

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

As we do not offer a telephone advice line, we have made these FAQs as comprehensive as possible. We hope that your question falls neatly into one of the following four categories:

A: General questions (questions 1–7, page 1–2)

B: Questions about our mailing list (questions 8–11, page 2)

C: Questions about Royal Albert Hall concerts and tickets (questions 12–24, pages 2–4)

D: Questions about trips abroad (questions 25–30, pages 4–5)

A: General questions

1. *Why don't you take telephone enquiries?*

We all work from home, with very irregular hours, and at times we might be anywhere in the world so there would be no-one to answer the telephone! Please read these FAQs and if you can't find the answer, please WRITE to PO Box 4211, Bath BA1 0HJ.

2. *What do people wear at your concerts?*

The dress code varies with the venue, the weather and the formality of the occasion, but sopranos generally wear something which includes blue, and altos something which includes red. Full details are given on the Notes for Chorus which are sent out with the tickets (or earlier if you enclose a stamped-addressed envelope with your booking). Alternatively, click on the Events button at the top of this page, and then follow the links to the event you are asking about.

3. *Where can I get hold of the music for your concerts?*

Most of the works we sing are in the popular choral repertoire, so you should have no trouble getting copies from your local music shop. You may also be able to borrow the music from your local library. The information page for the event in question will tell you which edition you need if there is more than one. Alternatively, you might like to order from Music Dynamics, a mail-order music retailer which offers a friendly and reliable service. To go direct to the on-line order pages of their website, visit <http://www.musicdynamics.co.uk/store/buyscores.aspx> or telephone them on 01242 679379.

4. *Can I pick up a copy of the music on the day?*

Not unless you plan to visit a music shop on the way to the rehearsal! Copies of the music will not be available at any of our events—you must purchase or borrow it in advance. This is not just because selling scores would cause delays and other problems on the day, but chiefly because we prefer you to do some homework in advance, even if it is only to read the Notes for Chorus and copy the instructions into your score.

5. *Do you sell CDs or cassettes to help me learn my part?*

Recorded performances of the works we sing are likely to be widely available. If you want a recording where your individual part is given prominence so that you can listen while you follow your line in the vocal score, then Music Dynamics can supply their Choraline CDs and cassettes. Visit <http://www.musicdynamics.co.uk/store/buycline.aspx> for more information, or telephone them on 01242 679379.

6. *I have some questions about the music; where will I find the answers?*

Where appropriate, we try to answer these in our Notes for Chorus which are sent out with the tickets (or earlier if you enclose a stamped-addressed envelope with your booking). They are also available to download from the Events section of this website: go to the Events page and click through to the event in question.

7. *The parts divide in the musical score; which part shall I sing?*

Sometimes the booking forms give you a choice but sometimes they do not. The general advice is to learn whichever part you wish, and the Notes for Chorus will usually cover this. If they do not, we have probably made a mistake, so lots of people will write, and the chorus notes will be changed! Check for updates on the page specific to the event in question, or download the most recent version of the Notes for Chorus; if you are still uncertain, please write to PO Box 4211, Bath BA1 0HJ.

B: Questions about our mailing list

8. *How can I join your mailing list?*

Nothing could be easier. Simply click on 'Join our mailing list' at the top of any page of the website and you will be taken to a page where you can fill in all your details. You should receive a welcome pack from us within two or three weeks.

9. *How can I change my address?*

Please write to PO Box 4211, Bath BA1 0HJ.

10. *How do I remove myself from your mailing list?*

You can either write to us at PO Box 4211, Bath BA1 0HJ, or alternatively return any one of our mailings to us. If you choose the latter option, first make sure there are no tickets enclosed in the envelope, and *please do not* obscure your address label: if you do, we will not know who to remove.

11. *What is the significance of the group of letters on my address label?*

This is a six-letter code unique to you, which you will need when we initiate on-line booking at some future date.

C: Questions about Royal Albert Hall concerts

12. *Why can't I buy my tickets from the Royal Albert Hall?*

Singing tickets cannot be sold by the Hall because their Box Office has no means of allocating you to the correct voice-part within the choir, and we might end up with half a dozen tenors in the middle of the altos! Audience tickets are sold by the Hall, but our booking process starts several months ahead of theirs and the best seats are often sold by us before booking opens at the Box Office.

13. *When will I receive my tickets?*

Tickets are not despatched until a few weeks before the concert. This way we can balance the size of the different vocal sections. If you are expecting tickets, be sure to look carefully at every letter you receive from **The Really Big Chorus**—people have been known to overlook their tickets thinking it is a routine mailshot. Sometimes people who order two tickets think they have only received one. Look carefully, as they are folded together accordion style. If you have not received your tickets two weeks before the concert, please write to PO Box 4211, Bath BA1 0HJ, and be sure to tell us the name and postcode of the person who actually made the booking. You can then come and see us at the Box Office on the day of the concert, and we will be able to issue passes in lieu of lost or missing tickets. If there isn't time to write, come to the Box Office anyway, and we will do our best to help.

