. Our choral repertoire is diverse, from early classics to contemporary music, world music and musical theatre, all in a variety of languages. We sing both accompanied and a cappella, and mainly in three-part harmony.

### Our professional team

After almost 12 years as our accompanist, Sharon Sinclair became our Artistic Director in January 2014. A great lover of choral music, Sharon holds a Bachelor of Music in Piano from University of Victoria. She was the

choir director at Wellington Secondary School for over 20 years and is the founder and director of Sinclair Singers, a choir for young adults. She teaches piano and voice privately, and sings with The Island Consort Chamber Choir.

Pat Rustand is our accompanist. Recently retired from a 30-year teaching career, Pat is also the accompanist for the Catholic choir at Nanaimo Ecumenical Centre. She has periodically taught music and has often accompanied school choirs in Burnaby and Nanaimo.

### What we stand for

Our purpose is to provide a forum for women of all ages to:

- pursue choral excellence through the continuous development and improvement of their musical and vocal skills, and
- broaden and enhance public interest in and appreciation of choral music through entertaining and inspiring performances of a diversified repertoire to various audiences.

As part of this purpose, we:

- support and encourage local musical talent, and
- foster goodwill and community spirit by networking with other choirs to enrich and extend the choral tradition in Nanaimo and the surrounding area.

We embrace **teamwork**, **respect**, and **camaraderie** in an atmosphere of **open communication**.

***We are a fragrance-free group at all choir gatherings.***

### New member intake

We accept new members into the choir at the beginning of each term.

When you first contact us about joining, you will be asked about your musical background and choir experience, and given information about what will be expected of you as a choir member.

The first two rehearsals are open, which means you can try out the choir with no obligation other than paying a \$20 refundable music deposit. You will be partnered

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with a member in your section to help you wherever necessary.

If you decide you are interested in continuing with the choir, Sharon will conduct a short, informal vocal assessment. She will ask you to do a few warm-up exercises to get a sense of your range, and to sing a song of your own choice. Some vocal experience and basic music reading ability are preferred.

If you carry on with the choir, your \$20 deposit is refunded. You will also be given access to the members' section of the choir's website, where we post scanned pdfs of the music, mp3 rehearsal tracks and other relevant documents and materials.

## Rehearsals

We have two terms each year:

- The Fall term typically begins on the Tuesday the week following Labour Day and ends with our Christmas concerts on the first weekend in December
- The Spring term typically begins on the second Tuesday in January and ends with our Spring concert on the first Sunday in May.

We rehearse each week on Tuesday evening, from 7:00 to 9:30 pm, except during Spring Break, at St. Paul's Anglican Church, 100 Chapel St. in downtown Nanaimo.

It's a good idea to bring your own water bottle. There is usually also a break mid-way through the evening where refreshments may be provided.

We occasionally hold sectional rehearsals; these may be called by either Sharon or decided within your section if a need is identified.

Depending on our progress, Sharon may also call 1 or 2 extra rehearsals just before our concert to polish our performance.

In addition to attending these rehearsals, you are expected to practice your music at home. Each week Sharon provides a list of the music to be worked on at the next rehearsal.

## Attendance

Regular attendance is a large part of demonstrating our commitment to the choir's success, and it is essential if we are to perform well. The general expectation is that, barring unforeseen circumstances, all members will attend the weekly rehearsals and sing in our concerts.

Regarding absences, we consider both your personal circumstances and the well-being of the choir as a

whole. In trying to be fair to both the individual and the group, we have established the following guidelines:

- If you are going to miss a rehearsal for any reason, you need to let Sharon know as soon as possible *in advance* by phone or email. After any absence, contact a member of your section to bring yourself up to date on what you missed (music instructions/notations and other choir business).
- Three absences during any term (single or consecutive) are considered the *typical* maximum. If you reach this level, you may receive a call from Sharon to review your situation.
- Following an absence of 2 or more consecutive rehearsals, you need to contact Sharon to discuss how you are managing with the repertoire.
- If your travel plans involve missing 2 or more rehearsals, contact Sharon to discuss the impact of your absence on the choir. If possible, please arrange your absence so you can be back by the end of the first week in October (for the Fall term) and February (for the Spring term).
- The last three regular rehearsals before a concert are crucial for the performance and morale of the choir as a whole. We ask that you attend all these rehearsals, barring illness or other unforeseen circumstances, and do not take discretionary absences, such as vacations, at this time.

## Music

Our music librarian will provide you with a package of all our sheet music at the beginning of each term. Original sheet music may be marked ***only with a pencil***, and at the end of the term, erase all your notations before you return your music to the librarian. If you lose or permanently damage any original music, the choir requires \$5 for each piece of music involved; this fee is to be paid when the music is reported lost or turned in damaged.

