

NEWBURYPORT CHORAL SOCIETY CHORUS SURVEY

November, 2019



Two notable passages are occurring for the Newburyport Choral Society (NCS) during the 2019 concert season -an historic 85th year anniversary of choral performance, and a search for a new Music Director commencing with the 2020-21 concert season. In marking these passages, NCS conducted a Chorus Survey of its members to acquire input that would guide the future of the chorus. The survey was designed to acquire feedback on significant aspects of NCS and on the qualities most valued by members in a new Music Director. There was a high participation rate in the survey process with 100 chorus members or 78% responding. The number of responses reflected an amazing balance across the sections: Altos-36; Sopranos-36; Basses-14; and Tenors-14.

HIGHLIGHTS OF SURVEY RESULTS

Summarized below are highlights of Chorus member responses in the following four areas: 1) NCS Music; 2) Concert Program Recommendations; 3) NCS Rehearsals; 4) The New Music Director; and 5) NCS Programs and Traditions.

NCS MUSIC: Singers rated music preferences on a 4 point scale from most interesting to least interesting.

The most striking finding of the survey was chorus members' widespread interest in performing a variety of music.

Regarding music from different historical periods, nearly half or more of the singers rated masterpieces from the Classical/Romantic, Baroque, and 20th century periods as most interesting to them.

	<u>Most Interesting</u>	<u>Interesting</u>
1. Music of the Classical/Romantic period	64%	30%
2. Music of 20 th century composers	50%	32%
3. Music of Baroque period composers	49%	40%
4. 21 st century music	36%	36%
5. Contemporary challenging pieces	20%	39%

Singers also confirmed their continued interest in performing larger works with professional orchestra and soloists.

Different types of music that the majority of the chorus rated as interesting or very interesting to them included opera choruses, a cappella pieces, early music (Renaissance), shorter pieces in different styles, spirituals, holiday music, and folk/cultural music. There was a spread of opinion about "Pop" type music (Broadway show tunes, jazz standards, Great American Song Book) with half the chorus indicating interest and half less interest.

CONCERT PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS: Chorus members were asked whether they agreed with concert program recommendations made by singers in the previous Chorus Survey conducted five years ago using a 4 point scale from Strongly Agree to Don't Agree. ***The majority of responses reflected agreement with all recommendations with the percent of Strongly Agree shown below.***

1. Continue to grow performance capabilities- every concert season demonstrates increased excellence (78%).
2. Continue to perform the masterworks and other high quality choral music that attracts audiences that love classical choral music, and educates audiences who are new to these works (73%).
3. Have a variety of different types of music performed in each concert - pieces of music that will appeal to a broader audience mixed in with the classical choral works (55%).
4. Perform music that is best suited to our size and capability ---select music we are likely to perform best when concert programs are being planned (50%).
5. Perform new works where we work with the composer (27%).

NCS REHEARSALS: Singers rated the importance/helpfulness of rehearsal practices on a 4 point scale from very important/helpful to least important/helpful. ***A high majority of singer responses reflected widespread support and appreciation for a variety of NCS rehearsal practices. These results underscored the value of current rehearsal***

practices and that they should be continued in the future. The rehearsal practices that received the highest percentage of very important/helpful (4 point) ratings are noteworthy and shown below.

	<u>Very Important/Helpful</u>	<u>Important/Helpful</u>
1. Practicing rhythmic patterns of difficult sections	76%	21%
2. Warming up with vocal exercises	75%	22%
3. Practice on notes in early rehearsals	69%	26%
4. Getting a sense of the whole of a piece while learning it	65%	28%
5. Learning best practices in vocal production/techniques	64%	24%
6. Being told what to focus on in next rehearsal	63%	24%
7. Working on choral diction and pronunciation	56%	33%
8. Emphasis on expectations –marking music, watching conductor	56%	30%
9. Early attention to dynamics/expressive aspects of music	53%	36%
10. Warming up with breathing exercises	49%	36%
11. Section rehearsals for learning notes/rhythmic patterns	47%	37%
12. Emphasis on at-home practice using cyberbass/other sites	43%	41%

The remaining rehearsal practices that a majority of NCS members found helpful included warming up with physical movement, count-singing early in the rehearsal season, and learning about the historical and stylistic aspects of the music.

THE NEW MUSIC DIRECTOR: Singers were asked to rate the importance of qualities they would like to see in a new Music Director using a 4 point scale from Very Important/Essential to Not Important. ***Responses indicated strong singer preferences for an outstanding teacher in demonstrating choral singing techniques, a skilled experienced conductor with the ability to move diverse amateur singers to high quality concert performance, and a leader with positive interpersonal skills and a charismatic and innovative vision.***

	<u>Very Important/Essential</u>	<u>Important</u>
1. Outstanding teacher in demonstrating good choral singing	89%	11%
2. Can move diverse amateur singers to level of great performance	87%	13%
3. Has positive interpersonal skills	86%	14%
4. Highly skilled conductor experiences in working with amateur choruses	85%	14%
5. Charismatic/innovative with inspiring vision for singers	84%	13%
6. Offers new interesting programs appealing to singers & audiences	82%	18%
7. Experience with wide range of music-classical & other types	66%	30%
8. Will take NCS to next level musically & artistically	61%	34%
9. Skilled in conducting orchestras as well as choruses	59%	32%
10. Can grow membership- attract singers of all ages	56%	37%
11. An outgoing person - would represent NCS well in the community	55%	39%
12. Accomplished musician with both vocal & instrumental skills	50%	40%
13. Has professional relationships with soloists & instrumentalists	39%	46%
14. Has deep knowledge of composers & historical aspects of music	35%	49%
15. Willing to seek collaborations with other arts groups/organizations	30%	52%

NCS PROGRAMS & TRADITIONS: Chorus members clearly value all of the NCS programs and traditions that have been established to engage the community and audiences. A high majority supported the Choral Society's emphasis on engaging children and youth, the audience "Carol Sing-Along," at the Winter Concert, the Summer Sing, and post-concert receptions. More than 60% also felt the Guest Conductor program at the Winter Concert should continue.