



**BROOKLYN
YOUTH CHORUS**

UPDATED: April 11, 2026

TRAINING DIVISIONS MEMBERSHIP HANDBOOK

Pre-Preparatory

Preparatory I

Preparatory II

Pre-Teen I

Pre-Teen II

Teen

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ABOUT BROOKLYN YOUTH CHORUS

BROOKLYN YOUTH CHORUS's Grammy Award-winning ensemble, led by Founder & Artistic Director Dianne Berkun Menaker, is one of the most highly regarded ensembles in the country and has stretched the artistic boundaries for the youth chorus.

Hailed by The New York Times as "a polished ensemble of miniature professionals," the Chorus has performed with acclaimed conductors including **Alan Gilbert, Jaap van Zweden, Marin Alsop, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Gustavo Dudamel, Joe Hisaishi, Reinbert de Leeuw, and Lorin Maazel**. The Chorus has also collaborated with an impressive range of organizations and artists including the **New York Philharmonic, London Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Kronos Quartet, International Contemporary Ensemble, David Byrne, Arcade Fire, Shara Nova, Sir Elton John, and Barbra Streisand**.

In 2002, the Chorus had its debut with the **New York Philharmonic** in **John Adams's On the Transmigration of Souls**, the recording for which the Chorus won a **Grammy Award in 2005**. Recordings of the Chorus have been featured in major motion pictures, commercials, and live events, and the Chorus has appeared on numerous recordings with artists such as **The National, Bon Iver, Fatoumata Diawara, Tyondai Braxton, Philip Glass, Wye Oak, Cécile McLorin Salvant, and Grizzly Bear**.

Under the leadership of Dianne Berkun Menaker, Brooklyn Youth Chorus has developed an active commissioning program. Born out of a desire to showcase the Chorus's versatility and uniquely beautiful sound and the Chorus has collaborated with some of the most important composers of our time, resulting in more than 120 original works and world premieres by award-winning contemporary composers, including **Caroline Shaw, Tania León, David Lang, Julia Wolfe, Nico Muhly, Angélica Negrón, Bryce Dessner, Richard Reed Parry, Paola Prestini, Nathalie Joachim, Paul Moravec, Toshi Reagon, Alev Lenz, Anna Clyne, Aleksandra Vrebalov, John King, and William Britelle**.

Brooklyn Youth Chorus has garnered a strong reputation as an arts producer, having developed numerous original choral/theater productions for the stage, with the most recent production, **Silent Voices: Lovestate**, premiering Off-Broadway at The New Victory Theater in 2019. Previous productions include the first two installments of the inclusive, social justice-oriented **Silent Voices** series (BAM 2017; National Sawdust 2018); **Black Mountain Songs** (BAM Next Wave Festival 2014); and **Tell the Way** (St. Ann's Warehouse 2011). The Chorus has released two albums through New Amsterdam Records—**Silent Voices** (2018) and **Black Mountain Songs** (2017)—and has appeared at important contemporary music festivals including the **Ecstatic Music Festival, MusicNOW, 21c Liederabend, Barbican Mountain and Waves Festival, and the PROTOTYPE Festival**.

Founded in 1992, Brooklyn Youth Chorus has served over 10,000 students through its core after-school and public-school outreach programs. The Chorus's professional faculty teach a

wide range of repertoire and styles using founding artistic director Dianne Berkun Menaker's proven Cross-Choral Training® method, emphasizing healthy and versatile vocal technique, music theory, sight-singing, and ear training. Classes take place at their Cobble Hill headquarters and neighborhood locations in Bedford-Stuyvesant and Brooklyn Heights.

CURRICULUM

Brooklyn Youth Chorus students are trained using the Cross-Choral Training® method, a proven holistic and experiential approach to teaching voice and musicianship in a group setting, designed by Founder & Artistic Director Dianne Berkun Menaker. It is a functional voice training based on voice science and health and a comprehensive approach to building sight-reading and music literacy skills.

Our goal is to develop each singer's full musical potential as the group delivers polished and authentic performances across a range of genres and styles.