When your intake process is complete, you will be given access to the Member page of the choir's website, where you can download scanned pdfs and print out your own copies. This way, you can mark up your music however you like.

To help you learn your music, computer-generated rehearsal tracks for each part and recordings of our rehearsals are posted in the members section of the choir's website. During the new member intake period, we will ensure you have access to the mp3 files. You are free to download these tracks to your computer, burn a CD or load them into your mp3 player. If you don't have access to the internet, or cannot download and burn

your own CD, please speak with the Communications Chair.

You will need to provide your own black music folder/binder to use at concerts. Choral folders are available online through [musicfolder.com](http://musicfolder.com).

If you ever have any questions about the music, or need help with it, please speak with Sharon.

### Concert wardrobe

The choir will provide you with a black concert top with a silver stone motif, scarves or other accessories. You are expected to return these items as directed. If you choose to keep the top when you leave the choir, you are expected to pay \$20 for its replacement.

You will need to provide your own:

- Black ankle-length skirt.
- Black dress pants.
- Black hosiery and black shoes.

Black means a solid, matte black, not shiny or gray in tone.

You are encouraged to wear “bolder than normal” makeup, including bright lipstick — some basic makeup information is provided on the choir’s website.

You may wear jewelry to add extra sparkle, as long as it does not draw attention from the choir’s overall look.

### The choir’s website

The members section of the choir’s website, [islandbelcanto.com/members](http://islandbelcanto.com/members), is your go-to place for the latest info. There, you’ll find executive-meeting minutes, our calendar, this handbook, and the scanned music files and rehearsal tracks already mentioned above. (You will be given the user name and password for the Members page when your intake process is complete).

### Fundraising

Our Christmas and Spring concerts are our major fundraising events. You will be given 10 tickets to try to sell for each concert. Fundraising will also be done through the Thrifty Foods *Smile Card* program and the Christmas Purdy chocolate sales.

### Fees

All choir members pay fees which, together with the money raised through charitable donations, grants, sponsorships and fundraising, are used to pay the choir’s operating expenses, such as:

- Sharon’s and Pat’s fees,

- music and wardrobe items,
- BCCF membership dues, society fees, and insurance,
- facility rentals for rehearsals, workshops and concerts.

These fees are \$165 per term, due by the last rehearsal in September and January. Members of the Chamber Ensemble also pay \$65 each term.

We strongly believe in the value of singing and try not to turn away any singer for financial reasons. If you are experiencing hardship, speak confidentially with the Finance Chair about creating a payment plan, or if necessary, a possible subsidy; she will outline the options available to you.

Except in the case of prolonged illness, there are no refunds or adjustments in the fees.

### Getting the work done

We are all volunteers, and we need everyone to assist in getting things done to keep individual workloads manageable.

Legally, the choir is managed by The Island Bel Canto Singers Society, a non-profit society and registered charity. The society’s constitution and bylaws are available in the members section of the choir’s website.

We have 5 executive committees: Finance, Communications, Concert, Marketing, and Hospitality & Wardrobe. The chairs of these committees form the choir’s executive and are the society’s directors. Members-at-large are also welcomed on the executive.

The executive takes care of the choir’s business and ensures the choir as a whole operates as a cohesive and fiscally-responsible group. They contract and oversee the choir’s professional musicians, oversee the choir’s plans and activities, and manage the choir’s policies. They work together as a team, assisting one another in the planning, problem-solving and work. While all committee chairs have equal authority, the Communications Chair is responsible for making sure everything gets done.

Committee chairs are encouraged to recruit other members to assist them in their duties; they are not expected to do all the work themselves.

Other important teams, which are not considered as part of the executive, are appointed to help the choir to operate smoothly. These are:

- Music Librarian & assistant
- Technical Team

## Meetings

The executive meets to deal with the choir's business issues; Sharon attends as needed. Decisions about the dates and time of these meetings are made at the first executive meeting each year, along with where the meetings will be held.

Before the meetings, the Communications Chair sends out an agenda to the rest of the executive and Sharon. Each committee chair prepares a report outlining the recent activity of her committee and any work ahead, and emails it to the other executive members; Sharon does the same for her activity and plans. These reports are included in the executive-meeting minutes which are distributed to all choir members.

You are always welcome to attend any executive meeting.

We hold an Annual General Meeting each year to review the past year's activities and financial results, and to elect a new executive for the next year. Our fiscal year-end is May 31, and we hold our AGM in early June. Everyone is urged to attend.

