CHORAL CONDUCTING HANDBOOK 2021–2022
INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Choral Conducting Graduate Program at Manhattan School of Music! We know you will find that intensive study with major artist-teachers and the practical experience of working with choral ensembles on a regular basis at MSM will prepare you for a successful career in conducting.

Kent Tritle, Director of Choral Activities, has led the program since 2008. Under his direction, the Chamber Choir has been featured at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, performed with the New York Philharmonic, and been featured at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Symphonic Choir has performed numerous choral masterworks, including Haydn's The Creation, Brahms' Ein Deutsches Requiem, Prokofiev's Alexander Nevsky, Mozart's Requiem, Bach's Mass in B Minor, Honegger's Le Roi David, Mozart's C Minor Mass, Verdi's Requiem, and Mahler's Symphony No. 8.

Ronnie Oliver, Associate Director of Choral Activities, teaches undergraduate and graduate choral conducting, choral repertoire, graduate aural skills, and assists with all aspects of the choral program. He conducts the Women's Chorus and has conducted the MSM Chamber Choir in performance, including Stravinsky's Mass and at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington DC.

One of the additional advantages of coming to MSM is New York City's incredible array of opportunities for you to experience choral music making at its highest level. This combination of top-level education, substantial podium time, and premiere musical experiences makes Manhattan School of Music a natural place to continue your education in choral music.

This handbook is designed to help answer questions about the choral conducting program at MSM. Please feel free to contact us about any other questions you may have. You can also use the link to our page on the MSM Website - Conducting website.

Sincerely,

Kent Tritle
Director of Choral Activities
ktritle@msmny.edu

Ronnie Oliver, Jr.
Associate Director of Choral Activities
roliner@msmny.edu
**APPLIED LESSONS**

**MM students**
- Year One: Study with Ronnie Oliver
- Year Two: Study one semester with Kent Tritle/one semester with Ronnie Oliver

**DMA Students**
- Year One: Study with Ronnie Oliver
- Year Two: Study with Kent Tritle

(These assignments may vary according to the schedules of either the teacher or student)

**Your Teacher**
Your teacher is among the most vital sources in helping you to make career decisions, both large and small. As in any relationship, issues may arise which require discussion and/or resolution. You are encouraged to discuss problems as they occur directly with your teacher. Unresolved issues and/or the sense that you cannot discuss problems with your teacher need to be addressed with the department chair or the Provost.

You are entitled to and required to have twenty-eight one-hour private lessons with your major teacher in the course of the school year. Some teachers give these lessons each week. Others, given the nature of other performance and teaching commitments, offer two-hour lessons and/or lessons at differing intervals. Others still have teaching associates or substitutes to give lessons at times when they are unable to do so. Make certain that you understand your teacher’s lesson schedule plan. If you are concerned that you are not receiving the requisite number of lessons, or have a problem with the frequency of your lessons, notify the department chair.

**Attendance Policy**
Private lessons constitute the core performance study for every student. If a student needs to cancel a studio lesson for any reason, the student should immediately inform the studio teacher. In cases of documented illness or other emergency, the teacher will attempt to make up missed lessons at a mutually convenient time. The studio teacher is not obligated to adjust lesson times or make up lessons that were canceled for nonillness, non-emergency reasons. Any student who has two consecutive unexcused absences in his or her private lessons will be required to see the Dean of Students before lessons may resume.

**Professional Leave**
No student may be absent from the school for professional engagements unless permission for such absence is granted by the Office of the Provost well in advance of all such engagements. Students who wish to pursue a professional opportunity over several days must apply for a Limited Leave of Absence, using the form available in the Office of the Provost. Typically the professional leave may not extend for more than two weeks.
EVALUATION OF STANDARDS

Each conducting student will be evaluated by the Director of Choral Activities and/or the Associate Director of Choral Activities throughout each semester in their private lessons and through observation of the rehearsals/performances they lead. Students will video record their rehearsals and performances and discuss both positive elements and those elements which need improvement.

RECITALS

Scheduling Recitals

A date for a recital taking place at MSM must be applied for with the Scheduling Office. The recital program must be approved by the major teacher and the department chair, and a copy of this program must be submitted to the Office of the Registrar as part of the student’s graduation requirement.

Master’s Degree Recitals

Masters students will be expected to conduct an equivalent of a half recital in their second year of study.

Length: 30 minutes of music, minimum.