14. *How do I add to my booking?*

Simply make an additional booking; we will connect your booking if the surname and postcode are the same (please write clearly). To be safe, send a covering note with your second and subsequent bookings. However, there are situations in which we may not be able to seat additional bookings with your earlier ones. That occurs with female voices when the early bookings have arrived soon enough to be seated in the Stalls, and the subsequent request arrives after the Stalls are full. We do not consider it fair to push someone out of the Stalls in order to join a later booking with an early one, although we may offer you the option of moving your friend(s) out of the Stalls so they can sit with you if they wish. Surprisingly, this option is not often taken up! We may also not be able to seat you together when the early bookings are seated Downstairs and the Downstairs is full by the time the second booking arrives.

15. *How do I rearrange the voices or audience categories in my booking?*

To do this you must write to PO Box 4211, Bath BA1 0HJ and explain your requirements. Be sure to identify the surname and full postcode of the person who made the booking. Please enclose a payment if the total price is increased. We will not normally refund any price difference, and if we do there will be an administration charge.

16. *How do I reduce or cancel my booking?*

Please write to PO Box 4211, Bath BA1 0HJ. We are happy to be told about reduced or cancelled bookings so that we can fill gaps in the seating, but we will not normally make refunds unless your section is sold out and we are able to resell the tickets. Even for sold-out events this is not always possible, particularly if you leave it to the last minute. If we do make a refund, there will be an administration charge of £5.00 per seat.

17. *I sent my booking form in ages ago; when can I expect to hear from you?*

You should have enclosed an SAE for a confirmation that we received your booking, otherwise we assume you trust us. If you did enclose an SAE, mail does unfortunately go astray! Your tickets will be sent a few weeks before the concert, but if the concert is less than two weeks away and you have not received them, please write to us immediately at PO Box 4211, Bath BA1 0HJ and we will sort it out for you.

18. *Where will I sit at the Royal Albert Hall?*

Choir tickets are sold in three categories, Boxes, Downstairs and Circle. The earliest bookings are always given what we consider to be the best seats. You can view pictures of the choir at our events in our photo galleries, which you will find on the Past Events pages of the website.

Downstairs Sopranos are first of all seated in the Stalls. We may then put in two rows of Arena seats behind the orchestra violins, and then two or more rows behind the Basses at the back of the Stage. Finally, we fill the Choir East Section from front to back.

Downstairs Altos are first of all seated in the Stalls. We may then put in two or more rows behind the Basses at the back of the Stage. Finally, we fill the Choir West Section from front to back.

Downstairs Tenors are usually seated on a stage extension behind the orchestra. Rows 1 and 2 in that section are farthest from the conductor but are the most raised, so we consider them to be the best position.

Downstairs Basses are seated on the Stage, from front to back.

The chairs for Tenors and Basses Downstairs are not as wide as they might be and, because of Health and Safety requirements, they now have to be strapped together. The number of end-of-row seats is limited, but if space is a problem for you, please tell us when you send in your booking form and we will do our best to accommodate you.

Circle Choir seats are organised into Sections by voice and according to how full the Circle is.

Any singer with a particular request should specify their requirements at the time of booking.

19. *Can I sit with my friend?*

Maybe. The safest thing is to book together. Alternatively, write to PO Box 4211, Bath BA1 0HJ asking to be seated together. Please be sure the other person has booked, and tell us who made their booking—these requests sometimes cause us much head scratching. We need to know the surnames and postcodes of the people who actually made the booking(s). However, there is one situation in which we will refuse to seat you with your friend. That occurs with female voices when the first booking has arrived early enough to be seated in the Stalls, and the subsequent request arrives after the Stalls are full. We do not consider it fair to push someone out of the Stalls to join a later booking with an early one. We may offer you the option of moving your friend(s) out of the Stalls so they can sit with you. Surprisingly, this option is not often taken up!

20. *I am disabled. How do I get easy-access seats?*

There are some seats on special platforms suitable for wheelchair access, and there are other seats that are easier to access for those not in wheelchairs. For disabled and easy-access seats, and any special request of a similar nature, please explain your requirement at the time of booking.

21. *I suffer from vertigo. How can I get a low seat?*

The Albert Hall is quite steeply raked in places and we know this can be a severe problem for some people. Your best option is to book very early. If you are worried about this, please explain fully when you make your booking.

