island soul choir

member handbook

— updated July 2025 —

who we are

Island Soul Choir is a community choir in its purest sense. The choir welcomes anyone who loves to sing. Members come from all over Vancouver Island, from Victoria to Port Hardy, and from Uclulet and Bamfield to Gabriola, Salt Spring, Quadra, Lasqueti and other neighbouring islands.

table of contents

who we are....1
- our mandate....1
- our core values....1
- our music director....2

becoming a choir member....2
- registration....2
- advance registration....2
- registration confirmation....2
- being on the waiting list....2

member fees....2
- creating a payment plan....2
- applying for a bursary....3
- refund policy....3

rehearsals....3
- welcoming new/past members....3
- rehearsal seating....3
- sectional rehearsals/getting support....3
- attendance....4

the choir's website....4
choir newsletters....4
music....4
a word about our repertoire....4
- additional music director responsibilities....5

conduct during rehearsals....5
soloists....5
concerts....5
- personal wellbeing on concert day....6
- leaving after the concert....6

concert wardrobe....6
- about our concert scarf....6

lost & found....6
privacy....6
communications practices....7
dealing with behaviour issues....7
leaving the choir....7
choir management framework....7
- the board....7
- portfolios....8
- role of the choir manager....8

The choir was founded by Ron Klusmeier and Brian Tate in August 2007 under the name Vancouver Island Gospel & World Music Choir. In August 2009, the choir changed its name to Island Soul Choir as part of incorporating itself as a non-profit society and assuming responsibility for its own management.

our mandate

Our mandate is to:

- Create a forum for people of all ages who reside on or near Vancouver Island to learn and perform soul music, which includes gospel, spirituals, world music, blues, pop, soul, R&B… basically any type of music that touches, moves or inspires the soul.
- Broaden and enhance public interest in and appreciation of soul music.

our core values

We have identified the following core values in order to make the choir an inclusive and welcoming community.

- **Respect:** We treat others as we want to be treated. Everyone is of equal status despite the varying musical skills among us or tenure with the choir.
- **Integrity:** We honour our commitment to be a member of the choir. We do what we say we will, and what we are asked to do, to benefit the choir.
- **Cooperation:** We comply with the choir's policies and practices, and instructions from the Music Director, Choir Manager and Stage Manager, and we help out to the extent we are able.
- **Collaboration:** We support one another and work together so we can be the best we can be.
- **Fun:** We enjoy the camaraderie of our community and the joy of our music.

We are a scent-free group. We ask that you DO NOT wear any fragrance on your body, hair or clothing to any choir gatherings—not only do we rehearse and perform in scent-free facilities, we can have members who are allergic to these odors.

our music director

Tom Arntzen became our Music Director in July 2024 when Karla Mundy stepped down after 12 years with the choir.

An established artist, Tom wears many hats: vocalist, keyboardist, composer, arranger, producer, musical director, teacher, and actor. He can sing and play any style of music, and has made a living performing and recording for over 40 years.

Tom relishes taking on musical challenges and meeting and exceeding expectations. His 13 years as a classroom music specialist with children aged 5–13, some of whom had special needs, greatly influenced his approach to musical direction and education. He is always respectful, inclusive, and encouraging, and he employs best practices to help musicians reach their greatest potential.

becoming a choir member

The choir is open to people of all ages who reside on or near Vancouver Island and who love to sing. No audition is required, and you don't need previous choir experience. With a choir our size, there's definitely safety in numbers for newcomers to find their singing voice.

Membership in the choir is done on a session-by-session basis. We have two sessions each year; typically:

- the Spring session goes from early February to late May, and
- the Fall session goes from late August to late November.

registration

Registration begins usually 2–3 weeks before the start of each session; a reminder email with details about how to register is sent out 5–7 days in advance, to all past choir members and everyone who is interested in joining.

All registrations are handled online only through the choir's website. No registrations are accepted in person.

We accept up to 140 in-person singers each session; we also accept registrations from people who want to be Zoom-only members, without any limits.