Program: a variety of styles, eras, genres, accompanied/unaccompanied (program must be approved by your private teacher)

Personnel: Master’s students will be able to utilize the Lab Chorus for their recital. Or, you will need to gather your own ensemble of singers, preferably 16+ in number; and an accompanist.

Paper: you will write a paper (typed) to accompany this recital. The paper will include a historical background of each composer, a rehearsal guide to each piece, musical analysis of each piece, translations, conducting analysis of each piece, and interpretation guidelines and rationale. This paper will be due TWO WEEKS BEFORE the date of the recital.

Rehearsals: Master’s Students will be able to use the Lab Chorus rehearsal time/space, or you will need to plan your own rehearsals and reserve space.

Recital Date/Time: Before you reserve the date/time-space with the Scheduling Office, ensure that both the Director and Associate Director of Choral Activities can be in attendance.

EXPECTATIONS OF GRADUATE CHORAL CONDUCTING STUDENTS

In order to maintain the integrity of the educational process at Manhattan School of Music, the school has developed a set of criteria for entrance to, and graduation from all the degree programs offered at MSM. These standards include a combination of both technical and musical skills and they are the result of consultation with faculty, administration and professionals throughout our musical community.

All graduate choral conducting students admitted to Manhattan School of Music will have demonstrated the following abilities:

- understanding of gestural technique (patterns, dynamic control, cueing)
- understanding of basic score study (harmonic analysis, bar analysis)
- proficiency in Latin, German, French, and English diction (including the ability to demonstrate these languages to their ensembles)
- understanding of effective rehearsal techniques
- understanding of healthy vocal technique
- understanding of characteristics of choral repertoire from the Medieval through Contemporary eras
- editorial practices (editing a score appropriate to the musical style, acoustical environment, effective communication of text)
Doctoral Recitals

DMA students will be expected to conduct three full recitals (45-60 minutes) during their two years of residency.

The doctoral thesis will consist of (but not be limited to) a historical background of the composers and compositions, conducting analysis of each piece/work, discussion of text/poetry, and rehearsal procedures in preparing the recitals. Each recital program must have the approval of the Director of Choral Activities prior to the first rehearsal.

DMA students may be able to utilize the Lab Chorus or the Chamber Choir to present one of their recitals, as performance schedules permit.


Recording of Recitals

The School records all required recitals when possible.

CONDUCTING OPPORTUNITIES

• All graduate students will lead sectionals for the Symphonic Chorus.

• There may be opportunities to rehearse and conduct one of the choirs in performance.

• Graduate students will participate in conducting rehearsals for the Conducting Lab Chorus, integrating rehearsal technique, stylistic considerations, and refining gestural technique.

• Often, conducting graduate students are asked to conduct premieres of new works by MSM composition majors. Students will be expected to confer with their private teacher when preparing pieces they are conducting.

OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES

• Sing in Symphonic Chorus and Chamber Choir

• Help with the administrative aspects of leading the choral program (e.g., attendance, rehearsal schedules, set-up, concert program preparation), as assigned

• Lead warm-ups for Symphonic Chorus and Chamber Choir

• Practice professional attitude and habits (punctuality, preparation, positive attitude)

Graduate students must understand that their Manhattan School of Music responsibilities (classes, lessons, rehearsals, performances) must take precedence over outside engagements - music-related or otherwise.
**GRADUATE CHORAL CONDUCTING AUDITIONS**

Name of Auditioner: ________________________________

Degree seeking: MM PS DMA

Rehearsal Pieces: __________________________________

Musicality  1  2  3  4  5  
*(Phrasing, dynamics, expressiveness, knowledge of appropriate style)*

_________________________________________
_________________________________________

Gesture  1  2  3  4  5  
*(Clarity, appropriateness, cues, articulation, right/left hand independence)*

_________________________________________
_________________________________________

Rehearsal Technique  1  2  3  4  5  
*(Preparation, clear instruction, accessing/addressing problems)*

_________________________________________
_________________________________________

Communication Skills  1  2  3  4  5  
*(Clear instruction, understandable, rapport with ensemble)*

_________________________________________
_________________________________________

Listening Skills  1  2  3  4  5  
*(Intonation, vowel unity, consonant articulation, ensemble, balance – how does he/she address discrepancies?)*

_________________________________________

*Assign an overall rating (between 1.0 and 10.0 – 10.0 being the highest)*

Adjudicator Signature: ________________________________

Date __________________________

**APPENDIX**

Master’s Degree and DMA Course Grid and Description available in course catalog.

Graduate Audition Form