22. *Where can I change?*

At the Royal Albert Hall there are some large dressing rooms available, but they are not big enough to accommodate the entire chorus, and they are not suitable for leaving valuables. If possible, come dressed for the concert. Information about the location of the dressing rooms is included in the Notes for Chorus for each Royal Albert Hall event, and these are available to download from the specific event page. Copies of the Notes for Chorus are sent with booking confirmations to those who book by post and enclose a stamped addressed envelope (and in all cases where a booking is made by telephone), and are also sent with tickets.

23. *Where can I eat at or near the Royal Albert Hall?*

There are a number of catering outlets within the Hall, ranging from bars to full service restaurants. If you are seated in Boxes you can also have catering in your Box. However, because the Hall's catering is operated on a franchise (currently held by Leith's) the Hall completely forbids self-catering in any of the public areas of the Hall, and this includes Boxes. See the Hall's website for catering options: www.royalalberthall.com

In fine weather at suitable times of the year, Kensington Gardens is excellent for picnics. Particularly in July the steps of the Albert Memorial and adjacent lawns take on a festive atmosphere between rehearsals and concert. There is a huge choice of pubs and restaurants ranging from fast food to Michelin Stars within 15 minutes walking distance of the Hall.

24. *Where can I park near the Royal Albert Hall?*

We advise you not to drive unless you are very familiar with the area. Quite apart from the weekday London Congestion Charge, which currently includes the area around the Royal Albert Hall, parking is expensive and heavily controlled. Local restrictions are constantly being tightened and can change without warning. At the time of writing (September 2009), parking is free at times on single yellow lines on some streets. We dare not give detailed advice; the two London Boroughs of Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea between them aggressively control the streets surrounding the Hall. On certain days, the Hall itself can arrange somewhat expensive spaces at nearby Imperial College (visit the Hall's website at www.royalalberthall.com and click on the 'Plan your visit' tab to find out more about parking arranged by the Hall).

D: Questions about singing trips abroad

25. *When will I receive my tickets?*

Tickets and other travel documents are sent in the fortnight before travel by our travel partners, Specialised Travel Ltd. If you have not received your documentation a week before departure, contact them on 020 8799 8350 or 8356, or e-mail scratch@stlon.com. Concerts from Scratch may also independently send information about the musical and concert-related aspects of the trip at about the same time, but these letters from us will be quite separate from your travel documents, so watch out for an envelope from Specialised Travel.

26. *Why am I getting information from a different company?*

The Really Big Chorus draws on the expertise of other organisations when it needs to. Specialised Travel Ltd is an experienced tour operator with a department which specifically caters for the needs of musicians, and the company has an unrivalled reputation for looking after its musical clients abroad. They have been our travel partners for more than a decade, and will be your contact for all your travel arrangements. Visit their website at www.stlon.com.

27. *I sent my application in weeks ago; when can I expect to hear from you?*

Information packs for overseas trips and cruises are sent out by our travel partners, Specialised Travel Ltd. In order to avoid sending the details twice, these packs are not sent out until every last detail is confirmed and agreed, and there are occasional last-minute hitches which cause delay. Please be patient: Specialised

Travel is aware that you need the information, and will contact you as soon as they can. If the delay is causing you problems, you can ring them on 020 8799 8350 or 8356, or e-mail scratch@stlon.com.

28. *How will I know what to bring with me?*

Your music is the most important thing, and we recommend you acquire this well in advance of the trip since we will not be able to provide it. (To find out where to get hold of the music you need, go back to the answer to question 3 on page 1.) Roughly two weeks before departure you will receive two sets of information: our travel partners, Specialised Travel, will send your tickets and general information about the trip (including details of the local currency, the likely weather conditions and suitable clothing for the time of year); we will send you everything you need to know about the musical side of things, including what clothes to pack for the concert and where you will be able to change.

29. *Can I travel independently on one of your overseas singing excursions?*

Sometimes you can, providing there is sufficient space in the concert venue. The price that we charge for independent travellers reflects the fact that numbers taking part in these trips are much smaller than at the Royal Albert Hall, and yet the costs involved in organising a concert at a prestigious foreign venue are substantial. Please write to us at PO Box 4211, Bath BA1 0HJ. You *cannot* book independent travel via our travel partner, Specialised Travel Ltd (unless you wish to extend one of our trips to give yourself a longer holiday).

30. *I just happen to have booked a place independently on the same singing cruise as The Really Big Chorus. Can I sing with you?*

Sorry, this will not be possible unless you cancel your original booking and re-book with us. Please join our mailing list (use the link at the top of this page) so that you can, in future, find out in advance where we are going, and book with us from the outset.