



THAMES  
**OPERA**  
COMPANY



**MEMBERS' HANDBOOK**  
2023-24

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**WELCOME TO THE CHORUS OF THE THAMES OPERA COMPANY. IT'S GREAT TO HAVE YOU AS A KEY PART OF THE THAMES OPERA FAMILY.**

The Thames Opera Company was formed in 2020, building on the legacy of the Royal Opera House Thurrock Community Chorus (ROHTCC). Due to the Covid Pandemic, in 2020 the Royal Opera House and Thurrock Council took the difficult decision to withdraw funding and disestablish the ROHTCC. Knowing the difference being part of that group made to the lives of its members, the community decided to form a new group to continue the work started by the ROH. Hence, the Thames Opera Company was born.

As registered charity, TOC has more control over its destiny than ever before – we are delighted you are joining us on this journey.

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# INTRODUCTION

**BY JOINING THE CHORUS, YOU ARE JOINING THE VERY HEART OF THE THAMES OPERA COMPANY. AS YOU MIGHT EXPECT, WE HAVE A FOCUS ON OPERA. IN FACT, IT DEFINES OUR VALUES:**

**O**pen – We are open about what we do and how we do it.

**P**ositive – We want everyone’s experience of being part of this musical family a positive one

**E**ducational – No matter your previous experience in singing or with opera we want you to learn something new whilst being a part of the chorus.

**R**esilient – We do not give up, we came from a difficult situation and we will go on.

**A**ll – TOC is for everyone, no matter your age, ability or experience. We are non-auditioned community opera group with the emphasis on community.

## **That is why, to us opera matters.**

We differ from other choirs because we are a community opera chorus. We hold the importance of storytelling, drama, character and emotional engagement as highly as the musical elements. We pride ourselves in high performance standards.

Our repertoire is selected in advance and in accordance with TOC’s prevailing artistic policy. Performances are staged or semi-staged as much as is practicable, and the repertoire is learnt “off book”. We sing our choruses in their original language and in four sections: soprano, alto, tenor and bass, each of which is split into part one (higher) and part two (lower). This means that we sing in up to 8 vocal parts.

TOC members come from Thurrock, the Thames Gateway area and beyond. Our aim is to serve our local and wider community. We are a non-auditioned chorus and open to members at all levels of musical experience and ability. We have accessibility, diversity and inclusivity at the heart of our identity.

As a self-supporting organisation, TOC members are encouraged to take an active role in the running of the group, so that we can be an inspirational presence locally, providing a strong artistic and social benefit in Thurrock and beyond.

This handbook will introduce you to the company, as well as making you aware of what is required from you, our members. You will also find signposts to the essential policies and procedures that keep all aspects of our activities running in the best way they can. By joining the chorus of the Thames Opera Company you agree to abide by the principles and rules that follow.

# KEY INFORMATION

## **Repertoire:**

We work on a mixed repertoire selected by the artistic team. There is a focus on opera choruses, both established and new, as well as other genres such as musical theatre, choral music and new commissions. Elements of drama, movement, staging and costume are also included in our performances, wherever possible.

## **Performances:**

We aspire to put on public performances in Thurrock, or at other locations in the UK, or even further afield.

## **Rehearsals and schedules:**

Rehearsals are held in the West Barn which is located at:

High House Production Park,

Vellacott Close,

Purfleet,

Essex,

RM19 1RJ

Rehearsals take place on Mondays in term-time, from 7.15pm – 9.30pm, with a 20-minute tea break at about 8.15pm.

Occasionally, additional rehearsals may be arranged for other times such as at weekends. Members can expect that there will be at least one weekend rehearsal commitment per term and possibly more in the lead up to a performance.

A schedule of diary dates is available [available on the TOC website](#). However, other events or opportunities may arise at shorter notice, and in that case, we will endeavour to provide information to members as soon as we can.

## **Newcomers:**

Newcomers will be invited to sing at a taster session before they join. We will hold at least one taster session each year. After attending a taster session, prospective members decide whether to join permanently, but there is no audition process. New members are invited to take part in an informal voice part check-up so that they can be put in the right section for their voice. Voice part check-ups do not take place in front of the whole chorus, are nothing to be nervous about and only last about 5 minutes.

