

Now you are a member!

Congratulations! You have passed your audition, handed over your hard earned money and have become a member of Bromley Ladies Barbershop Singers.

We didn't want to put you off with our Information for Potential Members but we did warn you that being a member does involve more than just turning up on a Tuesday evening for a couple of hours of gang singing.

This booklet explains your immediate next steps and what follows.

Your Questions answered (possibly)

There will probably be lots of things you won't understand in your first few weeks. Here are a few questions you might come up with -

Tell me about your website

You will find it at www.velvet-harmony.org.uk. Most of the really useful stuff is only accessible to members once you have logged in. When you became a member, you were assigned a User Name and Password which you need in order to login.

Your assigned User Name is your full name. e.g. 'Margaret Davies' or 'Kay Griggs-Wright'. It is not case sensitive so 'MARGARET DAVIES', 'Margaret Davies' or 'mArGaReT dAVIES' will do equally well!

Your assigned password is your surname e.g. 'davies' or 'griggs-wright'. This is case sensitive and you must type it in lower case.

Once you have logged in for the first time, it is strongly suggested that you change your login details by clicking on the [your profile](#) button and entering, at least, a new password, one that you will remember easily. Once you have changed your profile (don't forget to save it), logout and then log back in again with your new login details. This time, click the check box that says "remember me" and you will be automatically logged in whenever you visit.

The [members area](#) contains learning resources, progress reports, singout information, email forms and other miscellaneous stuff. Also, once you've logged in, the Members List and Committee List under the [about us](#) menu become much more informative and the [diary](#) and [news](#) contain information intended only for members. It is a good idea to keep up to date with the diary.

What's a Section Rehearsal?

Every chorus member belongs to one of the four sections - tenor, lead, baritone or bass. A section rehearsal is a rehearsal where only the members of one section get together to learn/perfect their part. They may be held in separate rooms on a Tuesday evening (frequently) or at someone's house on a separate evening (usually every four to six weeks). The Section Leader is responsible for organising these and taking them but she may delegate to someone else on occasion.

What's a Section Leader (sometimes called Part Leader)

Each section has a Section Leader who is responsible for making sure that everyone in the section is 'up to speed'. There is also an Assistant Section Leader. Between them they will organise and take their section rehearsals. The Section Leader will normally be the first person you should approach with questions or issues about the musical aspects of the club.

What's a singout?

It's a gig, a public performance. It may be a show that we put on, a show that we have been asked to perform in or a spot of entertainment for some function or other. It may also be a competition. You

won't be expected to be involved in these until you have learnt a number of songs in the repertoire. More of this later.

What's the Excel program?

When we learn a new song or revise an existing repertoire song, we ask everybody to record themselves and hand the recording to their section leader for review. The words and notes must be 100% spot on in order to pass. As a new member, you need to do this for every song as you learn them and this is the way in which you become qualified to join us on singouts. More of this later.

What are LABBS, BABS, Sweet Adelines, Harmony Inc., BHS etc.?

LABBS (the Ladies Association of British Barbershop Singers) is the national organisation for female barbershoppers in the U.K. Bromley Ladies Barbershop Singers (us) belongs to this organisation and part of your weekly subscription goes to them. In return you receive a monthly magazine, subsidies at various educational events including a bi-annual Harmony College, access to the annual Convention and its competitions and other benefits. You should have received a leaflet about LABBS when you joined Velvet Harmony.

BABS (the British Association of Barbershop Singers) is the male equivalent of LABBS.

Sweet Adelines (S.A.I.) is an international organisation for female barbershop singers. It has member clubs in the U.K. and there is some ebb and flow of clubs between LABBS and SAI.

Harmony Inc. (H.I.) is a U.S. based organisation for female barbershop singers. LABBS is affiliated to H.I.

BHS (the Barbershop Harmony Society and formerly called the Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barbershop Quartet Singing in America - SPEBSQSA) is an international organisation for male barbershop singers. Started in 1938, it is the original and arguably, the one to which we look for inspiration.

Where should I stand on the risers?

Unless there is some other good reason (which will be made obvious) your Section Leader will guide you on this. In the beginning, you'll want to be surrounded by people singing your part so that you can learn it without being confused by people singing some other part.

What is 'stack position'?

This is not, as you might think, your position on the risers. It is a way of describing how you should stand rather than where you should stand. Stack position is the position you should adopt whenever you haven't been given any other instruction. Simply rotate your whole body, including your feet, to face square on to, roughly, the Musical Director. In the middle of the risers you may need to rotate a little more and at the outside, you may need to rotate a little less. The result means that you are slightly shoulder on to the audience and is less intimidating than a 'down the tiles' stance which might come across as aggressive.

OK. So what is 'down the tiles'?

This stance is square on to the audience. Feet, body, head are all facing the audience and, often, your eyes also for a brief period of time. This stance can seem aggressive and is used sparingly.

Who should I ask if I have a question?

