

The West Potomac High School Choral Department



Choral Handbook for Singers and Parents

Ernest Johnson
Choral Director

Website

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Visit the *West Potomac High School Choral Department* website!

The website contains :

- All information in the handbook, along with forms which you can email or print out when needed.
- Information about each ensemble, along with sound bytes of their performances
- The 2008-2009 choral calendar of events, regularly updated with any additions and changes
- Choral Board members and email addresses

Stay in touch, stay updated, stay informed by visiting our website!

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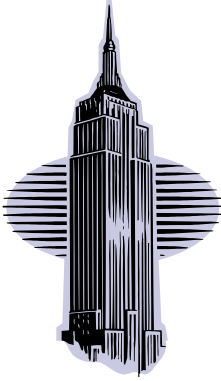
Meet our Music Director



Ernest L. Johnson , A man with a diverse range of talents, Mr. Johnson received his Bachelor of Music degree from Kent State University in Ohio, and a Master of Music degree from Ithaca College in New York. He is also certified in Dalcroze Eurhythmics, a philosophy of music education which employs movement (eurhythmics), singing (solfege), and improvisation.

He has taught choral music at all levels, from elementary to adult. His high school teaching credits include schools in Cleveland, Ohio; Mamaroneck, New York; Merrick (Long Island) New York, and private schools in Manhattan. His conducting credits include study with Vance George (San Francisco Symphony Chorus), Gregg Smith (Gregg Smith Singers), Dale Warland (Dale Warland Singers), Dennis Keene (Ascension Singers, NYC), Weston Noble (Luther College) and James Jordan (Westminster Choir College). His past conducting positions have included the Fairfax Chorale, Maryland Choral Society, and the Heritage Presbyterian Church chancel choir.

Mr. Johnson is beginning his 20th year at West Potomac, and his 33rd season of teaching and conducting. He has a passion for teaching, has an eclectic taste in music, and still loves to dance. He was lead writer for FCPS Secondary Choral Program of Studies (POS) which outlines objectives, goals and teaching strategies for all of Fairfax County's middle and high school choral directors. In 1993 he was West Potomac's *Teacher of the Year* , and is listed in five editions of *Who's Who Among America's Teachers*. In the summer of 2000, the West Potomac PTSA nominated him for the prestigious Robert Spillane (former FCPS Superintendent of Schools) Leadership Award, given to innovative FCPS teachers who have made a significant impact on student achievement. He has served two terms as the Virginia Music Educators Assoc (VMEA) District 10 Chairperson, and was twice nominated for president of the Virginia Choral Directors Association. (VCDA)



From New York...For twelve years, Mr. Johnson lived and worked in New York City. During this period he immersed himself in the artistic life of the city. He studied voice, conducting, piano, acting, and dance; performed with various choral chamber ensembles and professional church choirs. For a few years he presented arts-in-education assembly programs and workshops to thousands of elementary children and their teachers throughout the tri-state region of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. He was musical director/arranger/accompanist for an Off-Broadway show; coached professional singers; traveled with classical music humorist Peter Shickele and company (PDQ Bach) as an assistant stage manager; and worked at Carl Fischer Music Publishers.



To West Potomac...Under his direction, West Potomac ensembles have consistently received superior (I) ratings at VMEA evaluation festivals for over 10 years. They have performed at the National Cathedral, Maryland Renaissance Festival, Kennedy Center, US Capitol, US State Department, the White House, Washington's Mt. Vernon, Woodlawn Plantation, Gadsby's Tavern Museum, Gunston Hall, Jamestown and Williamsburg, VA venues. Each year WPHS choirs are chosen to perform on FCPS Channel 21 "Holiday Spotlight". In the past, Washington D.C.'s former classical radio station *WGMS* recognized and awarded WP choirs for excellence in choral performance with their "Young Artists in the Community" award. WPHS choirs have also been chosen by audition on five occasions to perform at the Virginia Music Educators Conferences for an audience of choral directors and music educators from around the state.