AREAS OF FOCUS

With a scope and pace appropriate for the ages and abilities of our singers, all students receive instruction in four key areas:

- Voice training—vocal development and applied technique
- Musicianship and music literacy—rhythmic and tonal elements, ear training, theory and harmony
- Social Emotional Learning (SEL)—self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship skills
- Performance elements and historical context—accepted performance practices for the style, genre and period of the repertoire and composers studied

We also focus on developing focus, listening skills and the art of collaborating as a group—skills vital to performing well in rehearsals, on professional concert stages, and in life.

VOICE

Based on traditional classical vocal pedagogy, vocal health and function, our voice training is also age appropriate. With a strong grounding in voice science, we safely expand the technical skill and capacity of singers by developing a range of vocal qualities including those appropriate for classical, contemporary, folk, musical theater, gospel, pop and jazz styles.

MUSICIANSHIP

Experiential and sequential, our musical training is based on a spiral curriculum that expands and deepens the knowledge and skills learned each year. Our youngest singers begin with a strong grounding in tonal music, basic rhythms and meters, practiced in the context of the performance repertoire. As the singers advance, studies expand to encompass a variety of sight-singing systems like tonic solfege, metric counting, scale degrees, and absolute pitch names. More complex tone sets, modes, meters and harmonic analysis are introduced later. The result: our singers gain the knowledge and confidence needed to rehearse and perform with the world's greatest conductors and musicians.

MEMBERSHIP PRINCIPLES

ARTISTIC COMMITMENT

Brooklyn Youth Chorus is a performance-based music education organization whose upper level divisions also function as professional performing ensembles in the community. Being a member of Brooklyn Youth Chorus means participating in the fun of making music. It also means accepting the responsibilities to yourself and to your fellow choristers that stem from your membership in a renowned choral group. Our reputation and our ability to attract audiences, performances, and future choristers are based on providing a consistent artistic product. We can maintain our high artistic standards only if parents and choristers honor their responsibilities.

BEHAVIORAL STANDARDS

Brooklyn Youth Chorus strives to create a positive and stimulating environment for its choristers and to foster an atmosphere of mutual respect and community. At no time will Brooklyn Youth Chorus tolerate rudeness, foul language, physical or verbal abuse, bullying/intimidation, theft, or failure to comply with safety guidelines. Alert attention, enthusiasm, and cooperation are expected during all chorus activities.

COMMITMENT TO EQUITY & INCLUSION

At Brooklyn Youth Chorus, we believe that every voice matters.

We strive to actively build a community that is dedicated to realizing the full potential of each chorister.

We stand for an absolute respect for each individual; an appreciation and understanding of the broad spectrum of all our differences - be they cultural, racial, religious, socio-economic, or based on sexual identity, gender, physical or intellectual ability - and the ability to experience bonds of friendship through the joy of music.

We celebrate open mindedness, and critical thinking, and seek to create opportunities for students to explore and embrace these important values together.

We recognize that a diverse community is an asset that must be continually cared for, preserved, and enhanced, with constant attention, for the benefit of all its members.

COMMUNICATION WITH BROOKLYN YOUTH CHORUS

Brooklyn Youth Chorus is a very active organization and you can expect frequent communications about schedules and upcoming events. Email is our primary form of communication. We require that all families have an email address in order to receive up-to-date information. In the event that a family does not have computer access, it is the responsibility of the parent to contact their Program Manager for weekly updates.

The most recent emails and schedules are also available for review any time through the **Members Area** of the Brooklyn Youth Chorus website.

Prior to every scheduled performance or event, you will receive an email with details, including schedule, venue, ticket and box office information, as well as uniform descriptions, directions and meal/snack needs.

WEBSITE

The Brooklyn Youth Chorus website, brooklynyouthchorus.org, has a **Members Area** with information specific to active choristers. In this area, you will find up-to-date information on chorister schedules, weekly division memos, performance event masters, registration documents, the complete Members Handbook, photographs, and general information about the program.

When setting up an email address on the Members Area for the first time, you will be prompted to choose a password. You may change or update this password at any time.

PROGRAM AND REHEARSAL MANAGERS

The Program Manager is your primary contact while your child is enrolled at Brooklyn Youth Chorus. You should direct all communications toward the Program Manager, including questions and/or concerns regarding absences, lateness, rehearsal schedule, uniforms, and upcoming events.

