

A Brief Description of our Musical Style

The chorus sings a style of unaccompanied, four-part, close harmony music called barbershop. Barbershop arrangements are constructed so that the four parts support and reinforce each other. When performed properly, the parts lock together and produce a characteristic 'ring' which is quite distinctive to the style. The names of the four parts are borrowed from the men and are :-

- **Leads** generally sing the melody but with brief forays into harmony.
- **Tenors** sing a high harmony part above the melody. Tenors need to be able to sing the high notes with a 'sweet' tone that doesn't distract from the melody line.
- **Basses** sing the lowest notes, always below the melody. Basses don't have to be loud but they do need to develop a full, rich tone.
- **Baritones** sing the notes that nobody else wants! It is, technically the most difficult part to sing but is also very satisfying. Baritones have roughly the same vocal range as the leads (maybe not quite so high) and their notes may be either above or below the melody.

An important feature of the style is our visual presentation which requires that we sing without music. We learn every song by heart.

So, you are thinking of joining Velvet Harmony

If you are reading this, it is likely that you have been, or are, attending our Singing Course and the idea of becoming a member of Velvet Harmony has occurred to you. You'd like to know how to go about it and a bit more about what you'd be getting into. The last thing we want to do is put you off but, on the other hand, we feel that your decision to join should be based on having all the information. This leaflet is an attempt to provide you with all pertinent facts but, if you have any further questions, any chorus member should be able to answer them

What it will mean to you

Rehearsals

The Chorus meets every Tuesday evening for 50 weeks of the year, with a two-week break at Christmas. In addition to this, the members of each section meet once a month, on another evening of the week, to polish up their part without the distraction of having the other parts around. We also have extra rehearsals (about 3 or 4 a year), sometimes during the week and sometimes at weekends, if a little extra effort is needed for Convention or for a show.

We recognise that no one can attend every single scheduled rehearsal but you are urged to attend as many as possible and to let your Section Leader know if you have to miss one.

Performances

The Chorus regularly performs public engagements for a variety of functions; an average of one a month but it does vary during the year. These are not accepted unless a sufficient number of members can attend and make a balanced chorus of acceptable size. You are encouraged to attend as many as you can.

Competitions

The chorus regularly supports local Music Festivals such as Bromley, Beckenham and Medway by competing in the appropriate classes. Our most important contest in the year is the LABBS Chorus Contest which is held at the Annual Convention in October or November. All chorus members are expected to be on stage for this contest and for the Preliminary round in April.

Costs

The regular subscription is currently £4 per week (£200/year) and includes your membership of LABBS, cost of hiring the rehearsal hall, purchase of music, costumes, etc. Your first annual subscription to LABBS of £33 is payable, in advance, on becoming a member. Subsequent subscriptions to LABBS are included in your club subscriptions.

The biggest additional cost will normally be attendance at the LABBS Annual Convention. Although the Club does endeavour to subsidise members by paying for coach travel and registration fees, etc, depending on funds available, members are responsible for finding monies for hotels and other outgoings. Other items of cost include

- A one-off deposit for sheet music which is provided, on loan, when you pass the audition. The deposit is refunded on return of the music, if you leave.
- On occasion, there may be small contributions to make towards new dresses and other items of clothing and stage wear.

The Chorus is committed to raising additional funds for costumes, Convention costs, etc., and each member is expected to play a part in this effort.

Costume

Stage wear and informal wear will be provided. In some cases, there may be a small deposit, refundable should you leave.

Musical Director: Neil Watkins 01306 740245
Performance Coordinator: Christine Warne 020 8658 6184

Chair: Seager Banks 020 8859 3518
Singing Course Coordinator: Jean Garelick 01689 850668

How do I join?

Visitors

Velvet Harmony rehearsals are open and we welcome visitors at any time, whether or not they might be considering membership.

Attendees on the Singing Course are counted as visitors.

Initial Voice Test

Ladies seeking membership are given an initial voice test, in private, by two members of our Music Team. The purpose of the test is two-fold.

- o A potential member must be able to sing in-tune and with reasonable vocal quality without excessive uncontrolled vibrato.
- o To determine the appropriate voice part. This will depend on vocal range, voice quality and experience (because some harmony parts are more difficult to sing than others).

Attendance on the Singing Course does not by-pass this test.

Audition

Normally, provided that the initial voice test is satisfactory, a potential member will be given a piece of music (currently 'Let The Rest Of The World Go By') and a learning CD (or tape). She may continue to attend rehearsals while learning her voice part to the song and may ask her Section Leader for assistance or assessment at any time. Singing Course attendees may, however, audition using the course song - 'Try A Little Tenderness'. When you feel ready, the audition is in two parts, not usually at the same time.

- o You will sing into a tape recorder while performing with the rest of the chorus on the risers. Your Section Leader will assess the recording and advise you if there is any further work to be done.
- o You will be asked to sing your part, in a quartet, with three experienced members of the chorus. This final part can be quite stressful for some people but it is done in private and we all want you to succeed. We do this because it is important to the chorus that members make a full contribution and are not simply following everyone else.

Once you have passed the audition, the rest of your life can begin! You will be given a folder of music containing the current repertoire songs and a set of CDs to help you learn them. The Musical Director may advise on a learning program (i.e. the order in which you might learn them) depending on chorus performing commitments. Once you have learned enough songs and received your costume(s), you will be asked to join us in our public performances.

Velvet Harmony

Bromley Ladies Barbershop Singers

Chorus Membership Information

for Singing Course Attendees



A Brief Description of our Club

Bromley Ladies' Barbershop Singers was originally formed by six enthusiastic women singers in 1976 and is affiliated to the Ladies' Association of British Barbershop Singers (LABBS), Making Music (formerly the National Federation of Music Societies) and to Bromley Arts Council.

The club performs under the 'stage name' of Velvet Harmony and all members of the club are members of the performing chorus.

Many members take on organisational roles on one of the committees within the Club. Decisions involving music, costumes, publicity, fund raising, bookings, transportation, etc, are made by these committees and are an essential part of the smooth running of the Club.

An annual competition is held for all LABBS choruses (50 in number) and takes the form of a preliminary round (Prelims) in April and a three-day Convention later in the year in October or November for those who qualify from the Prelims. Velvet Harmony is committed to taking part in this contest.

We are well known both locally and nationally and are very much in demand for a wide variety of engagements, both charitable and private. We take a pride in all we do and continually strive for improvement, but this does not prevent us having a great deal of fun and enjoyment.