There are also limits for each in-person section so our sound doesn't get out of balance. Once we reach any in-person sectional limit, a waiting list will be created for that section.

advance registration

We may accept up to 100 in-person registrations (with limits by section) in advance of the general registration.

To qualify for this advance registration, a member must:

- have completed the immediately previous session, or
- have attended rehearsals in the immediately previous session but was unable to complete the session due to a last-minute unforeseen situation (e.g., illness, injury, surgery, funeral or death in family).

registration confirmation

Once you complete the online registration, you will receive an email from the Choir Manager: it will either confirm your membership in the choir, or advise that you have been placed on the waiting list.

being on the waiting list

All is not lost if you are on the waiting list! It is quite common for us to receive cancellations from members who discover they have a schedule conflict, or just change their mind. Less common, members may not pay their member fee before the deadline and thus forfeit their spot in the choir.

The Choir Manager can fill these spaces with people on the waiting list, while maintaining the balance of singers by section. Anyone who comes off the waiting list is able to start by the second rehearsal at the latest, and has until then to pay their member fee.

The waiting list is discontinued as of the second rehearsal each session.

member fees

Each member is required to pay a fee each session to cover the choir's operating costs, such as:

- Music Director and Choir Manager fees.
- Rehearsal venue rental.
- BCCF membership dues and BC non-profit society fees.
- Insurance and accounting fees.
- Rehearsal tracks and CDs, concert CDs, and sheet-music rights.

Fees are established and published in each session's **rehearsal & concert schedule**, and are payable after your registration has been confirmed. Instructions for payment are provided on the members-only page of the choir's website.

To maintain your place in the choir, you must pay your member fee no later than the deadline; otherwise, your place in the choir will be forfeited, and you may be replaced by someone on the waiting list.

creating a payment plan

If you cannot pay your member fee on time, you will need to contact the Choir Manager before the paymennt due date to set up an acceptable payment plan. To be "acceptable", your plan must have specific

dates and amounts identified, and your fee must be paid in full by the 5th rehearsal. We are very flexible!

applying for a bursary

If you cannot afford to pay your member fee even with a payment plan, you may apply by email to the Choir Manager for a bursary. You will be expected to pay at least half of the fee, and you must apply for a bursary before the payment due date. If need be, you can set up a payment plan for the balance.

refund policy

Once paid, member fees are not refundable unless you are precluded from continuing to the end of the session due to a significant health issue or major unforeseen circumstance (either yourself or an immediate family member). In this case, we will refund the unused portion of your fees as of the date you advise us. Unused fees cannot be carried forward to a future session.

rehearsals

We hold five 3-hour rehearsals each session, typically on Saturday afternoons. A separate **rehearsal & concert schedule** is published each session to supplement this handbook, with the rehearsal and concert dates and venues, and other details specific to the session.

There is a 15-minute break during rehearsals. If you want to eat a snack, be sure to eat it only in designated areas, and be aware there may be members close by with food/nut allergies. ***Please DO NOT eat in the sanctuary! Only water may be consumed there.***

During rehearsals, we all wear lanyard-style nametags which indicate not just your name but also your member status (new, from last session, or rejoined from a prior session). The titles for people who hold a position within the choir are also shown on their nametags. As you mix and mingle throughout the session, you can use these nametag cues to help you as you connect with, and meet new, people.

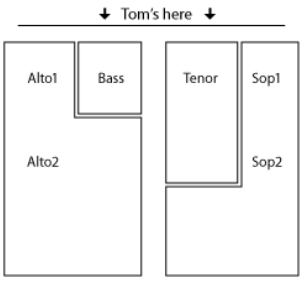
Please pick up your nametag when you arrive for each rehearsal, and hand it back as you leave.

welcoming new/past members

Before the first rehearsal each session, our Orientation Coordinator will be in touch by phone with each of our new and past members, to welcome them into (back to) the choir and answer any questions they may have.

rehearsal seating

We do not assign seating like typical choirs. We do, however, have a few guidelines that we ask you to follow:



- We sit in S-A-T-B sections, with the soprano and alto sections split into high and low parts. Please be sure you're sitting together with people who are singing the same part as you.
- Taller people should sit towards the back and outer sides within their section, while shorter people should sit closer to the front of their section.
- Be flexible and welcoming as people are looking for a seat, especially our new and past members.
- ***Our Stage Manager is available if you need help finding a suitable seat or if you need special seating arrangements.***
- We encourage you to mix up your seating every so often to hear the song from a different perspective. Not only will you get to meet more members, you never know who you may be standing beside during the concert.
- Wherever you sit, be sure you can see the Music Director when we are seated. If you can't see him, please move so you can.
- Please sit as far forward, and as close to other singers, as you are comfortable. The closer we sit together, the better you can hear other singers in your section to help you learn your part faster; it also helps the Music Director because we make a better sound together.
- You are responsible for taking care of your personal wellbeing. If you need/want to sit or stand while others are doing the opposite, you are free to do so. If you'd rather stand during rehearsal, please stand along the side or at the back of the sanctuary so that you don't distract the other members.

sectional rehearsals/getting support

Given our geographical diversity, holding section-wide sectional rehearsals is not a viable option.

If you need help between choir rehearsals to help you learn your part, it is up to you to get the help you need. You have a number of options available:

- Listen to the rehearsal tracks and Zoom rehearsal recordings.
- Phone someone you know in your section to talk/sing through your problem areas.
- Organize a rehearsal with members from your section who live nearby: you can use the choir directory on the members-only page of the website to make your invitations. You can use the rehearsal tracks for the accompaniment.
- If you still need help, contact the Choir Manager.

attendance

You are expected to attend rehearsals either live (in person or by Zoom), or by watching the rehearsal recordings, and to practise between rehearsals, so that you are prepared to perform in the concert.

For each rehearsal (including the stage rehearsal), please remember to check in at the welcome table so that we can record your attendance. If you are attending via Zoom, please post your name in the chat room so that we can record your attendance.

the choir's website

The members-only page of the choir's website, islandsoulchoir.com/members, is your "go-to" source for all the latest information and resources. It contains, among other things:

- How and when to pay your member fee.
- Sheet music, rehearsal tracks, and other learning resources.
- Zoom links for the next rehearsal.
- Links to all choir newsletters issued during the current session.
- The choir directory, this handbook, and the rehearsal & concert schedule for the current session.
- Contact information for all choir-management personnel.
- The directors handbook that outlines what's involved in being on our Board of directors.
- Annual reports and society information.

Please take the time to familiarize yourself with all the information available on the members page, and make it a practice to check it before each rehearsal and any time you have a question about anything—usually the answer you need is already on the website!

The members page is password-protected, and the password changes each session. **Be sure to make a note of the members' website access info when your membership is confirmed at the beginning of each session; you can also find the access info at the bottom of each newsletter.**

choir newsletters

Please be sure to save manager@islandsoulchoir.com to your email contact list, so that our newsletters are not tagged as spam/junk.

You can expect to receive, at the very least, a newsletter the week before each rehearsal, and another, within the week after each rehearsal. Please be sure to read these newsletters ***in full,*** in order to stay up to date.

If you don't receive our emails, please be in touch with the Choir Manager to resolve the matter. You can still stay up to date by using the links on the website's members page.

music

The choir performs all concerts "off book"; i.e., you have to memorize all the music and lyrics.

Sheet music is posted as pdfs on the members-only page of our website, for you to download and print; we don't print it for you! In true gospel/world music tradition, we may learn some songs by ear, for which only lyrics sheets will be provided.

We may also provide lyric sheets of songs that have a lot of "twists and turns" to help guide you throught it from beginning to end.

Bring a pen or pencil to rehearsals, so that you can take notes of the Music Director's instructions, song form, and any changes made to the music—don't trust your memory! These changes are key to our concert performance!

We provide rehearsal tracks for each of the parts to help you learn your music between rehearsals. You can either:

- receive a CD at the first rehearsal, with the rehearsal tracks for the part you select when you register, or
- opt out of getting this CD, and instead, use the rehearsal tracks available on the members-only page of our website and/or our Google Drive.