It is because of these wonderful outreach performances that the West Potomac Choirs have a proud tradition of excellence, and are well-known and respected not only throughout the metropolitan area but also throughout the entire state!

West Potomac Choirs Course Descriptions

Freshman Women's Choir- #926016 Gr. 9

This is an *intermediate* level choir for 9th grade women who have shown success singing in their middle school ensemble. Placement is given to singers who have passed all requirements for their previous ensemble, and have been recommended by their middle school director.

- Those with little or no experience are also welcome to audition, but must make every effort to meet the requirements for the class within the first quarter (Singers must have basic sightreading skills and be familiar with basic musical terms, and know how to follow a choral score)

Singers will learn a variety of music in English and other languages, in unison and in parts, and learn rehearsal and performance skills. All students will receive daily instruction to improve their sight-reading skills, using solfege syllables. Basic musical fundamentals will also be introduced and/or developed. The chorus will combine with other ensembles in after school rehearsals and concerts

Entrance Requirements:

- Have an informal interview and audition with the director, or recommendation from their previous middle school choral director.
- Ability to sing on pitch
- Able to attend all required after school rehearsals and concerts
- Purchase the choral uniform

Singers will learn a variety of music in English and other languages, in unison and in parts, and learn rehearsal and performance skills. All students will learn to sight-read using solfege syllables. Basic musical fundamentals will also be introduced and/or developed.

Uniform Fee: \$100, which includes black concert gown, pearls, shoes, hose. *Free/reduced lunch students are subsidized* by FCPS and/or the West Potomac Choral boosters. Singers must return the uniform at the end of the year to the choral department, or a fee for the uniform will be charged.

Men's Chorus "Bunchagize" #926017 Gr. 9-12

Entrance Requirements:

- Have an informal interview and audition with the director, or recommendation from their previous middle school choral director.
-
- must be able to sing on pitch
- able to attend all required after school rehearsals and concerts
- purchase the choral uniform

The *Bunchagize* are a dynamic group of male singers dedicated to the joy of accapella and accompanied arrangements written for men. The group performs a variety of styles, including barbershop, gospel, doo-wop and pop, folk songs, ethnic works, and classical pieces. Music reading skills will determine the level of music to be studied and performed. Singers will continue to develop reading skills throughout the year in class exercises and assignments. In addition, the Bunchagize combine with the women's choirs in after school rehearsals and concerts. The men may also perform outreach concerts for area elementary schools and community functions.

Uniform Fee: \$100, full tuxedo rental (jacket, pants, tie, cummerbund, vest) from choral dept. and includes purchase of tuxedo shirt. Singer may deduct \$20 if a he owns a wing-tip tuxedo shirt. Singer must supply black dress shoes and socks. Free/reduced lunch students are subsidized by FCPS, but must return the uniform at the end of the year to the choral dept.

Advanced Male Ensemble:

Men may audition for an advanced male ensemble. See the director for details. Singers must be available to rehearse twice a week from 2:30 – 4:00.

Advanced Womens' Choir:

Symphonic Women #928916 Gr. 9 - 12

Entrance to this ensemble is by AUDITION ONLY. The Symphonic Women are known for their outstanding musicianship, and have performed at the *National Cathedral* and *Virginia Music Educators Assoc. (VMEA) state conference*. The class is intended for more advanced students who meet the following criteria, determined by the director. Current WP choral students may audition for the ensemble. The director will consider your past performance, sightreading ability, rehearsal discipline, and attendance. New students to the choral department must:

- Be able to read music and/or have solfege experience
- Have previous experience in an advanced choir, or have performed in an instrumental ensemble; or is an intermediate to advanced pianist.
- able to attend all required after school rehearsals and concerts
- purchase the choral uniform

Uniform fee: \$100 - black concert gown, pearls, shoes, hose. Free/reduced lunch students are subsidized by FCPS, but must return the uniform at the end of the year to the choral dept.

