



MEMBER HANDBOOK

2024–2025

*“Enriching the lives of youth in the region
through a program of vocal music education and through the
performance and study of the world’s great choral literature”*

MISSION

It is the mission of the Mountain Empire Children's Choral Academy (MECCA) to enrich the lives of youth in the region through a program of vocal music education and through the study and performance of the world's great choral literature.

WHO WE ARE

The Mountain Empire Children's Choral Academy serves young people throughout East Tennessee and Southwest Virginia by offering programs at multiple levels. Explorers is open enrollment, with no audition required. All other MECCA choirs require an audition. Potential members should be willing to commit themselves to at least one full school year of membership. Students in ETCC and EVCC who are accepted and remain in good standing may continue in their choir without re-audition. Current singers progressing to a more advanced choir will audition for their new choir. HYE members will re-audition each year.

- Explorers is for children in grades 1–3
- The East Tennessee Children's Choir (ETCC) and Emory Virginia Children's Choir (EVCC) are treble-voice choirs for grades 4 and up
- Da Capo is an advanced choir for ETCC/EVCC singers in grades 7 and up
- Singers in grades 9–12 may continue in our treble choirs (ETCC/EVCC/Da Capo) or audition for our mixed choir (HYE)
- The Highlands Youth Ensemble (HYE) is a mixed choir for students in grades 9–12 and changed male voices in 8th grade

STAFF

- Jane DeLoach Morison – MECCA Artistic Director and conductor of ETCC, EVCC, Da Capo, and HYE choirs
- Andrea Cottrill – Emory Explorers director
- Lauren Ramey – Johnson City Explorers director
- Rebekah Rasnake Cash – HYE accompanist
- Shawn Howell – ETCC/EVCC accompanist
- Beth DeLong – Administrator

NOTE: Qualifications and information about our staff are on the website.

<http://www.meccacademy.org/staff-and-board.html>

GOALS

The goals of MECCA choirs are to:

- Provide children and youth an unforgettable, exemplary choral experience with a broad range of repertoire and styles
- Build a foundation of proper singing technique that will allow a lifetime of singing involvement
- Develop music literacy utilizing the Kodaly tradition of music instruction
- Supply an experience in non-competitive team behavior drawing out the best in each person
- Enrich the music programs of area schools and churches through the leadership that experienced MECCA singers will provide
- Enhance the Mountain Empire's appreciation of children's fine choral literature
- Encourage lifelong participation in the arts by the singers, their families, and the larger community
- Share our music with others in regional, national, and international concerts
- Encourage singers to express their musical and artistic skills

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

The Artistic Director is hired by the board to provide musical leadership and guidance in all matters pertaining to the MECCA choirs. The Artistic Director conducts one or more of the MECCA choirs and supervises the work of other MECCA conductors. More information about current Artistic Director Jane DeLoach Morison may be found on the MECCA website at <http://www.meccacademy.org/staff-and-board.html>

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Board of Directors holds the ultimate responsibility for carrying out the mission of MECCA. The Board secures funding, approves budget, sets policy, hires staff, evaluates the organization's progress, and elects future board members as provided for in the MECCA bylaws.

HISTORY

The late Dr. Carl King founded the East Tennessee Children's Choir in 1987. He retired from conducting the choir in the spring of 1990. In 1994, Beth Perkinson McCoy was named Music Director for the choir. Upon her retirement, Jane DeLoach Morison succeeded Beth McCoy in 2009.

The organization has commissioned new musical works from noted composers, including Kenton Coe, and has been the recipient of several grants from the Tennessee Arts Commission and the Arts Build Communities program of the Johnson City Area Arts Council.