Please remember that the rehearsal tracks may not necessarily reflect the final form of all songs; you must integrate what we learn at rehearsals.

Our rehearsals are recorded via Zoom and then posted to our website, so that you can hear everything that was sung and said during the rehearsal—this is an invaluable tool if you have to miss a rehearsal or need to get clarity about anything.

We may also post audio rehearsal recordings of a run-through of each song in their final form, to help you with your final practice.

You are always welcome to bring your own recording device to record rehearsals for your own use.

a word about our repertoire

Our Music Director has sole responsibility for selecting the choir's repertoire, keeping the following considerations in mind:

- We have just 5 rehearsals each session to become "performance ready" on all our music.

- There is a wide range of choral skills among the membership, from novice on up.
- Members need to learn to sing everything off-book. This can be particularly challenging for novice singers.
- Soloists and small groups are integral to the style of music we sing. Tom needs to balance the number of songs that can feature these singers with the available rehearsal time and the skill of the potential soloists.

What we've learned over the years is that:

- We have to limit our repertoire to 10–11 songs each session so that everyone can be ready to perform the music successfully at the concert.
- We need to repeat 2–4 songs from either the last or previous sessions to ease the learning burden; the members who have sung these songs before help to boost the learning process of other singers.

additional music director responsibilities

Not only is Tom responsible for selecting our music and providing the learning resources, he is responsible for:

- Providing musical leadership and direction for the choir during rehearsals and concerts.
- Developing and selecting our soloists for concerts.
- Hiring musicians for our concert, and rehearsing with them before the concert.
- Hiring a rehearsal accompanist at his discretion.
- Setting rehearsal dates, and selecting and hiring concert guests in collaboration with the Choir Manager.

conduct during rehearsals

- With a group our size, it is ***absolutely essential*** for us all to be respectful of both our Music Director and our fellow choir members by being attentive at all times to the instructions being given. That means, **NO TALKING/CHATTING with nearby members during rehearsals while Tom is instructing other members!**
  - Nine times out of ten, when Tom is working with one section, he is saying something that all sections need to learn.
  - Many of us don't hear as well as we used to, and unnecessary chatter interferes with what we can hear.
  - Having to speak above the chatter simply wears the Music Director out. It takes a lot of extra physical, mental and emotional effort for him to remain focused and be heard above unnecessary chatter, even with a microphone.
- Whenever the Music Director is working with a particular section, it is NOT an opportunity for you to sing your part too, even quietly! He needs to hear only what it is going on in that section, and fix it as necessary—if you're singing a different part, it makes things much more difficult for him and the singers he's working with; it also slows our overall progress.
- Punctuality is key: our time with Tom is limited. Please arrive early enough so that you can do all that you need to do beforehand and be seated, ready to go, on time at the start of each rehearsal. Also be back in your seats after our breaks so that we can restart as soon as the break is over.

soloists

Our soloists come from within the choir, and solo parts require varying skill levels. Whether you are an experienced soloist, or you've been toying with the idea of giving it a try for the first time, this choir is the best place to "step up to the mic": we are the perfect safe and supportive space.

Soloist rehearsals are held before each of our rehearsals. Concert tryouts are held at the third rehearsal, after which the Music Director will make his selections for the concert; the selected soloists will then rehearse with the choir during our remaining rehearsals.

If you'd like to see what the soloist thing is all about or just want to come to sing the choir parts while the soloists do their thing (and get in some extra practice), you're more than welcome to attend the soloists' sessions. Please remember that this is the soloists' time: please be quiet, and hold any questions about your choir part until the main rehearsal.

concerts

At the end of each session, we produce a concert at The Port Theatre in Nanaimo on a Sunday afternoon, with a stage rehearsal earlier in the day.

Guest musicians are featured during the opening set. If possible, we may have the guest join the choir for the concert finale.

We also have a band of professional musicians accompany the choir; we rehearse with them just once during the stage rehearsal before the concert.