For definitive answers, if the question is anything about music and learning it, you should first talk to your section leader. If it's about the club organisation, subs, LABBS or anything else that is not musical, the club Chairman or Secretary would be a good place to start. You can, of course, ask any club member anything you like and, often, they will be able to help.

Quality Control

The Excel Program

What is it?

It is just our way of learning new songs, revising existing repertoire songs and making sure that everyone is keeping up.

At the beginning of the year a plan is produced and circulated to all members which shows our learning activity for the year. It will identify the date on which we intend to start learning (or revising) each new song and how many weeks we will spend on it (usually between three and six). We call each of these periods of time an Excel cycle and the bulk of our rehearsal time during that period will be spent on whatever song(s) have been planned.

To learn a new song, music and teaching materials are made available several weeks before the planned start date. Part predominant recordings of the song are put on the website or on CD if you prefer. A tape can be made if you can't use either of these.

Section Leaders will organise extra section rehearsals sometime during the start week. We have learned from experience that the fastest way to learn new songs is to concentrate the effort up front. Ideally, we would spend three consecutive evenings on it but, since that is impractical for many people, we get as close as we can. You can, of course, spend as much time on it as you like before this.

You are encouraged to record yourself as much as you can. For new members, recording other people in your section can be a good way of helping the learning process. Check with your section leader though, you don't want to record mistakes!

Listen to your recording(s) and decide for yourself whether they are right or not.

Monitoring progress

Sometime during the cycle period, you should submit a recording to your Section Leader for review. This recording must be made while, singing with the rest of the chorus and without reference to the printed score.

Please listen to the recording yourself and only submit it you think it will pass. None of the Section Leaders likes asking you to do it again!

Your Section Leader will listen to your recording to make sure that you have all the words and all the notes correct.

Results are logged on our website where they can be viewed at any time. (they are only accessible once you are a member and have logged in).

Making a recording

It is true that many people find this a traumatic experience and most people dislike listening to recordings of their own voice. However, it doesn't take long before it becomes second nature to carry a recorder and to switch it on. It is also a wonderful incentive to improve!

Recordings can be made in a number of ways -

A standard cassette recorder. If you have one already, great. If not, you may have trouble finding one to buy, they are rapidly becoming obsolete.

A mini-cassette or Dictaphone. These are still available but you will probably have to hand over the machine as well as the tape to your section leader because she won't have a compatible machine to play it on.

A digital recorder. These are generally intended for use as dictation machines and are available in a wide variety of forms with and without computer (USB) interface. If you get one without USB, you

will have to hand in the machine for review. If it has USB and you are familiar enough with your computer, you can upload the recordings to your computer and email them to your section leader.

An iPod, MP3 player etc. These will tend to be a bit more expensive and you need to make sure that the one you are looking at does record (most will only play). However, they have a number of advantages - USB interface so you can email your recordings, much more memory so you can keep recordings indefinitely, ability to download teaching materials to them for learning purposes, small size means you can hang it round your neck and forget it, much better quality sound than a dictation machine, other features allow you to view pictures, play games, listen to book tapes etc. Etc.

Keeping informed

Your Section Leader will return, with your recording, a review sheet. The sheet has the words of the song printed on it and will probably have some written comments from your Section Leader. The bottom right hand corner will tell you whether you passed or not.

Some of the comments will be advisory - things you might like to think about changing in order to improve. Some comments may identify problems that prevented you from passing - these will be wrong words, wrong notes or very bad timing issues. Remember though, just because your sheet is covered in comments, it doesn't mean that you've done a bad job!

The result of your review is logged on our website where you can view your progress at any time.

Go to www.velvet-harmony.org.uk and log in (see the section about the website). Go to the Members Area and under Reports, you'll find 'My Progress Report'. This is a list of all the relevant songs in our repertoire and how you are doing.

Also in the Members Area under Reports you'll find 'Excel Progress Chart'. This shows, in graphical form, the progress of the entire chorus using symbols as below..

	A quarter to nine	Almost like being in love/This	Choo choo ch'boogie	Crazy	Get happy	I don't know why	In my room	Jeebers creepers	Let the Rest of the World Go B	Nevertheless	Over the rainbow	Something	Somewhere Out There	South East London Garden	The Glory of Love	The Rose	Two sleepy people	What a wonderful world	You're nobody 'til somebody lo
Genevieve Donald	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹
Heather Dancy	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹
Kate Shennan	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹
Seager Banks	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹
Susanne Cocker	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹
Angela Horemans	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹
Barbara Gray	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹
Barbara Crispe	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹

An empty space means that you haven't submitted a tape.

A ☹ symbol means that you have submitted a tape but did not pass.

A ☺ symbol means that you have passed.

Once all members of a section have passed a song, the background colour for that section turns dark.

Your aim must be to ultimately have a ☺ symbol against every repertoire song.

The Revision Schedule

So that our existing repertoire doesn't get rusty, we plan the year so that we usually sing four repertoire songs at every rehearsal in addition to any songs that are part of an Excel cycle. The four songs will include two from our standard repertoire, one song from our Christmas repertoire and one song from the Community repertoire.