Over time, MECCA has added additional choirs: Highlands Youth Ensemble began in 2002 with Choristers, Da Capo, and Bella Voce following. In 2018, the Emory Virginia Children's Choir and Choristers program was started. More detailed historical information may be found on the MECCA website at <http://www.meccacademy.org/history.html>

TUITION and FEES

Tuition is non-refundable

Explorers	\$185.00 for the year* Installment plan: \$195.00 – \$48.75/month x 4
ETCC/EVCC	\$275.00 for the year* Installment plan: \$285.00 – \$71.25/month x 4
Da Capo	\$45.00 (in addition to ETCC tuition) for two semesters
HYE	\$375.00 for the year** Installment plan: \$385.00 – \$96.25/month x 4

**These fees do not include uniform items*

***NOTE: HYE tuition includes a \$50 music fee. This music fee is not discounted*

- The installment plans are payable in four equal payments from August through November, payable by the last day of the month. A \$10 service charge is included.
- A late fee of \$25 is charged to outstanding accounts (not utilizing the installment plan) after **September 30**. The deadline for students enrolling in January is **February 28**.
- 10% discounts for families with multiple children in MECCA choirs are applied to the lesser-priced tuition fees. Da Capo tuition is not discounted.
- A \$1000 cap is in place for families whose tuition bill would exceed that amount.

OTHER COSTS

- When MECCA choirs sing in their own concerts, there is no official admission charge, but a suggested donation of \$10 per adult and \$5 per child (with a cap of \$20 per family) is posted at the door. When MECCA choirs sing in other venues, those venues may include an admission charge. Those desiring to attend are responsible for their own admission.
- HYE singers keep their own music. The music purchase is covered by the HYE Music Fee.
- There may be other incidental costs associated with some MECCA choir activities.
- Singers are responsible for purchasing their own uniform items. (See UNIFORM REQUIREMENTS on page 6)

TUITION ASSISTANCE

NOTE: Various organizations use similar terms in different ways. For MECCA, “tuition assistance” is financial aid; “scholarships” are merit awards given without regard to financial need.

- MECCA wishes to provide musical opportunities to all qualified children in East Tennessee and Southwest Virginia, regardless of their financial situation. To enable participation of all eligible students, MECCA will provide tuition assistance to families with financial need.
- MECCA will help qualified families on a sliding scale.
- The level of MECCA tuition assistance may be limited based on available resources.
- When tuition payments come due, the parent or legal guardian will fill out the online Tuition Assistance Form and submit it to the Artistic Director and Administrator. This form will ask the applicant to briefly describe their financial circumstances and the reduction amount they wish to receive.
- A request is valid for one year only. If financial need persists, a new written request is required for each year.
- MECCA shall treat requests for tuition assistance with due confidentiality.
- In each case, the Artistic Director and Administrator shall review the applications and make a decision based on MECCA’s financial resources.
- The Administrator will inform each family in writing of the amount of tuition assistance granted.

SCHOLARSHIPS

NOTE: Various organizations use similar terms in different ways. For MECCA, “tuition assistance” is financial aid; “scholarships” are merit awards given without regard to financial need.

Purpose: MECCA Merit Scholarships serve as incentives and rewards for excellence and are awarded to outstanding students regardless of their families’ financial situations.

Process: Applicants should fill out the online Scholarship Application, which includes a letter written to the scholarship committee that describes what singing means to the applicant and why they believe they would be a worthy recipient of a Merit Scholarship.

Evaluation:

- The Artistic Director and scholarship committee shall review the applications individually and make decisions based on merit, commitment, and promise.
- Scholarship award decisions are final.

SUPPORT

Individual and corporate support supplies a significant portion of the organization’s budget each year. Please consider joining the generous group of those who make this musical experience available to children in our region. Your support makes it possible for families to participate who might otherwise not be able to afford the tuition.

Because MECCA is a 501(c)(3) organization, your contribution is eligible to be tax deductible. Contributions in the following categories will be recognized in the choirs’ concert programs throughout the season.

Many businesses offer a matching program with their employees. Please inquire if you think your employer offers such a program.

<i>Friend</i>	\$25+	<i>Bronze Baton</i>	\$750+
<i>Contributor</i>	\$50+	<i>Silver Baton</i>	\$1000+
<i>Supporter</i>	\$100+	<i>Gold Baton</i>	\$1500+
<i>Sponsor</i>	\$250+	<i>Concert Sponsor</i>	\$2000+
<i>Benefactor</i>	\$500+	<i>Grand Benefactor</i>	\$5000+

FUND-RAISING

The Board of Directors has established a formal policy regarding fund-raising activities. Copies of the policy are available on request.