The Brooklyn Youth Chorus Program Manager is **Angela Batchelor**, and she can be reached at abatchelor@brooklynyouthchorus.org.

Rehearsal Managers assist the conductor in supervising rehearsals. They will report all activity to the Program Manager to communicate to families. Though your weekly in-person communication may be with your Rehearsal Manager, please refer to the Program Manager for any details. Should an issue arise *during* rehearsal, please call our main phone number 718.243.9447

DIVISION AND REHEARSAL INFORMATION

The program year runs from September through May. Brooklyn Youth Chorus Training Divisions are organized by age first, to support healthy vocal development at different stages of growth and maturity. Within these age-based Divisions, students' section assignments reflect their current level of skill and experience. Our most advanced students are invited to join one of the three Performing Ensembles. While all Divisions perform at Brooklyn Youth Chorus' winter and spring season concerts, the advanced performing ensembles perform in the majority of contracted and professional engagements.

The number and length of rehearsals, as well as the number of performances each year, increase as a chorister progresses through the program.

TRAINING DIVISIONS

- Pre-Prep (ages 5-6)
 - Pre-Preparatory: 45 minutes, 1 day / week

- Preparatory (ages 7-9)
 - Preparatory I: 1 hour, 1 day / week
 - Preparatory II: 1 hour, 1 day / week

- Pre-Teen (ages 10-12)
 - Pre-Teen I: 1.5 hours, 1 day / week
 - Pre-Teen II: 2 hours, 1 day / week

- Teen (ages 13+)
 - Teen: 2 hours, 1 day / week

PERFORMING ENSEMBLES

- Junior Ensemble (ages 12+)
 - 2 hours, 2 days / week

- Bass Ensemble (tenors and basses with changed voices, ages 12+)
 - 2 hours, 2 days / week

- Concert Ensemble (ages 13+)
 - 2 hours and 15 minutes, 3 days / week

COMBINED REHEARSALS

All training division levels have two or more class sections that rehearse separately each week. Once in the fall semester and twice in the spring semester, in preparation for culminating performances, a rehearsal combining class sections is scheduled to prepare for singing together as one larger ensemble. These rehearsals are scheduled at the beginning of the year

and required as they prepare students to sing together as a larger group. Choristers who miss the combined rehearsal, without giving prior notice, may not be permitted to perform.

MAKE UP REHEARSALS

Because training division levels rehearse in multiple class sections, it is possible for choristers to make up a missed class by attending the other class section rehearsal. Make-up rehearsals are available after registration closes. Choristers who wish to make up a rehearsal must contact the Program Manager to determine if space is available that week.

TECH REHEARSALS

Tech Rehearsals usually take place the same day as an upcoming concert, and chorister attendance is essential because it is the only time choristers rehearse in the performance venue prior to the concert. Tech Rehearsals are mandatory, and choristers who miss this rehearsal may be asked not to perform in the concert. Exceptions to this rule are rare but may be granted on a case-by-case basis. If there is a conflict with the tech rehearsal schedule, please notify the Program Manager immediately. Also note, choristers are not required to wear their uniform for the tech rehearsal unless otherwise noted.

CONCERT INFORMATION

Concerts for Training Divisions fall into three categories: Brooklyn Youth Chorus self-produced concerts, contract performances, and outreach concerts.

SELF-PRODUCED CONCERTS

Brooklyn Youth Chorus manages all aspects of the production from publicity to ticket sales and performance logistics. All Brooklyn Youth Chorus divisions perform in these annual concerts—*Holiday Harmonies* and *Spring Sings*. Parent volunteers are recruited to help staff these events.

Holiday Harmonies takes place each year in mid-December at the end of the fall concert cycle, and *Spring Sings* takes place each year in mid-May at the end of the spring concert cycle. Specific information about location, exact dates, call and performance times will be sent via email prior to the concert.