### **Section Representatives:**

Each voice section has a volunteer Section Rep. Their main duties are to welcome and help their section members and ensure that everyone has everything they need. Section Reps pass on chorus notices and information to their sections via email, telephone or in person. Once a term, the chorus holds a 15-minute 'Section Meeting' during the rehearsal break, where Section Reps collect any concerns, ideas or feedback from their section to pass on to the Board of Trustees.

Reps are appointed on an annual basis. Any member can apply to be a rep, you just need to put yourself forward. If more than one section member volunteers, the decision will go to a vote.

If you are a new member please get to know your section rep, they will be your first point of contact for any issues at all. Reps are an invaluable asset to TOC's Chorus they are here to represent you!

### **Copies of music:**

Sheet music will usually be sent electronically and will also be available to download from the TOC website in the [Rehearsal Tracks and Music](#) section. This is a password-protected section of the website for members only, and you will be given the password at the start of each Autumn Term.

### **Practising at home:**

Monday rehearsals are there to enable everyone to rehearse as a complete chorus. Members are expected to practice at home so that they arrive at each session well-prepared. This allows the Artistic and Musical Directors to concentrate on interpretation instead of simply learning notes. This will also make rehearsals more enjoyable for all. The Artistic Director will advise at the end of each rehearsal what needs to be practised at home that week.

### **Voice Part recordings:**

We know that not all members of the chorus are able to read music, that's why recordings of each voice part will be made available to members to enable them to practice at home. These audio files can also be [downloaded via the TOC website](#). Please speak to your rep if you need support in downloading them.

### **Dress:**

There is no dress code during rehearsals. We usually perform wearing clothes of any shade of blue, but there may be various dress codes for special performances. Details of these will be circulated in good time before performances.

# VOLUNTARY DONATIONS

TOC is a charitable organisation that is reliant on grants and donations. However, as these are not guaranteed forms of income, we ask for a subscription amount from our members to keep the chorus going. We therefore ask that every chorus member makes a suggested, termly donation of at least £50 to help cover our core costs, including music, rehearsal tracks, artistic team and our rehearsal venue. This is a heavily subsidised cost which, this year, we are able to keep lower than most choir subscriptions due to a generous donation to the chorus.

We firmly believe that financial difficulty should not be a barrier to being part of the TOC family, and that anyone who sings with us should be able to do so.

However, whereas the suggested amount is completely voluntary, we will not be able to continue to operate unless we can meet the costs listed above.

If you are unable or would rather not pay the recommended amount, please let your Section Rep know. These conversations will be treated with the strictest of confidence but will allow the Board to plan effectively for any upcoming activity. It will also give a realistic view of the group's finances, needed for applying for funding bids or forecasting.

If you can pay please do so within the first 4 weeks of each term, by direct transfer into the TOC bank account.

If you could include your name and section in the format below, that would be hugely helpful:

eg: **JosephineBloggsS1 / JoeBloggsB2**

The TOC Bank details are as follows:

**Account Name: Thames Opera Company**

**Sort code: 60-09-11**

**Account Number: 72704403**

Please note that the term mentioned above refers to the three terms in the academic year, broken down to Autumn, Spring and Summer term.

If you are a UK taxpayer, please let us know when you fill out your membership form as we will be able to reclaim 25p of tax from every £1 donation made to us by you.

# FINDING US

## GETTING TO THE WEST BARN, HIGH HOUSE PRODUCTION PARK, VELLACOTT CLOSE, PURFLEET, ESSEX, RM19 1RJ

The nearest railway station is Purfleet, on the Southend to London Fenchurch Street line. Trains usually run approximately every 30 minutes. For more information on train times, visit [National Rail Enquiries](#).

**BY TRAIN** High House Production Park Station. is about 15 minutes walk from Purfleet

**BY BUS** At the time of rehearsals, there is no available bus route.

### BY CAR FROM THE A13

- Take the Wennington/West Thurrock/Purfleet/A1306 exit and continue along the A1306.
- Take the A1090 exit at Stonehouse Corner Roundabout (signposted West Thurrock), and from this road, take the first right towards Carpetright.
- Turn left straight away before arriving at the Carpetright building (signposted High House Production Park).
- Continue straight, then turn right at the fork until you reach the car park. We are the brown barn building on the left after you pass the Backstage Centre.
- For satnav, use the postcode RM19 1AS

There is ample parking on site for those travelling by car. For those without cars TOC actively encourages car sharing as part of our commitment to reducing pollution. Speak to your section rep who will try to find you a car-share partner.