Audio recordings of our concerts are distributed at no cost to members at subsequent rehearsals and as an mp3 download from the website.

The Choir Manager will provide a detailed newsletter with the concert day's timeline and activities: please be sure to be where you need to be when you need to be there so that the day can go off without any hitches.

personal wellbeing on concert day

We understand and appreciate that you may not be able to stand for our entire stage rehearsal and concert. You can absolutely sit as much as you need to, in order to take care of your personal wellbeing: you just need to bring your own stool. Be sure to write your name on it somewhere, and remember to take it home at the end of the day.

leaving after the concert

We are required to exit the backstage area as quickly as possible after the concert, so that The Port's staff can finish work. The more you linger, the longer they're "on the clock".

As soon as the show is over, your first priority is to grab your belongings from the dressing room and green room ***before*** you go to the lobby to meet your family and friends. Once you leave the backstage area, there's no coming back!

We will do a backstage sweep to collect any forgotten items (which is the theatre's preference). You'll have a better chance of getting any lost items back from us than from The Port's lost & found office!

concert wardrobe

Our standard concert attire is a **solid, matte all-black outfit, from the neckline to the floor**—not grey, not navy, not faded, and nothing shiny or glittery about it.

- Women can wear a dress, or a blouse/top with either slacks or a skirt; there are no restrictions on sleeve or skirt/dress length.
- Men can wear a black shirt (long- or short-sleeved) and pants; black ties are optional.
- NO jeans or T-shirts, please!
- Socks/pantyhose/knee-highs must also be black; ***absolutely NO bare legs or toes!***
- Shoes must be black and, equally important, comfortable so that you can wear them throughout the performance.
- Women may "pump up" their usual makeup. They may also wear jewelry to add a bit of light-catching sparkle, as long as it is consistent with our overall look.

Your black outfit is accessorized by a colourful concert scarf.

When you join the choir, you will need to purchase a scarf for $10. Please be sure that your scarf is freshly ironed before concerts; you can wrap it around an empty toilet-paper roll to keep it smooth while you transport it to the concert. As a back-up, an iron and ironing board will be available in the theatre's green room.

about our concert scarf

Our scarf fabric is an African kente fabric. It was originally chosen by our founding Music Director Brian Tate and choir administrator Ron Klusmeier for the choir's first concert in June 2008, to honour the African roots of the music we sing. Many genres of North American music, including gospel, spirituals, blues, jazz and rumba, are derived to varying degrees from African musical traditions brought to the Americas by enslaved Africans. These rhythms and sounds have subsequently been adapted into newer genres like rock, pop, soul, and rhythm and blues.

While kente cloth was originally worn only by kings, queens and important figures of state during ceremonial events and special occasions, it is now worn worldwide as a symbol of African heritage and pride in African ancestry, and it is worn on a more widespread basis to commemorate special occasions, such as church celebrations and graduation ceremonies; for Juneteenth, Kwanzaa and other holidays; and as a means of connecting to and recognizing African origins.

lost & found

As sure as death and taxes, things get left behind after our rehearsals, especially music books and water bottles. Please put your name on ***everything*** you bring to rehearsal, and take a look around your space before you leave, for items that may have slipped from view.

Items that we find while re-setting the church can be claimed at a subsequent rehearsal from the welcome table (they are kept between rehearsals by the Choir Manager). For items we don't find, you'll have to contact St. Philip's administrator directly (admin@stphiliplantzville.ca).

As mentioned earlier, if you forget anything at the theatre after the concert, contact the Choir Manager first. If she doesn't have it, you can contact The Port Theatre Admin Office (250-754-4555).

Unclaimed items at the end of the session may be donated to a local thrift shop or thrown out.

privacy

The personal information that we collect when you register is used to:

- Track and support your participation in the choir.
- Email you about choir activities (see our communications practices below).
- Create a member directory that's posted on the password-protected members page of the website, as a resource for choir members who are looking for

support with learning their parts, carpooling, and/or billeting on concert weekends.

Every effort is taken to protect the privacy of all members.