AWARDS

In May, singers in the Explorers and the Children’s Choirs receive certificates and awards for their participation and years of membership. We appreciate the time and talent these students share with us! HYE seniors will receive a special gift at their Senior Night concert.

MUSIC

Explorers, ETCC/EVCC, Da Capo – Music is supplied by MECCA, usually in a binder. Singers are expected to take care of their binders, music, and pencils and to turn in all supplies in good condition at the end of the season.

HYE – All music will be ordered by MECCA and included in tuition (so that singers may keep their music) and kept neatly in a plain black binder (provided by the singer). HYE singers are expected to keep their binders, music, and pencils organized at all times.

UNIFORM REQUIREMENTS

All Choirs

Uniformity is essential in a performance choir. A distraction of a singer in any way, including individual fashion in hair, makeup, and jewelry, can affect the entire concert for the audience. The choir must dress uniformly so that the choir is viewed as a unit and not as individuals.

Uniform items are to be clean and neatly pressed; hair is to be worn securely off the face. All hair accessories are to be simple and either black or red or matching the hair color. No watches or bracelets/wristbands unless they are needed for medical reasons. Please refrain from wearing perfume, cologne, or scented lotions.

At the beginning of the year, the Parent Coordinator for each choir will send ordering information for the choir's uniform pieces.

Explorers

Formal:

~Black knee-length or longer skirt OR black dress pants, white long-sleeved collared button-down dress shirt, solid black tights OR black dress socks, black shoes (closed toe, no sneakers/athletic shoes). Red neckwear will be provided by MECCA upon arrival at the concert venue.

Casual:

~Blue MECCA t-shirt, blue jeans, socks, and casual shoes

ETCC/EVCC and Da Capo

Formal:

~ Black pleated uniform skirt OR black dress pants, red uniform sweater vest, white long-sleeved collared button-down dress shirt, solid black tights OR black dress socks, black shoes (closed toe, no sneakers/athletic shoes). Black neckwear will be provided by MECCA upon arrival at the concert venue.

Casual:

~ Red MECCA t-shirt, blue jeans, socks, and casual shoes

HYE

Formal:

~ Short-sleeved black uniform dress (per ordering instructions), closed-toe black dress shoes, flesh-toned hose, uniform pearls and pearl earrings, natural looking makeup only.

~ Tuxedo (per ordering instructions), black bowtie, black socks, black dress shoes (no sneakers/athletic shoes)

Casual:

~ Black MECCA t-shirt, blue jeans, socks, and casual shoes

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Parents are vital to the success of MECCA Choirs. Their most important duty is to have their child at every rehearsal and scheduled performance. However, assistance to the organization is needed in many areas, some of which are described below. Contact the Parent Coordinator or the Administrator to give your energy to the organization. The list below is a sampling.

- **Auditions:** Be present to help prospective members and their parents fill out appropriate paperwork.
- **Concerts:** Supervise children before performances and during intermission. Assist them with their attire. Help guide children on and off stage (as needed or requested by the conductor). Assist administrator in collecting donations and handing out programs.
- **Music Library:** Place music in rehearsal folders at the beginning of each semester. File music at the end of each semester.
- **Fundraising:** Participate in or coordinate fundraising efforts (i.e., program ad sales, fundraiser sales, HYE Cabaret, etc.)
- **Rehearsals:** Help with taking roll; assist with other administrative work as needed.
- **Events:** Assist at fall and winter retreats, awards picnic, HYE senior night, etc.
- **Attire:** Assist with organizing uniform purchase and distribution. Assist singers in being properly attired for each performance.

PERFORMANCE SCHEDULE

Each of the MECCA choirs participates in MECCA concerts near the end of each semester. In addition, each choir may occasionally perform independently. A complete schedule is maintained on the MECCA website. <http://www.meccacademy.org/calendar.html>

Every attempt is made to ensure that all events are on this schedule. Occasionally it is necessary to add additional rehearsals, particularly when collaborating with another organization, such as Symphony of the Mountains or the Johnson City Symphony Orchestra.

If you would like to share a concert calendar with friends or relatives, see <http://meccacademy.org/concerts.html>.