We wouldn't normally spend a great deal of time on these songs, usually just singing them through once or twice unless there are pressing reasons for doing more. If we sing them regularly enough, they don't get forgotten. However, members are expected to realise if they are making mistakes and to fix them.

Vocal Skills

We don't have any formal quality control on your vocal skills. If necessary, your section leader may address particular issues with you and we do have regular coaching from skilled and experienced external coaches. You are expected to learn from these events and to aim to improve your skills using the knowledge gained. Remember, it is always possible to do better.

Visual performance

Visual performance is a key element of our style. While we may not have planned 'choreography' for every song, you are expected to develop simple stage craft so that our performances are pleasant to watch and have visual meaning. Also, for the songs where there is planned choreography, there will be time allotted in the rehearsals for this and you should apply yourself to it just as much as to the singing.

In general, you may well be told many times to stand up straight and smile!

Catching up

General

You will have realised that, as new member, you have a lot of catching up to do. Primarily, you will be concerned with how you are going to learn all the songs in the repertoire but you probably also will have much to learn about the craft of singing in harmony.

You will realise as the weeks go by that, actually, we all have much to learn and, even when we've learned it, it is very easily forgotten! Every week's rehearsal is effectively a craft session in how to sing barbershop and you will learn the craft bit by bit, the same as everyone else.

Getting started on the songs

There are six songs that you must learn before you can join us on a singout. These are the songs that are most frequently used and currently are, in no particular order

Get happy
Crazy
It's almost like being in love / This can't be love medley
Over the rainbow
Choo, choo ch'boogie
The rose

Depending on your circumstances, you may be invited to join us at an upcoming competition. If you decide to do so, you will need to learn the two songs for that which probably will not be any of the six songs above. Also, joining us in contest does not short circuit the six song requirement for singouts, it just means that you'll have eight songs under your belt.

Generally speaking, six songs is not enough for an entire singout but we arrange things so that, once you've learned them, you'll be able to appear and sing with us for those songs.

You need to learn the songs using the music and resources available - either tapes, CDs or download from the website. You must submit recordings and pass all songs in the same way as described for the Excel programme. You can use the times when the songs appear as part of the revision schedule to record them. However, you can always ask your Section Leader if a particular song can be included one week just so that you can record it. If time permits, we try hard to accommodate these requests. Also, ask your Section Leader to go through a song you are trying to learn at a section rehearsal.

Once you have passed all six songs, your name will be added to the singout roster and your availability will be sought for any potential future singouts.

Learning the rest of the repertoire

Once you have learned the six 'starter' songs, you need to think about the rest of the repertoire.

In the meantime, it is possible that the chorus will have started one or more new songs that you will be learning at the same time.

Barring any advice from your Section Leader or the Musical Director to the contrary, it is a good idea to get the Christmas songs out of the way first - they are usually fairly simple to learn and we do a lot of singouts at Christmas time. Our repertoire of Christmas songs is relatively large and it is not possible to learn them all in a few weeks so leaving them until October or November is not a real option. Ultimately, you must record and pass them all in the same way as described for the Excel program.

Other songs from the standard repertoire can be learned when possible and as directed by your Section Leader or Musical Director. Again, they must ultimately be recorded and passed.

Public Performance

General

The Chorus regularly performs public engagements (we call them 'singouts') for a variety of functions. The frequency of these varies but November and December are usually very busy times with Christmas songs being heavily featured. They are not accepted unless a sufficient number of members can attend to make a balanced chorus of acceptable size.

The Performance Manager is responsible for accepting performance requests. Unless there is an over-riding reason why we should not accept a particular request (e.g. we are already performing that day) she will take a roll call at a Tuesday rehearsal.

Once you are on the singout roster, it is important to carry your diary with you so that you can respond to the roll call positively (whether the answer is yes or no). An "I'm not sure" response is not much help. The request will be accepted or not based on the response of chorus members.

You are expected to attend as many public performances as you can. They are our showcase and an important source of funds. Once you have given a positive response to a request, please do not change your mind or withdraw without a good reason and please notify your Section Leader. It does immense damage to the chorus reputation if we accept a singout and then cannot perform to our usual standard due to members not honouring their commitment.

Contest

Contests are usually only two songs and for any particular contest, you will be told which two songs we will be singing. Even if you are not yet on the singout roster, you may be invited to sing with us at contest if the Music Team thinks there is a reasonable chance that you will be able to learn the two songs in time.

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, if there is one, for the Preliminary round in April or May.

People

Chair: Seager Banks 020 8859 3518
Secretary Julia Chance 01689 818369+
Musical Director: Neil Watkins 01306 740245

Assistant Musical Director Joan Mattinson 020 8668 3856
Assistant Musical Director Kay Griggs-Wright 01306 740245

Tenor Section Leader Seager Banks 020 8859 3518
Lead Section Leader Kay Griggs-Wright 01306 740245
Baritone Section Leader Margaret Davies 020 8857 7215
Bass Section Leader Joan Mattinson 020 8668 3856