Manhattan
School of Music

CHAMBER MUSIC HANDBOOK 2026–2027

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WELCOME/INTRODUCTION

Chamber music is a vital part of study and performance at Manhattan School of Music. Almost every classical instrumentalist is required to take part in chamber music at some point in each degree program.

Over 100 chamber ensembles of varying size and instrumentation are formed each semester. The chamber music faculty includes many of the School's most experienced chamber musicians, including current or former members of the American, Brentano, Juilliard, Mendelssohn, Orion and Tokyo string quartets, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, and Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, among others. Our resident ensembles, American String Quartet and Windscape, also coach and give seasonal performances. Masterclasses given by distinguished artists are available to chamber groups by audition or nomination from the chamber music faculty.

Students are assigned to ensembles by the Ensembles Office in collaboration with the department chairs and Dean for Instrumental Studies. Before each semester, students are encouraged to submit a Chamber Music Group Request Form as a group which will allow students to request a complete or partial group, or as an individual, to allow students to request specific group types, repertoire, schedule availability, or notes to consider when being placed.

Performance is a key element of the chamber music program. Most groups perform in the Chamber Music Festival which takes place towards the end of each semester. Exceptional chamber groups are invited by faculty nomination to audition for the Lillian Fuchs Chamber Music Competition, which takes place each semester, and the winning ensembles perform in a special public concert held in Greenfield Hall.

ENROLLING IN CHAMBER MUSIC

- The number of semesters required varies by instrument and degree. Please consult the Academic Catalog for specific requirements based on your instrument, year, and degree.
- Students are only permitted to be in one chamber ensemble per semester. Students who are not required to take chamber music may also be recruited to complete a group's personnel. Exceptions may be made for programmatic need.
- Students enrolled in chamber music will receive credit for each group assigned.
- If a student completes their chamber music requirement before the end of their degree, a student may continue to enroll in chamber music ensembles as an elective at the discretion of the Ensemble Office if space allows and the student can accommodate the credit.

- Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA) students are not required to take chamber music but may enroll as an elective at the discretion of the Ensembles Office during their first two years of on-campus study.
- Professional Performance Diploma (PPD) Classical Piano students are required to participate in a performing ensemble each semester, indicated in their program requirements with the course code SP1500. PPD students are enrolled in orchestra cycles and/or chamber music ensembles at the discretion of the Ensembles Office to fulfill the SP1500 requirement.
- Students will typically not be placed or allowed to request duos, with some minor exceptions at the discretion of the Ensembles Office.

SEMESTER OVERVIEW

Enrollment

Based on the suggested credit distribution as published in the Academic Catalog, students are enrolled in Chamber Music (SP1500) by the Office of the Registrar. However, students are responsible for verifying their correct enrollment and degree requirements.

If a student wishes to take chamber music and it is not required, or if a student has completed their credit requirements, the student must request to enroll in Chamber Music directly with the Ensembles Office.

Placement

Students enrolled in SP1500 will be sent an electronic form to complete. The form will be sent before the semester begins and will have a specified deadline for submission. The form can be submitted as a group which will allow students to request a complete or partial group, or as an individual, to allow students to request specific group types, repertoire, schedule availability, or notes to consider when being placed. Students who have not submitted a form by the deadline will be placed in an ensemble at the discretion of the Ensembles Office.

Coachings

Chamber groups must complete eight (8) hours of coachings by the end of any given semester. The coachings may be completed and distributed throughout the semester as the ensemble and coach choose and agree upon. Some examples of how the hours may be completed are as follows:

- Weekly, one-hour coachings starting on the third week of classes. This would allow an ensemble to either finish early or make-up coachings for any week that needs to be cancelled due to illness or injury.
- Bi-weekly hour-long coachings starting as soon as the group receives their assignment. This allows the students to have coachings and independent rehearsals on alternating weeks.
- Two-hour coachings. Most beneficial for students who have a busy work or academic schedule and would allow the students more flexibility to schedule rehearsals between coachings.

After completing the eight required coachings, students are allowed to request up to three additional hours of coachings if they feel that their group needs the additional coaching for any reason. The request can be completed via an online form sent out by the Ensembles Office and can only be requested by the students, not the coach. Students requesting additional coachings will be required to perform at an end of semester concert.

PERFORMANCE

Public performance is not a requirement for chamber music. However, students enrolled in chamber groups have various performance opportunities throughout the school year which they may sign up for at their discretion:

- ChamberFest: Occurs at the end of every semester. Students can sign up for this series at their discretion. Ensembles will be given approximately 10 minutes each, though the time may be longer by petition or based on how many groups participate in each concert. A form will be sent during the semester to sign up for a performance time.
- Lillian Fuchs Chamber Music Competition: This competition honors the legacy of violist and long time MSM faculty member Lillian Fuchs. The competition occurs every semester and is open to all chamber groups. Students must be nominated to participate by their coach. Specific rules and requirements will be released at the start of the relevant semester.
- Ruth Widder Competition for String Quartets: This competition honors the legacy of philanthropist Ruth Widder. The competition occurs every Spring semester and is open to string quartets who have been performing together for at least one semester prior to the Spring semester the competition takes place. Specific rules and requirements will be released at the start of the relevant school year.

- Artur Balsam Competition for Duos: This competition honors the legacy of pianist and long time MSM faculty member Artur Balsam. The competition occurs every four Spring Semesters, with the next instance occurring in the Spring of 2025 and is open to student duos that fit the instrumentation requirements (official chamber music status is not necessary). Specific rules and requirements will be released at the start of the relevant school year.

While a public performance is not a requirement, your coach may request you present a short private performance so they may assess your progress during the semester. This should take place during a coaching hour and may involve multiple ensembles in a coach's studio but the teacher may also request the group performs at any of the above concerts or competitions.