REHEARSAL SCHEDULE AND LOCATION

- For HYE and ETCC/EVCC, an all-day orientation rehearsal/retreat is held on a Saturday near the beginning of the school year and again in early January. The retreat culminates in an informal performance. Times and dates will be announced.
- Choirs meet during fall/spring breaks and Monday holidays, such as President's Day and Martin Luther King Day, but do NOT meet on Labor Day Monday or on Thanksgiving Day.
- In the case of inclement weather, ETCC, EVCC, and Explorers rehearsals are cancelled when the school system in the city (*ETCC – Johnson City*) or college (*EVCC – Emory and Henry*) where the rehearsal takes place has cancelled school for the day. HYE weather decisions are NOT tied to any school district but are made on an individual basis by the Artistic Director and communicated via email.
- **Johnson City Explorers, East Tennessee Children's Choir, and Da Capo** rehearse on Mondays at Munsey Memorial United Methodist Church (201 S. Roan Street, Johnson City, TN). Explorers will meet from 4:15–5:15 and ETCC will meet from 4:00–5:30 p.m. Da Capo meets from 5:35–6:05 p.m.
- **Emory Explorers, Emory Virginia Children's Choir, and Da Capo** rehearse on Thursdays at Emory & Henry College. Explorers will meet from 4:30–5:30 and EVCC will meet from 4:15–5:45. Da Capo meets from 5:50–6:20 p.m.
- **HYE** rehearses on Mondays at First Presbyterian Church (701 Florida Ave., Bristol, TN) from 7:15–9:15 p.m.

ATTENDANCE

In order to build a cohesive choral ensemble, it is necessary for all the singers to be present. Individuals with excessive absences – even for good reasons – undermine the ensemble and may be asked to sit out of a concert for which they are not adequately prepared. When singers are prepared to attend regularly, they can be restored to full participation in all choir events.

- **Promptness Is Essential.** Many schools allow singers to be dismissed a few minutes early so they can arrive on time. Two late arrivals of 30 minutes or more constitute an absence.
- Three excused absences per semester are allowed for illness and/or irreconcilable schedule conflicts.
- In the case of last-minute illness, ETCC, EVCC, and Explorers are to email or text their Parent Coordinator. HYE members are to contact the director by email before 2pm or text after 2pm.
- Absence from mandatory and dress rehearsals can result in the singer being unable to participate in that performance.
- Attendance at ALL concerts is mandatory.
- More than three excused absences OR one unexcused absence per semester may result in the child being asked to withdraw from the group.
- At the discretion of the conductor of the choir, singers may be required to perform a "music check" to ensure that they have worked on their own to learn material covered in a missed rehearsal.
- Parents are urged to pick up their children promptly at the conclusion of rehearsals. Choir directors often have other rehearsals to lead and cannot be responsible for children whose parents are late for pick-up.
- After a long day at school, children will likely need a healthy snack and a bathroom break before coming to rehearsal. No snacks are allowed in the rehearsal building.
- There will be a short activity break during the rehearsal, and members will be excused only in case of an emergency. Because rehearsal time is most valuable, there will be no scheduled bathroom breaks.

NON-DISCRIMINATION

MECCA does not discriminate with regard to race, gender, creed, ethnicity, or sexual orientation in the hiring of staff or selection of singers. Musical factors may be a factor in decision-making.

Mountain Empire Children's Choral Academy singers study and perform a variety of music from traditional folk songs to contemporary musical literature. The music chosen is commonly from the widest variety of traditions and is performed in an array of settings. The repertoire is selected to educate the MECCA members and is not intended to impose or intrude upon anyone's personal beliefs. Therefore, it is essential that *all* singers are willing to sing *all* repertoire.

High quality music from all cultures, belief systems, traditions, styles, and periods form the foundation for musical learning and serve as the basis for the curriculum. MECCA will stay true to its mission of enriching the lives of youth in the region through a program of vocal music education and through the study and performance of the world's great choral literature.