CONTRACT PERFORMANCES

Contract performances are all engagements sponsored or presented by an organization other than Brooklyn Youth Chorus. These engagements occur throughout the year, primarily for the Performing Ensembles, and include appearances with major symphony orchestras, professional recording artists, and performances at various arts festivals, civic, corporate or charity events. More details will be sent in a memo regarding this type of event if your division is asked to participate in a performance of this type.

OUTREACH CONCERTS

Brooklyn Youth Chorus often performs in public school outreach concerts to bring our special gift of music to children throughout the borough, to support public school music programs, and to recruit new choristers for our program. More details will be sent in a memo regarding this type of event if your division is asked to participate in a performance of this type.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Although chorus is a group activity, successful concerts and chorister progress are dependent on each chorister's active participation and best effort at every rehearsal. Choristers are expected to attend all rehearsals and performances scheduled for their division from September through May.

While Brooklyn Youth Chorus recognizes that some absences will be necessary, our absence policy is designed to maintain the artistic integrity of the Chorus while allowing choristers and families room to balance their busy lives and schedules.

DISCRETIONARY ABSENCES

Division/Level	Fall Point Allowance	Spring Point Allowance	Points for Full Absence	Points for late arrival/ early dismissal of 15-29 min.	Points for late arrival/ early dismissal of 30 min. or more
Pre-Preparatory	2.5	4	1	.5	1
Preparatory	2.5	4	1	.5	1
Pre-Teen I	2.5	4	1	.5	1
Pre-Teen II	2.5	4	1	.25	.5
Teen	2.5	4	1	.25	.5

A limited number of *discretionary* absences are allowed for choristers each concert cycle (fall/spring) to cover absences due to illness, school conflicts, family commitments, transportation emergencies, etc. Discretionary absences work on a point system with a full point charged for each full rehearsal absence and partial points charged for late arrivals and early dismissals.

Participation in the annual *Holiday Harmonies* and *Spring Sings* concert series is an important milestone in choristers' training and is mandatory. In the rare case where circumstances make attendance at concert tech rehearsals or performances impossible, a chorister is expected to inform the Program Manager. Please note that choristers who miss concert tech rehearsals may not be permitted to perform in the concert. Notification of absences can be given by email or phone and should include an explanation of the absence.

As a chorister approaches the maximum number of absences for a semester, a parent or guardian will be notified. Choristers may be asked to leave the program for the remainder of the program year if absences exceed the maximum allowed. NOTE: Make-up classes are available. See above for more specific details about make-up classes.

OPERATING PROCEDURES

ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES

Choristers are expected to arrive 10 minutes prior to the start time of their rehearsal to check in with the Rehearsal Manager, collect and organize music and materials, and settle into their places so the rehearsal can begin on time. Choristers may not be dropped off more than 10 minutes prior to their rehearsal unless they are attending an elective class. Choristers who arrive late miss the vocal warm-up which are critical for the development of young singers.

LATE PICK-UPS

Choristers are expected to be picked up at the stated dismissal time. The Chorus maintains a 20-minute grace period in instances when pick-up is delayed. Repeated abuses of this grace period will result in dismissal from the Chorus. For older children, parents should identify an alternate waiting spot in the neighborhood for occasions when pick-up may be delayed beyond the grace period.

FACILITIES

The Brooklyn Youth Chorus lobby waiting area and facilities are intended for use by choristers who are waiting for a rehearsal or a class to begin and for their family or guardian. At no time can siblings or other children not attending Brooklyn Youth Chorus classes be in the building unsupervised. Parents and guardians are asked to wait outside or in the lobby for dismissal. Please note there is no waiting area for families on the second floor. Parents are asked to please drop-off and pick-up their children outside or from the first-floor lobby area. Specific details regarding similar policies and procedures will be sent to families regarding rehearsals that take place at locations other than Brooklyn Youth Chorus HQ in an email memo. All parents must sign-in at the front desk with a valid ID to access areas past the lobby.

TRANSPORTATION

Parents are responsible for all transportation arrangements to and from Chorus and the sponsored performances and events. Transportation details for performances and events will be communicated in your emails and will also be accessible on the Chorus website.

LATE ARRIVAL FOR CONCERTS

Choristers who arrive late to concert performances without prior notice and approval will have missed critical direction and warm-ups and may not be permitted to perform.

