

## Choir Resources: **Music Theory, Reading Music and Sight-Singing**

This leaflet is to help you to access assistance with the above.

### **Your starting point**

If you already have significant choral experience, you will be familiar with most, if not all, of the information in this leaflet. Even so, it is hoped that this leaflet will be helpful to you in your support for new, or less experienced members, so please read on.

You may be just starting your choral journey, with little experience of reading music or knowledge of music theory; if so, this leaflet is designed to help you in particular.

This leaflet will also be useful to those who read music quite well, but lack singing or choral experience.

Whatever our starting point, we're all on a learning curve!

### **FCS constitution**

In the first few weeks of joining the choir, you may be thinking that there's a huge skill / experience gap between yourself and other choir members. Well, most of us felt exactly the same when we started. Don't worry at all; that feeling is normal and it will pass!

It may be helpful to be aware of the aims of Formby Choral Society, as expressed in its Constitution: To "advance, improve and maintain public education in and appreciation of, the art of choral music in all its aspects". So there it is in writing; we're here to help you on your choral journey.

### **Standing on the shoulders of others**

One of the fabulous things about choral singing is our interdependence. At first, you may find yourself feeling lost most of the time. It will help to sit next to an experienced singer who knows the piece and preferably someone with a strong voice that you can hear. You'll soon return the favour to your neighbour, when s/he gets lost, as we all do, on occasion!

### **How much music theory do I need to know?**

Not as much as you might think. You do need enough to support some key musical skills for singing in a choir:

- keeping in time
- staying on pitch
- adjusting your volume

We'll signpost you to the music theory information that is most relevant for developing these essential choir skills. Much of this information is about what the various symbols and terms on the music score mean.

## **Reading music**

Singing in a choir is a great way to learn to read music, if not the best. If you can't read music at the moment, don't worry - we'll signpost you to helpful resources to help get you started. Think of the symbols on the music score as a shorthand set of instructions mainly on timing, pitch and volume, but also expression.

You can learn a piece of music by listening to the music whilst "following the dots" on the music score. Whenever you listen to, sing or play music when looking at the notes at the same time, your music reading skills are improving! The likes of YouTube and the various choral rehearsal aids are invaluable here, so have a good look at our leaflet "[Choir Resources: Rehearsal Aids](#)".

If you can read music, but not quickly enough, don't worry, that phase will soon pass. If you already read music, it is easy to cover the musical skills mentioned in the above section.

## **The conductor**

Your first rehearsals may feel like you've jumped in at the deep end, when barely able to swim! Relax! - you'll learn something at every rehearsal. You can also listen to recordings of your own part between rehearsals as mentioned in the above section. Your mentor is there to help you and give you some guidance if you want it.

The person guiding all of us is our splendid conductor. So, make sure you listen to him carefully and ensure that you can see him. If everyone pays close attention to the conductor and follows his instructions, we will ALL sing in time, on pitch and at the intended volume! He will also point out features in the score that are particularly important, and that in itself is a learning opportunity.

## **Private tuition**

If having private lessons in singing and/or music theory from a suitably qualified registered teacher is an option for you, you will find them extremely helpful. Your teacher can tailor the lessons to your specific needs. S/he can teach you and guide you, in a logical and structured way, through various learning resources, including any listed in this leaflet. This is the best option, if it is available to you.

## **Organising your own learning**

If private lessons are not an option for you, you should be aware that there are excellent books, workbooks and internet-based resources available. Many of the internet courses are free, with the option of paying for a more comprehensive package.

## A keyboard of some sort

If you want to learn music theory, a piano is the perfect companion and a keyboard is almost as good. If you have neither, it would be worthwhile investing in, or borrowing, a basic keyboard. Even a picture of a keyboard is useful, but it has the serious disadvantage of not making a sound! A keyboard instrument enables you to visualise the way notes are organised in a way that is not possible on a guitar or clarinet etc. A keyboard instrument of some sort makes learning music theory easier.