BEHAVIOR

Choir members are expected to always be on their best behavior, thus requiring no need for disciplinary measures. If a child has a problem, the director will discuss it with the individual and will contact a parent only if the problem persists. Choir members also are expected to be helpful upon arrival at the rehearsal hall, assisting the director with room and music readiness. Continued disruption of any nature, whether by students and/or parents, constitutes grounds for dismissal.

MECCA CODE OF CONDUCT

To ensure the safety and welfare of all participants in the Mountain Empire Children's Choral Academy, we require every member to follow our MECCA Code of Conduct during all MECCA activities. This is to ensure the highest respect and courtesy toward one another. Violating the Code of Conduct can result in immediate disciplinary action at the discretion of the director and/or board, up to and including dismissal.

- Appropriate attire must be worn at all times. Vulgar language or images on clothing is not appropriate.
- Inappropriate behavior of a physical or sexual nature during MECCA activities, including lewd behavior and/or unwanted advances, is strictly prohibited.
- No public display of affection.
- Harassment (including verbal, physical, or sexual) is unlawful and prohibited. It is a serious act of misconduct and is subject to disciplinary action and possibly criminal prosecution. This unlawful discrimination includes harassment by/of members, staff, parents, and board members of MECCA.
- Bullying is prohibited. Bullying is intentionally aggressive behavior including verbal, physical, sexual, social/relational/emotional, cyber bullying, or any combination of these abuses. Bullying can consist of one person bullying another, a group of people ganging up against one lone person, or one group of people targeting another group.
- Smoking or drinking or being under the influence of alcoholic beverages, drugs, or other substances during MECCA activities is strictly prohibited.
- Use of illegal drugs or substances is not acceptable and is prohibited. Possession of unauthorized firearms or other weapons is prohibited.
- Removal or destruction of MECCA property or the property of someone else without his or her prior consent constitutes theft of property.
- Verbal abuse, swearing, profanity, fighting, and arguing are not acceptable and are considered inappropriate behavior at MECCA activities.
- Lack of respect shown to staff or other members is not acceptable and will result in suspension and/or termination of membership privileges.

DISMISSAL

Failure to comply with the MECCA Handbook and its standards could result in dismissal from MECCA.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **Where can I pay my child's tuition?** MECCA Administrator Beth DeLong will issue each family an invoice. At that time, tuition can either be paid via PayPal or a check can be mailed to the P.O. Box:
MECCA
P.O. Box 3021
Bristol, TN 37625
- **Cell Phones?** Cell phones should be silenced during rehearsals. Phones may be collected at the beginning of rehearsal and returned when rehearsal ends. This prevents the temptation of being distracted by the phone during valuable rehearsal time.
- **What if my child is going to be absent or late?** In case of sudden illness, ETCC, EVCC, and Explorers singers should email or text their Parent Coordinator. HYE singers should contact the director by email before 2pm and text after 2pm. See ATTENDANCE.
- **Where do I order my child's concert attire?** Ordering information can be found on our website at <http://www.meccacademy.org/uniform-information.html>
- **Is there a charge to attend a concert?** When MECCA choirs sing in their own concerts, there is no official admission charge, but a suggested donation of \$10 per adult and \$5 per child (with a cap of \$20 per family) is posted at the door. When MECCA choirs sing in other venues, those venues may include an admission charge. Those desiring to attend are responsible for their own admission.
- **What if my child needs to drop? Can we get our money back?** Tuition is non-refundable. Students and families sign a statement at registration affirming that they will make MECCA a priority.
From the contract: As a member of the Mountain Empire Children's Choral Academy, I agree to make singing in the choir a high priority. I agree to read the handbook along with my parent/guardian and to abide by the policies outlined in the MECCA Member Handbook (found on our meccacademy.org website). I also understand that I am making this commitment for the entire school year. It is very important that the students continue in the choir throughout the spring semester without any interruption of instruction.
- **Does MECCA take holidays?** Choirs meet during spring and fall breaks and on Monday holidays, such as President's Day and Martin Luther King Day. The ONLY holidays we observe during the semesters are Labor Day and Thanksgiving Day.
- **Does my child have to re-audition after being accepted into a MECCA choir?** Auditions are only required for the first year of ETCC, EVCC, and Da Capo. No audition is required for Explorers. HYE members will audition every year.