OFFICE HOURS

Brooklyn Youth Chorus building hours are 11:00 am to 7:15 pm from Monday through Friday and Saturdays 9:30 am to 4:30 pm during the fall and spring. Please note that these are general hours of operation for office business, but staff members may vary their hours. All staff members are always available by email or voicemail. You will find email addresses and staff telephone extensions at the end of the handbook.

BYC DRESS STANDARDS

All Brooklyn Youth Chorus dress standards reflect expectations in accordance with the principles that:

- Students have the right to make choices about their dress and to feel comfortable in what they wear
- Students have the responsibility to respect the rights of others and support a positive and safe shared environment

REHEARSALS

Choristers may feel free to select their own attire at regular rehearsals in accordance with the above guidelines.

TECH, DRESS, AND SHARED REHEARSALS - PROFESSIONAL DRESS STANDARDS

When singers appear as representatives of Brooklyn Youth Chorus for dress and tech rehearsals and sessions with other artists or professional collaborators both in BYC spaces and at outside venues, choristers must adhere to the Brooklyn Youth Chorus Professional Dress Standards as outlined below. Any time BYC Professional Dress Standards are required it will be communicated to singers in advance.

Brooklyn Youth Chorus Professional Dress Standards:

Students may wear well-fitting pants, skirts or dresses of their choosing with the following noted exceptions. Students must wear both a top and a bottom but are not permitted to wear:

- undergarments or bra-tops as outerwear
- mini-skirts with hemlines above mid-thigh
- strapless tops or strapless dresses

PERFORMANCES

For performances Brooklyn Youth Chorus will provide guidelines for each event.

MUSIC SUPPLIES

All choristers' music and rehearsal binders/folders are provided by Brooklyn Youth Chorus and remain the property of Brooklyn Youth Chorus. Each chorister will be provided a set of music for each semester for which they are fully responsible. At the end of every rehearsal it is the responsibility of the chorister to put his/her/their music binder/folder back on the shelf designated for the chorus division. If a piece of music is lost or damaged, the chorister can obtain a replacement copy from his/her/their Program Manager. Choristers will be billed for lost and damaged music, folders, and binders at the end of each semester when the music is collected. Music binders/folders are kept in the chorus room at all times unless home study is assigned. Each chorister is responsible for having a sharpened pencil with an eraser at every rehearsal in order to mark scores as directed by the conductor.

ASSESSMENTS, PROGRESS REPORTS, AND PROMOTION

ASSESSMENTS

Brooklyn Youth Chorus monitors each chorister's progress and development closely during rehearsal as well as during their participation at the winter and spring concerts.

All choristers in Pre-Teen I and II, Teen, and Performing Ensembles are evaluated annually to measure individual choristers' progress and to determine areas of strength and potential growth. The assessment includes three components:

Vocal Assessment

An individual singing assessment with the conductor – choristers are scored on posture and breathing, vowel sound resonance, register development and coordination, and their knowledge of 1 to 2 songs from their Brooklyn Youth Chorus repertoire.

Sight-Singing Assessment

An individual singing assessment with Brooklyn Youth Chorus artistic staff – choristers are evaluated on their fluency in melodic/tonal and rhythmic sight reading.

Written Assessment

An individual written assessment may be administered during the chorister's rehearsal time at the beginning and end of each program year – choristers are evaluated on their knowledge of musical symbols, pitches on the staff, solfege application, rhythm, and musical terms.

PROMOTION

Assessment results influence a chorister's Division and Level placement for the following program year. Annual re-enrollment and Division promotions are not automatic but are based on a chorister's development, music knowledge and performance, rehearsal participation, attendance, as well as the number of spaces available in the next level or division.

Also note, assessment results are used for internal purposes to help evaluate program effectiveness, and as a critical program measurement tool for fundraising and grant reporting.

OTHER POLICIES

HEALTH & SAFETY POLICY

Brooklyn Youth Chorus updates its health and safety policies and protocols on a regular basis. For the most up-to-date information, please visit our website at <https://www.brooklynouthchorus.org/safety>.