## Music theory resources

There are several providers of books, workbooks and video courses on the internet. You may well find that you prefer a particular style, so refine your internet searches and home in on what feels right for you. If you're new to reading music and music theory in general, you should include "grade 1" in your search and take things from there.

You'll find that each course tends to be linked to the relevant exam syllabus of particular examining boards, such as ABRSM and Trinity. There is no need to undertake any exams, although they are a way to confirm that you know the material. Past papers and model answers are available from the examining boards ... another good way to confirm your progress. A few sources of music theory resources are listed here:

- **My Music Theory:** from Victoria Williams <https://www.mymusictheory.com>
- **Music Matters:** from Gareth Green <https://www.mmcourses.co.uk>
- **ABRSM:**  
[https://shop.abrsm.org/shop/powersearch/powersearch\\_results?search=music+theory](https://shop.abrsm.org/shop/powersearch/powersearch_results?search=music+theory)
- **TRINITY Music Theory Workbooks:**  
[https://shop.trinitycollege.com/shop/powersearch/powersearch\\_results?search=music+theory+workbooks&x=6&y=5](https://shop.trinitycollege.com/shop/powersearch/powersearch_results?search=music+theory+workbooks&x=6&y=5)
- **TAKE FIVE – and pass first time:** This is a very informative book for those wishing to take grade 5 theory. It is entertaining, unlike several publications on music theory, some of which are rather dry.  
<https://www.musicroom.com/take-five-and-pass-first-time-mhm555500>

## Reading music and sight-singing

**THE NOVELLO GUIDE TO SIGHT-SINGING:** This is book/ebook/practice assessment app is marketed as an interactive guide for all choral singers. I found it helpful, although I struggled with the technology that supports the book. Others may have no difficulty. The back page reads as follows "Whether you are 7 or 70, a beginner or an experienced singer, this book will improve your ability to read music and help you to enjoy singing to the full". Quite a

claim. I suspect, on the basis of my own experience, that the claim will ring true for the majority of those who are not already accomplished choral singers.

<https://www.musicroom.com/the-novello-guide-to-sight-singing-musnov166067>

**TRINITY:Sound at Sight series (singing).** Three booklets of grades sight-singing exercises, to use with a teacher.

[https://shop.trinitycollege.com/shop/powersearch/powersearch\\_results?deptid=100058&catid=100296&scdg=](https://shop.trinitycollege.com/shop/powersearch/powersearch_results?deptid=100058&catid=100296&scdg=)

**ABRSM:Joining the Dots series (singing).** Graded exercises to work through with your teacher.

<https://shop.abrsm.org/shop/prod/Bullard-Alan-Joining-the-Dots-Singing-Grade-1/2204511>

## **Choose what is right for you**

The best options for you will depend on your own circumstances and preferences. It is hoped that you find this leaflet helpful. If you would like assistance with anything, don't hesitate to ask anyone in the choir – we're all here to help.

In this leaflet, the writer expresses a personal view, based on his own experience and confirms that neither he nor Formby Choral Society have any financial or other interest in in any products or websites that feature in this, or any other, Formby Choral Society "Choir Resources" leaflet.

## **Practice makes perfect!**

A little singing every day, even if only for 5 minutes, will strengthen your voice .

Listening to the music in the background will make you familiar with the overall feel of the music.

Looking at the music score as you listen or sing will improve your music reading skills.

Looking at the music score as you listen to, or sing your own part between lessons will really help you to learn your part and also improve your music reading skills at the same time.

## **Enjoy the journey**

The experience of performing a work with moments of sublime choral beauty is both unforgettable and addictive. You will enjoy satisfaction in your achievement, particularly if you are using new skills, gained since joining the choir. So, we encourage you to relax, take your time, enjoy the challenge, the music, the fun and the company of your fellow choir members, some of whom may become lifelong friends.

*This is one of a series of leaflets to help members. If you feel that this leaflet can be improved or that a leaflet on any other topic would be useful to some members, please let a committee member know.*