



Westwinds Questions and Answers

The following are questions that are often asked of the board, including some comments and questions arising from Westwinds program evaluations. In this list, your executive attempts to answer some of your questions using a “Q and A” format. We hope you find it useful.

Q *When Westwinds pays to rent rehearsal space for our choirs, why are there occasions when the school moves the piano from our rehearsal space? This is very disruptive, and frustrating.*

A Westwinds rents the school spaces through Calgary Parks and Recreation, and often the communication between Parks and Recreation and the schools we use is not what it should be. The Westwinds office (a.k.a. Jackie) tries to be as proactive as possible to ensure that the equipment we require is in the room, but unfortunately, school staff often moves equipment around without informing Parks and Recreation or Westwinds. Please be assured that the executive and the office are as frustrated by this as you are when it occurs.

Q *Why does so much of our (choir) music tend to be traditional or secular music? Could we include more contemporary music, Celtic pieces, or modern folk songs?*

A Except in the very rare case that Westwinds’ Artistic director has to step in and modify music selection, the music your ensemble sings (or plays) is selected by your director. If you’re interested in finding music in styles that differ from what your director has presented, please talk to them directly. This is true of all of our ensembles whether they’re choral or instrumental.

Q *When will Westwinds be having more choral workshops?*

A Westwinds has not offered any workshops (choral, jazz, or concert band) in the last couple of years. Prior to that time, all three families of workshops experienced sharply declining attendance, to the point that they were unable to break even financially, and the volunteers that worked to organize them were discouraged and frustrated. As a result, the executive was forced to discontinue the workshop program.

Q *What would need to happen for Westwinds workshops to start up again?*

A Your executive needs to be relatively confident that enough people will take part in a workshop that it will support itself. If interested members organized a “petition” of confirmed attendees (not necessarily from within Westwinds), that would be a great indication of renewed support for workshops. Contact your executive directly for attendees required for a particular workshop.

Q *Why does the Choral Ensemble pay more fees than the other choirs, and can this be changed?*

A The extra fees were originally put in place to allow the director at the time to hire professionals outside Westwinds (e.g. a professional rhythm section) for Choral Ensemble performances. The recent letter from our President regarding a necessary fee increase also included the information that because this desire no longer exists, the extra fee for Choral Ensemble has been removed.

Q *Why do jazz bands pay higher fees than all the other groups?*

A Unfortunately, this is a simple matter of numbers. A jazz band is limited by its nature to seventeen or eighteen players. This in turn limits the revenue available from jazz bands. However, a jazz band still requires a room, a director, and music, all of which are just as expensive for the seventeen piece jazz band as they are for a forty or fifty piece concert band.

Q *Is it possible to have recordings made at concerts?*

A It's certainly possible. However, recordings come in two varieties. If an interested friend or significant other is willing to bring in equipment to record a performance, that's great, and the executive supports them doing so, providing it's not disruptive to the performance. The other variety of recordings are made by a professional sound engineer using high-end audio equipment, and we know from our 20th Anniversary CD set that this is very expensive, and therefore not something Westwinds would be able to do on a regular basis for all performances.

Q *What, exactly, is Westwinds' dress code for performances?*

A That's a great question, and one that gets revisited regularly. Westwinds' performance dress code is "black on black", which means black slacks (black jeans do not qualify), black long-sleeved button-up shirts, black socks and black shoes for the men. For women, "Black on black" is interpreted as black skirts (preferably knee-length at least, and black leggings are **not** a substitute), black long-sleeved blouses, black hosiery, and black shoes. Some ensembles have acquired group-specific accessories (e.g. the Choral Ensemble's neck scarves) but the basic attire still remains "black on black". The reason for this is that over the years, "black on black" has consistently provided a uniform, sharp appearance on stage without being prohibitively expensive for members to put together (i.e. You don't have to buy a tux !!). The dress code can be found on our web site under Home / About Westwinds / Policies, Practices, Processes.

Q *Why were there rehearsals after the Christmas concert and after the final concert in the spring?*

A These rehearsals get back to the old adage that says "You can't please everyone". Westwinds members who have contacted the executive with their opinions are split almost exactly 50/50 between wanting all the available rehearsals, and wanting to drop the last rehearsal of each half of the year after the concerts have been completed. Scheduling the rehearsal and providing the rehearsal venue for those dates makes it possible for each ensemble to choose for themselves whether they wish to rehearse or not.