Advanced Vocal Ensembles

The *Colonial Singers* and *Bella Voce* select ensembles are intended for the highly motivated, disciplined and musically talented student. They are the representative concert ensembles of West Potomac HS, and perform many outreach concerts throughout the year at community functions, elementary schools, and private business venues. Students who audition for these ensembles must

- have a strong commitment to choral excellence.
- have strong organizational and management skills
- be at least a rising sophomore at the time of the audition
- show evidence of past successful musical experience in a previous choral ensemble at West Potomac, including excellent rehearsal discipline, attendance, and ability to work with peers
- be able to sight-read
- be able to sing own part alone in a quartet
- practice at home regularly and come prepared for each rehearsal with pitches and rhythms learned.

Bella Voce #929616 Gr. 10 – 12

This ensemble is designed for the singer who desires a musical and vocal challenge, and the opportunity to sing in an advanced chamber chorus for women. Members will study and perform music of the highest quality, which will include classical, folk, contemporary, and ethnic music.

Uniform fee: \$100, dress, shoes, hose, pearls.
(Free/reduced lunch students receive assistance)

Colonial Singers #928015 Gr. 10-12

A "living history" educational outreach ensemble, singers perform an original program of songs, stories, and dances from the 1770's. They perform annually at Gadsby's Tavern, Mt. Vernon, and in schools throughout the county. A wide repertoire of European and American music between 16th—19th centuries is also studied and performed. A four-day ENSEMBLE RETREAT at a nearby sleep-away camp is held each August. Due to the performance schedule in August and September, retreat attendance is required for participation in those concerts! **After auditions, the *Colonial Singers* class is closed.**

Uniform fee: Authentic Colonial clothing, \$100+, depending on design & chosen character. Concert attire— women, \$90 Men \$65

West Potomac Choral Department 2008-2009
Important contact information:

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West Potomac High School Choral Booster Board

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Trip Coordinator

Bunchagize

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Choral Program of Studies

Philosophy

Music, through its inherent ability to develop intellectual and emotional communication skills, encourages cultural awareness, and enriches society. The WPHS choral curriculum provides opportunities for students to attain the knowledge and skills necessary to become musically literate, well-rounded individuals. Participation in the choral program engages the mind, raises self-esteem, improves self-confidence and is vital in developing the positive attitudes towards schooling and life-long learning. Furthermore, singing in the choral program is important to the educational process because it develops students'

- Intellectual skills required to comprehend the language of music, which will enable them to continue to learn new music independently throughout their lives;
- Coordination, contributing to the physical expression of musical sound;
- Interpersonal skills through participation in an ensemble;
- Ability to listen to many different kinds of music with understanding, and gain a broader cultural and historical perspective;
- Ability to recognize and pursue excellence in musical experiences;
- Ability to express themselves creatively.

The adult life of every student is enriched by the skills, knowledge, and habits acquired in participation in the choral program.

Choral Music Program of Studies

Vocal Techniques

- **Physiology of the vocal mechanism**
- **Vocal production:** *posture, breathing, range, open throat, resonance*
- **Diction:** *pure vowels, diphthongs, voiced and unvoiced consonants*
- **Accuracy of intonation**
- **Singing tone; Ranges and designations of the singing voice.**

Choral Techniques

- **Rehearsal discipline:** *how to rehearse; making rehearsal markings within the music; cooperative efforts to improve self and ensemble*
- **Responding to conducting gestures**
- **Using movement to see, feel a musical concept**
- **Using imagery to achieve a desired musical response**
- **Exercises to develop good intonation, blend, balance, and diction.**