***If you have any issues or problems, please talk to one of the executive members so that the situation can be dealt with appropriately.***

## Committee responsibilities

### Communications Committee

- Act as the primary liaison between choir members, Sharon and the executive.
- Prepare the agenda for and chair all executive meetings, general meetings and the AGM.
- Take and prepare the minutes of all meetings and the AGM, and distribute to all members.
- Create and maintain the choir roster each term.
- Create a calendar each term, of executive meetings, choir practices and other choir-related activities.
- Update the *Chorister Handbook* and *Executive Handbook* as required, in liaison with other executive members.
- Keep the choir up-to-date with announcements and emails about choir activity and current issues (e-newsletters optional).
- Create and oversee the Technical Team in coordination with the Marketing Chair.
- Receive incoming correspondence, respond to or redirect correspondence as appropriate to other executive members.
- Submit reports to BCCF.

- Handle the contracting of the choir's music professionals.
- Conduct member surveys each season as required, including tabulating and circulating the results to all members, to ensure everyone has an opportunity to be heard.

### Finance Committee

- Collect member fees, and issue receipts.
- Coordinate and collect concert ticket sales, including sourcing and managing sales outlets and online sales.
- Collect money from choir members as needed.
- Handle all banking activity, including depositing funds received from fees, concerts, charitable donations, grants and fundraising events, and writing cheques to pay expenses incurred.
- Maintain the choir's bookkeeping records and reconcile the bank statements monthly.
- Oversee the financial aspect of fundraising.
- Oversee the submission of grant and sponsorship applications and subsequent post-event reports.
- Calculate and submit SOCAN fees following performances.
- Issue official tax receipts for charitable donations.
- Renew the choir's BCCF membership and insurance annually.
- Present an updated statement of financial operations at executive meetings, and keep the executive informed of our financial status.
- Present the annual financial statements and a budget for the following year to choir members at the AGM.
- File the annual GST/HST rebate application and the annual Registered Charity Information Return.

### Marketing Committee

- Manage the choir's brand.
- Develop and place recruitment advertising/ notices for new members.
- Promote our concerts through:
  - Design and production of tickets and concert programs.
  - Writing and issuing press releases to local newspapers.
  - Online listings and newspaper community listings.
  - Social media postings.
- Arrange for photography of practices, concerts and annual group portrait.

- Manage choir's archive of concert materials (programs, posters, newspaper clippings).

#### **Concert Committee**

- Book venues for concerts.
- Manage the storage, transportation and arrangement of risers.
- Coordinate the front-of-house and post-concert receptions with Friends of Bel Canto.
- Oversee the set-up and clean-up of the concert venue.

#### **Hospitality & Wardrobe Committee**

- Serve as primary contact for new members and handle the new-member orientation.
- Recruit and oversee the Section Coordinators.
- Arrange for venues and refreshments for special events, such as workshops and the AGM.
- Coordinate supplying refreshments for rehearsals.
- Select and arrange for the choir's concert wardrobe and/or accessories.
- Manage wardrobe inventory.
- Purchase get-well and condolence cards, gifts, flowers and/or donations on behalf of the choir as required.

#### **Members-at-Large**

- Participate in executive meeting discussions and assist where possible.

### **Responsibilities of appointed positions**

#### **Music Librarian**

Manage the choir's music library, including keeping all sheet music filed in alphabetical order, maintaining an electronic database of the library, and processing new music (numbering, hole-punching, stamping, filing, and adding to database).

- Manage the distribution of music to choir members each term, including its return to the library. Collect \$20 deposit from prospective new members, and either return it if the person does not stay or give it to the Finance Chair to apply to fees if they do stay.
- Maintain a backup archive of all Sibelius files, scanned music pdfs and concert recordings.

#### **Technical Team**

- Produce mp3 tracks of the repertoire before the beginning of each term in coordination with the music librarian.
- Manage the set-up and take-down of the PA system when needed.

- Manage the recording of rehearsals and concerts, including dividing the recordings into separate tracks, and producing concert CDs for all members, Sharon and the choir's music library.
- Maintain the choir's website with current information for members and the executive, and promotional information for the public.

### **Responsibilities of our professionals**

#### **Artistic Director**

- Plan, prepare for and conduct all rehearsals and concerts, including selecting repertoire and soloists, sourcing and ordering new music, and making sure music is available when needed.
- Select and engage concert guests, including determining dates, music, and fees.
- Ensure expenditures for music and concert guests are within the choir's budget.
- Assess prospective choir members.
- Manage the choir's attendance at rehearsals.
- Provide direction to the Music Librarian in the preparation of the Sibelius files produced to create the mp3 rehearsal tracks.
- Collaborate with the Concert Chair as required about artistic staging issues.
- Pursue ongoing professional development and training to hone skills and remain current.
- Work with the executive, including attending meetings as necessary and coordinating, leading or assisting in special choir initiatives from time to time, in a manner consistent with our mission, goals, values and practices.

#### **Accompanist**

- Provide accompaniment at rehearsals specified by Sharon, and our Christmas and Spring concerts.
- Work with guest musicians and choir members for ensemble work when required.