Q *How do we get more performance opportunities for our ensemble?*

A Additional performances beyond those established in Westwinds' annual schedule may be arranged by the ensembles for themselves, but please keep in mind that Westwinds' office **must** be notified well in advance of any additional performances. Please also note that the director (and the accompanist for choir performances) **must** be paid for those performances, so some generation of revenue will usually be required to do that. Finally, bear in mind that the desire to perform more is a very personal thing, and many members don't want to perform more than they already do.

Q *The Jubilee Auditorium is a beautiful venue for the Christmas Concert, but why do we charge admission? Wouldn't we get more people out if admission was free?*

A It's possible that the turnout to the Christmas Concert would be higher if admission was free. However, while the Jubilee Auditorium is a great hall, it's also extremely expensive. Losing the admission revenue we do receive at the door would mean more of that expense would have to be paid from Westwinds revenues, and Westwinds revenues are predominantly your annual fees. Your executive is made up of members like yourselves, and we pay the same fees as you do, so we're very reluctant to make decisions (like eliminating concert admissions) that would result in an adverse effect on fees.

Q *Why does the distribution of stage time at performances seem to favour the more advanced groups? Also, why does the Christmas Concert seem to have more choral content than band?*

A The final decisions regarding stage time for all performances are with the Artistic Director. However, one factor that may be contributing to differences in stage time is that the more advanced the ensemble, the general rule is that their pieces of music are longer. Therefore, if the schedule is set so that each ensemble plays three selections, the overall time for Green Band, for example, would be less than the overall time for three Wind Orchestra selections.

Q *Why doesn't Westwinds have some groups rehearse in the Northwest? Why are all the groups in Lord Beaverbrook or Ernest Manning?*

A Westwinds literally has members from all over the City of Calgary, as well as from most of the surrounding communities, so there really is no one location for rehearsals that's better than any other. Lord Beaverbrook and Ernest Manning were chosen because they are two of a very short list of schools that have multiple rehearsal rooms (three in Ernest Manning, and two in Lord Beaverbrook), and our contract with Parks and Recreation is structured so that the second and third room in a school cost us less than renting a single room in an additional school.

Q *Since we pay the same fees as the other jazz bands, why do we use the choir room at Beaverbrook? Could we not use a real band room at another school, that doesn't have to be set up and torn down for each rehearsal?*

A Your executive is keenly aware that the Beaverbrook choir room is not an optimal band rehearsal space. However, as explained in the previous question, renting a single (band) room in a "new" school is more expensive than renting another room in a school where Westwinds is already located, which limits our alternatives at this point.

Q *Could Westwinds provide an outline of rehearsal expectations that would address the issues of off-topic chatter and attendance at rehearsals?*

A Westwinds doesn't currently have a document that deals in any depth with these issues. Our "Code of Conduct" document (available on the web site under home / Policies, Practices, Processes) mentions a "golden rule" policy whereby respect for band-mates (or choir-mates) and your director should lead a member to be in his/her chair ready to play on time, and to be attentive during rehearsals. The executive also encourages directors to exert control over disrespectful or disruptive activity, and supports them in doing so when necessary.

Q *Why does Westwinds continue to do placement auditions?*

A "Placements" are not true auditions, in that they don't determine whether a player or singer "gets in" to the ensemble. The only true auditions in Westwinds are held in the Jazz program for Gold Jazz bands and Jazz Orchestra, and in the Choral Ensemble. These auditions are conducted by professional clinicians to ensure that members in these higher level ensembles play or sing at an ability level appropriate to the group and to select players when there are more applicants than there are openings.

Q *OK. So why does Westwinds require "placements"? As adults, can we not work this out by ourselves, without adding stress to the beginning of the year?*

A Formal placements are held in Bronze and Silver Jazz Band, all of our concert bands, and Women's Choir at the beginning of each season. Placements provide the directors of these groups a measure of control over the musical makeup of the sections in their ensemble, as well as valuable information for structuring the year's program for the ensemble. They also allow the director to offer guidance to any members who may have placed themselves in a group that is significantly above their ability level.

Q *Why does Westwinds put on the Big Band Dinner Dance? This is not jazz!*

A Westwinds had dropped the Big Band Dinner Dance for a couple of years. The main reason for bringing it back was a huge number of requests from former attendees. It is extremely popular, as evidenced by the turnout last spring, as well as providing an opportunity for members of the choir and concert band programs to meet, get to know, and enjoy the playing of the jazz band members. With regard to the extent to which it is or isn't jazz, the selection of material for each of the bands that perform in the Big Band Dinner Dance is made by the directors, so the extent to which the event is jazz-oriented is directly controlled by the bands themselves.