On the occasions that we perform outside Thurrock, TOC may arrange transport, usually by coach. Members wishing to use the coach will be required to contribute to the cost. Details of how to book a place and pay will be announced at a rehearsal beforehand. Members are, of course, free to make their own way to performances if they prefer.

# REFRESHMENTS

There will be a 15-minute break half-way through each rehearsal, where tea, coffee water and squash will be provided for those requiring it. We are committed to avoiding the use of disposable cups wherever possible, so please bring your own mug and put it on the tea table in the correct drink section, and this will be ready for you at break time. Biscuits will also be available. Sections take it in turns to prepare the refreshments at rehearsals.

If you would like to make a contribution towards the cost of the tea or coffee and biscuits, there will be a donation box on the refreshment table.

At full-day weekend rehearsals, the same process will apply. Often, at full-day rehearsals, we have a 'bring and share' lunch, where those who wish to participate bring a dish to share, either sweet or savoury, which is placed out on a buffet. Details will be announced before full-day rehearsals, and participation in the 'bring and share' is always on a voluntary basis.





# COMMUNICATIONS

## **How we will communicate with you:**

Apart from brief announcements during rehearsals, chorus information will be emailed to members by their section reps, trustees or the Artistic Director. News and information will be posted on both the TOC website and the TOC Members Facebook page.

If you have any questions or concerns please speak to your section rep who will pass these on appropriately. The Artistic Director will be available for queries during the rehearsal break, but they should not be contacted at other times.

## **Emails:**

Members will be expected to have an email address to receive messages from TOC. Please check your emails regularly and respond promptly when required. For those without email, please speak to your section rep for alternative arrangement to be made. It is therefore a requisite that all members of the chorus give consent to be contacted (preferably via email) by TOC as a condition of membership.

## **Facebook page:**

We have a chorus facebook page, [Thames Opera Company Members](#). This is a private group. New members should request to join via Facebook, and will be approved by the moderator (Matt Smith or Daniela McDonach).

## **External Communications:**

All publicity will be dealt with directly by designated members of TOC. Members are requested not to involve themselves with the media without the prior agreement of those members responsible. This is to enable TOC to coordinate the organisation's profile and for legal reasons.

There will be opportunities for members to help with the distribution of recruitment and publicity material and other such items. In which case the section reps will call for volunteers.

## **Data protection policy:**

TOC will retain a list of members' names, addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses. This will be done in accordance with current GDPR regulations and to comply with the TOC policy.

Members will be required to complete an annual membership form providing up to date details and giving permission for TOC to contact them.

# CODE OF CONDUCT

## **Attendance and punctuality:**

In order to maintain a high standard of performance, members should commit to attending all rehearsals unless prevented by circumstances beyond their control. Members should be ready for a prompt start at 7.15 pm. If you know you will be more than 10 minutes late, or circumstances mean that you won't be able to attend at all, please let your section rep know. If you know in advance that there are dates when you won't be able to attend, please notify your section rep.

Your rep will take a register at every rehearsal.

If a chorus member misses more than six rehearsals in a term they will automatically be considered as "resting" and will be allowed to re-join again at the next appropriate recruitment session, unless a different agreement has been reached with the music team. A "resting" member does not attend rehearsals or performances but may attend any social or non-performance based activities. At the end of each term, all "resting" members should confirm with their section reps if they wish to re-join, remain a "resting" member or wish to leave TOC.

Members are encouraged to participate in all performances during the year but should give their section reps plenty of notice if they are unable to take part. Those unable to participate in performances may be asked to stand down from rehearsals leading up to the performance.

## **Illness:**

All members will be expected to comply with any government health regulations in force. If for any reason you feel unwell do not attend as this may put other members at risk.

## **Guests and visiting ex-members:**

Guests are welcome at our rehearsals provided that prior permission has been received from your section rep. This is necessary for fire safety and safeguarding purposes.

## **Comfort and safety:**

Members should always feel free to use or request a chair for rehearsals or performances where standing is required. Members should always feel that they can express their discomfort or worries to TOC, section rep or other member, particularly if they are concerned about the limits of their physical capabilities. It is recommended that members bring water to rehearsals, to ensure that they are adequately hydrated.