- You have the option to withhold any or all of your personal data from the member directory.
- Other than the uses noted above, information from the database is not shared with any other person, group or organization.

Any questions about privacy should be forwarded to the Choir Manager.

communications practices

We regularly email:

- All active choir members in the current session to keep them up to date, as needed, about what's happening that session. We expect all active members to stay up-to-date by reading these emails completely. Links for these newsletters are also posted on the members page as a back-up option.
- All active and inactive choir members, as well as people who are interested in joining the choir, to invite them to register each session.
- All inactive choir members, people interested in joining the choir, and people on our patrons list:
  - When we have determined the basic details of our concerts, to "save the date".
  - When concert tickets go on sale, with instructions on how to buy their tickets.
  - Within 2 weeks of our concerts, with a last-minute reminder to buy tickets.

Anyone on these mailing lists can unsubscribe from these mailings at any time.

dealing with behaviour issues

Disrespectful or offensive behaviour, including bullying and harassment, is not tolerated. Intent does not determine whether behaviour is acceptable; a person cannot excuse their behaviour simply by saying they did not intend it.

If you experience or observe any behaviour that contravenes our core values or member responsibilities as outlined in this handbook, you have the right to respectfully tell the other person that their behaviour is unwelcome and ask them to stop. If they don't stop, we encourage you to report the situation to the Choir Manager or President as soon as possible, providing as many details as you can.

Once a complaint is received, you can expect that it will be dealt with in a timely, sensitive, consistent and confidential manner. No complaint will be dismissed or downplayed, nor will you be told to deal with it personally.

A grievance committee will deal with your complaint reasonably and in good faith. They will interview you and any individuals who can provide relevant information about your complaint. Their investigation will be fair, impartial and focused on finding facts, and once they make a decision, they will inform all parties.

If their investigation substantiates your complaint, the grievance committee will determine the appropriate remedy; it may include a reprimand, requiring an oral or written apology to the offended member, suspension and/or permanent expulsion from the choir.

Any director who is alleged to have contravened our values must immediately take a leave of absence from the Board until the matter is satisfactorily resolved. Any director who is found to have contravened our values must resign from the Board.

No member is allowed to interfere with the resolution of a complaint, retaliate against anyone for filing a complaint, or file an unfounded complaint.

leaving the choir

If something comes up that will prevent you from completing the current session, please take a moment to let the Choir Manager know. That way, she won't continue to pester you with emails about the rest of the session, and we can better plan our concerts by knowing how many members we will be dealing with on-stage. If you qualify, she will also issue a refund for any unused fees.

If you don't plan to return to the choir, you may sell your scarf back to the choir for the $10 you originally paid, or you can donate it. This way, we can reduce the number of new scarves that need to be produced each session.

choir management framework

The choir is managed by Island Soul Choir Society, a non-profit society registered under the laws of the Province of British Columbia.

the board

The society's board of directors includes:

- 3 officers: the president, vice president, and secretary-treasurer, who each serve a 2-year term.
- Up to 8 directors at large, who each serve a 1-year term.

At the Annual General Meeting each year, elections are held to fill open director positions. These openings are filled from among our active members.

portfolios

Currently, there are 4 portfolios that either a director or member may take on or be assigned to:

1. Stage Manager: Oversees the choir's logistics at rehearsals and concerts.
2. Scarf Coordinator: Oversees producing and selling concert scarves.
3. Orientation Coordinator: Oversees welcoming new members each session and answering any questions they may have.
4. Merchandising Coordinator: Oversees ordering, selling and managing inventory of choir-branded merchandise.

The work involved with each of these portfolios is completed in collaboration with the Choir Manager.

Portfolios may be created, amended and discontinued as needed by the Board.

role of the choir manager

The Choir Manager is the chief executive officer of the society and is hired as an independent contractor (not an employee) of the choir. She is responsible for managing all of the choir's day-to-day operations, so that the society consistently achieves its purpose and financial objectives, and abides by its bylaws.

For more details about the choir's management and/or what it takes to be Board director, please check out the Directors Handbook on the members page of our website.