ILLNESS POLICY

When a chorister is ill and experiencing symptoms, they should NOT attend rehearsal, particularly if the illness is contagious. This is an intended use of the discretionary absence allowance. For minor ailments such as a headache or menstrual cramps, choristers may attend. Please notify your program manager if you need to miss rehearsal.

CELL PHONES, IPODS, ETC.

Choristers may bring their cell phones and handheld electronics to rehearsals, but they must be turned off and out of sight during the rehearsal period. Students may check messages during break times. Please do not use Brooklyn Youth Chorus' outlets for charging your electronic devices without permission from the Program Manager. Charging is not allowed in the rehearsal room. Brooklyn Youth Chorus is not responsible for any lost items that students may bring to rehearsals or performances.

DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

Brooklyn Youth Chorus has a no tolerance policy regarding drugs and alcohol. If a chorister is found to have either substance at Brooklyn Youth Chorus Headquarters or on their person at a Brooklyn Youth Chorus event, they will be expelled immediately from the program. If a student arrives at a performance and appears to be under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol, they will be sent home immediately and will face suspension or dismissal from the Chorus.

PERSONAL PROPERTY

Brooklyn Youth Chorus is not responsible for personal property lost or damaged on our premises or at performance locations. We encourage choristers to keep all items of value in the rehearsal room at their seat, or in the designated holding areas at performance locations. The coat hook area in the Brooklyn Youth Chorus hallway is intended for coats and backpacks only.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

In order to ensure the safety of all choristers in the event of an emergency, Brooklyn Youth Chorus has made the following provisions:

In the case of an emergency affecting only Brooklyn Youth Chorus' premises, we will escort and hold choristers in the nearest safe location. A staff member will remain close to the building to inform parents of the location.

In the event of a citywide emergency, we will hold choristers at Brooklyn Youth Chorus for immediate pick-up or until we receive specific permission for your child to leave alone or with a designated guardian.

In the event of an emergency affecting choristers off-site (at a performance or special event), our first response will be to return to Brooklyn Youth Chorus Headquarters provided it is safe to do so. If this is not possible, we will stay at the event site and communicate plans with families.

In case of a citywide (or more extensive) emergency, do NOT call the Program Manager's cell phone. Contact the office at 718.243.9447. We will make an immediate attempt to change the outgoing phone message to reflect current information about your child. If your child has a cell phone with him or her, call your child's cell phone.

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

When a chorister becomes ill during rehearsal, we will contact a parent or guardian at the phone number we have on file. If a parent or guardian is not reachable, we will attempt to reach the designated emergency contacts. The effectiveness of our emergency procedures depends largely on maintaining accurate and up-to-date contact information. If any of your contact information changes, including that of emergency contacts, please alert the Brooklyn Youth Chorus office immediately. Brooklyn Youth Chorus must be able to reach a parent, guardian or emergency contact at any time during which your child is in our care.

INCLEMENT WEATHER POLICY

Brooklyn Youth Chorus generally cancels rehearsals for weather when New York City public schools close or impose an early dismissal.

In the event of any cancellations, we will update the Brooklyn Youth Chorus website, send an All-Division email, and place a message on our phone system.

For weekend rehearsals/performances, we will update the Brooklyn Youth Chorus website by 5 pm the evening before a canceled Saturday or Sunday rehearsal/performance.

It is important to note that, unless you are notified about a cancellation in the manner listed above, the Brooklyn Youth Chorus attendance policy will be in effect. If a chorister is unable to attend a rehearsal due to weather-related transportation circumstances, it will be treated as a discretionary absence.

MUSIC ELECTIVES

In addition to the chorus, Brooklyn Youth Chorus houses an extensive music electives program, offering private vocal and instrument lessons, performance workshops, group classes, and more. Those who study private lessons have the opportunity to perform for friends and family in a recital at the end of each term. These courses are optional for students.

A sampling of elective private lessons, music courses and workshops that have been offered in the past includes:

- Private Voice, Piano, Guitar, and Songwriting Lessons
- Middle School Audition Prep
- High School Audition Prep
- Musicianship Skills/Music Theory
- Musical Theater Workshops
- Songwriting and Composition
- Sound Engineering

For more information about music electives, please contact Brooklyn Youth Chorus.