### **Safeguarding:**

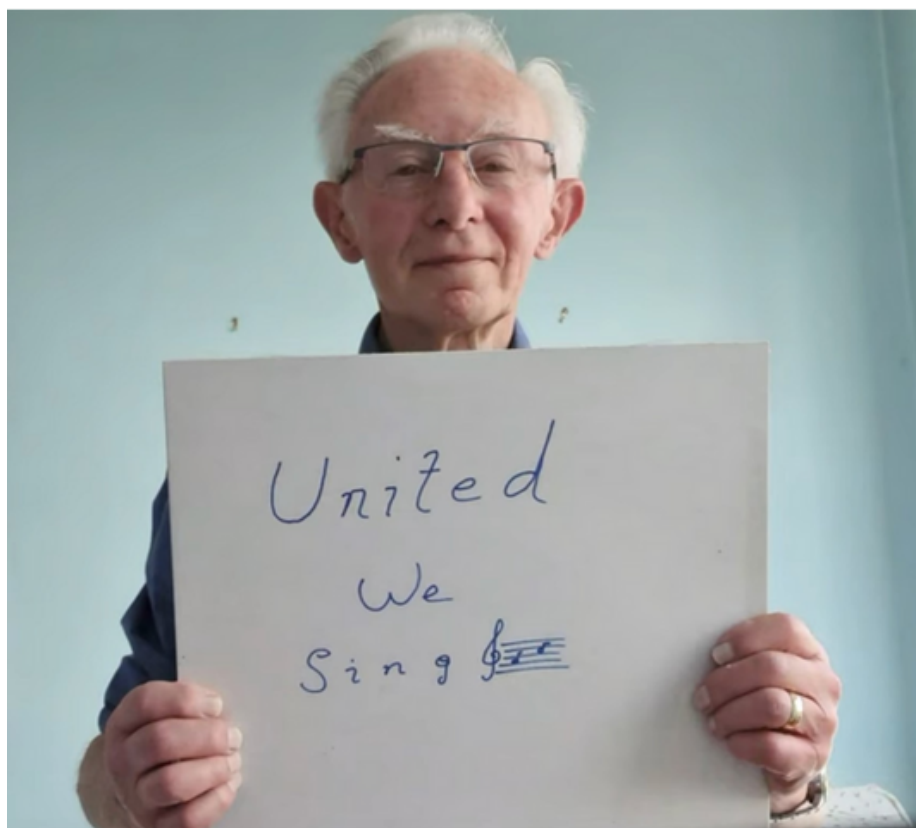
The chorus operates under their own safeguarding policy (see website) to comply with current legislation. TOC is currently aimed at all over the age of 18. Members under that age will be permitted to attend but they must be accompanied at all times by a parent, guardian or other responsible adult who will be responsible for that person. Vulnerable adults are welcome, but they must be accompanied by a suitable carer.

The designated safeguarding officer is Daniela McDonach, who can be contacted on 07932 724642 .

Should a chorus member see or hear anything that causes concern or is inappropriate, they should immediately report this to a section rep, safeguarding officer or a member of the Board. If they have a concern regarding the safeguarding officer, they should report this to the Chair of the Trustees.

### **Bullying:**

As a community group, mutual respect and a positive, welcoming and friendly attitude is essential. Behaviour of a bullying nature, or behaviour that could bring TOC into disrepute will not be tolerated and could result in members being asked to withdraw from the chorus. This applies to all members of the TOC, volunteers and/or Trustees.



# MEMBERSHIP FORM 23-24

Please [click here](#) to fill out the Thames Opera Company's membership form for 2023-24.

All members must fill in the form, which can be filled in on a computer, tablet or smart phone (iPhone or android).

If you cannot access the form online, please let your section rep know and they will provide you with a paper copy.

*Thank you!*

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REGISTERED OFFICE - THE OLD BAKERY, THE GREEN, WEST TILBURY, TILBURY, ENGLAND, RM18 8TU

REGISTERED IN ENGLAND COMPANY NUMBER13055360

REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER 1201123

THAMES  
**OPERA**  
COMPANY

COMMUNITY IN HARMONY