CLASS POLICIES

Coachings

Eight (8) contact hours with your coach are required for academic credit. Students may request up to three additional hours which must be approved by the Ensembles Office. **Students requesting additional coachings will be required to perform at an end of semester concert.**

Lateness/attendance

Promptness and regular attendance at coachings are an essential part of your grade. Your coach will have a grading policy that outlines the grade penalty for being late, unprepared, or absent for a rehearsal. If this is not made clear to you, please ask your coach directly, or if you are unable to receive a proper answer, ask the ensembles office.

Cancellations/Absences

- All requests to cancel a scheduled coaching must be communicated to and approved by the coach within their published cancellation period. If no cancellation period is made clear, at least 24 hours notice is required.
- If a member of the group is sick, notify the coach immediately so they can make a decision regarding the scheduled coaching. Requests to cancel coachings with less than 24 hours' notice are only permitted in cases of a documented personal emergency or illness.

- Absence from a coaching is acceptable only in the case of a documented personal emergency or illness; you may send a substitute player only with prior approval of the coach.

- Cancelled coachings after the cancellation period will count as an unexcused absence, coaches are not required to make up unexcused absences.
- Faculty are sometimes able to reschedule a cancelled coaching with advance notice, though they are not required to do so. Repeated issues regarding setting and following through on a coaching schedule may impact your grade.

Extended absence

If a professional commitment will necessitate your absence from one or more coachings, you must submit a Limited Leave of Absence form through the Office of the Provost (form available on the student portal), and you must notify your ensemble and your coach. After consulting with your coach and group, it is YOUR responsibility to put a plan in place which may require you to:

- Find a substitute, or
- Reschedule the lesson(s) with your coach.

Early communication with your group and your coach regarding professional conflicts is critical to ensuring they are resolved in a manner that does not impact your grade.

Scheduling Conflicts & Student Responsibilities:

Students are responsible for managing attendance, punctuality, and scheduling conflicts between chamber music activities and other MSM commitments, including orchestra rehearsals and performances.

- Chamber music rehearsals should not be scheduled during the dedicated Large Ensemble hours unless all members of the ensemble are not rostered in a cycle that is rehearsing.
- If a chamber music rehearsal or coaching is scheduled before a large ensemble rehearsal, students should make efforts to conclude early to arrive on time.
- When registering for performances such as ChamberFest, students are responsible for selecting dates and times that do not conflict with large ensemble rehearsals or performances for which they are rostered.
- When committing to activities scheduled far in advance, such as competitions or external performances, students are responsible for submitting any required time-off requests through the appropriate procedures outlined in the relevant ensemble handbook.
- Participation in outside activities or optional performances does not automatically excuse absences from required ensemble obligations.

Grading

Preparation by the individual student and by the group is the most important element of a productive semester. A sincere commitment to your coach, colleagues and the music will be positively reflected in your grade. Chronic lateness, absence and group cancellations are also factors in your end-of-semester grade. Your coach will publish their specific grading policy in the course syllabus.

Rehearsals

You are expected to set a regular weekly rehearsal schedule that works for all members. In addition to your coaching hours, students will be given an additional 2 hours of regular rehearsal time by the scheduling office. Be on time to rehearsals; this is a sign of respect for your colleagues and the work itself. If you are delayed, let your colleagues know right away.

OPTIONS FOR FULFILLING CHAMBER MUSIC CREDIT

Ensemble types include but are not limited to:

- Strings only
- String trio, quartet, quintet, or sextet.
- Piano and strings
- Piano trio, quartet, and quintet.
- Woodwind quartet or quintet with or without piano
- Brass ensembles
- Trio, quintet, and sextet with or without piano
- Harp, Percussion, Guitar, and Saxophone Ensembles

Due to the number of pianists enrolled at MSM, there are additional opportunities that pianists may select or be placed in to complete their credits:

- Duo ensembles: Pianists will occasionally be assigned to a piano duo/four hands group. Pianists can also request to work in sonata settings if a suitable partner is available. Pianists may also request to work with a vocalist, this will be accommodated at the discretion of the Ensembles Office.
- Instrumental Accompanying Class (IAC): Requires a year-long commitment. First-year graduate piano majors are assigned by audition to this year-long class studying sonata and other literature with instrumental students.

Upon successful completion of the two-semester assignment, students will have completed two chamber music credits for their degree and additionally can qualify to work for MSM as a paid accompanist.

Contact Dr. Heasook Rhee for more information at hrhee@msmnyc.edu

- Vocal accompanying: pianists may request or be assigned to one of the following two vocal accompanying classes: Songs of the Romantic Period or Russian Romances and Ballads and Baroque Aria (learning harpsichord).

Vocal Arts Collaboration: Classical Piano majors may elect to work with the vocal arts department in which they must complete 11 hours of meetings (maximum hours which one would have with a chamber group) with vocal partners during lessons to complete one credit. If a student is asked to meet past the 11 required credits, every additional hour will be paid at a rate provided by the collaborative piano department.

- Approaches to Chamber Music for Piano and Strings – This is an advanced seminar style class which meets for 8 sessions, 2 hours at a time. The class enlists advanced MSM string students, and a group of pianists will each prepare a movement of a full work. The class is coached by Prof. William Wolfram and Prof. Peter Winograd.

Professional Performance Diploma (PPD) Classical Piano students are required to participate in a performing ensemble each semester, indicated in their program requirements with the course code SP1500. PPD students are enrolled in orchestra cycles and/or chamber music ensembles at the discretion of the Ensembles Office to fulfill the SP1500 requirement.

CHAMBER MUSIC PROGRAM STAFF

Office Hours are by appointment/and posted office hours.

Please drop by or contact us with any questions or concerns.

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