Music Literacy

- **Pitch:** *identifying notes in treble and bass clefs*
- **Rhythm:** *identification of rhythmic notation and corresponding duration; simple and compound meter recognition; accurately performing rhythmic patterns by clapping, speaking, and/or singing; Using the count-sing method in choral rehearsals.*
- **Ear-Training:** *aural recognition of rhythm and pitch patterns, major & minor modes, and intervals*
- **Solfege/Sight-singing:** *sequenced approach to sight-singing melodies. Using solfege syllables (do, re, mi, etc,) the student will begin with stepwise melodies in simple rhythms through more advanced interval skips and rhythmic patterns. Students will accurately sight-sing 4-8 measure melodies, using correct solfege syllables in various keys studied.*
- **Improvisation:** *improvising melodies, phrases, rhythmic patterns*
- **Dictation/composition:** *Notation of melodies and rhythmic patterns as they are sung or played from the keyboard, followed by sight-singing the notated examples.*
- **Musical vocabulary:** *identification and use of musical terms*
- **Keyboard orientation:** *basic knowledge of the piano keyboard; identifying notes on the keyboard in treble & bass clefs; learning to play one's choral part at the piano. Application of basic music theory concepts*
- **Music theory:** *key signatures, scales, intervals, triads*
- **Analyzation:** *identifying all learned concepts music being studied*

Choral literature

- **Develop choral literacy through the study and performance of sacred and secular literature:** *diverse selections include **historical works of great composers, spirituals, folksongs, popular standards, new works by contemporary composers.** Also included in the study of selected works: historical significance, cultural characteristics, composer biographies, and other relevant information.*
- **Lyric analysis:** *understanding of the meanings of words, phrases within the lyric, overall message to be communicated through singing the piece.*
- **Performance of one or more works in a foreign language:**
- **Choreography:** *some selections are performed with movement*

Performance skills

- **Stage presence:** *proper dress and demeanor in performance*
- **Facial communication:** *showing emotional meaning of the text.*
- **Application of good vocal and choral techniques**
- **Memorization of music:** *exception of longer works (+10 minutes)*
- **Watching the conductor:** *responding to conducting gestures*

Concert Programming

Concerts are planned to present a diverse selection of music for study and performance throughout the year. Music is selected with the following criteria in mind:

- Educational value for both students and listeners (audience)
- Cultural or historical value
- Lyrics
- Music availability – is it in print and affordable;
- Appropriate arrangement of a work for high school singers;
- Level of difficulty
- Accompaniment: Acapella, or accompanied by piano or other instrument
- Relationship of a selection to the program theme
- Entertaining and enjoyable, for both singers and audience

The WPHS choral program is intended to provide the student with a well-rounded musical experience. The educational *process* of preparing a musical work for performance far outweighs any consideration given to the *entertainment* value of a selection.

WPHS Annual Concert Programs

Potluck and Preview: (September)	Fall banquet, which includes informal performance of works in progress by each ensemble
Fall Concert (October)	First concert contains a diverse selection of music, chosen specifically to develop vocal, choral, and ensemble rehearsal and performance skills. Most songs are learned without the aid of the piano, with singers sight-reading each piece using solfege syllables (do, re, mi, fa, sol la ti) and rhythmic counting.
Winter Concert (December)	A selection of seasonal favorites. The concert traditionally ends with audience members and alumni being invited to join the choirs in Handel's <i>Hallelujah Chorus</i> .
Major work (Community singers WPHS choirs & orchestra)	Although not an annual event, this concert presented in lieu of a Fall or Winter concert West Potomac Community singers (parents neighbors, faculty, staff) are invited to join WPHS choral students & orchestra in a performance of a major work. Professional soloists perform the solos.
Dessert Concert (March)	This concert is performed outside of WPHS at a location in the community, most often a church. It features selections which reflect each ensemble's most advanced work, and is often considered the most beautiful, musical concert of the year. Following the concert, the audience and singers enjoy a delicious array of desserts at the reception.
District 10 Festival Evaluations (March)	The evaluation festival is hosted by one of the District 10 schools, and features performances by each choir in the district. Choirs perform two of their most advanced pieces and are graded by three choral adjudicators. The performances are given a rating of superior (I), excellent (II), good (III), or fair (IV) the ratings are based on such criteria as intonation, pitch/rhythm accuracy, blend & balance, musicianship, and stage presence
Spring Trip (March)	An optional event, the choirs travel to a major city to perform. Often the groups participate in a choral festival with other choirs, under the direction of a well-known college choral conductor. In addition to performing, the students receive a choral clinic by the conductor, have the opportunity to hear other high school ensemble, and attend a professional concert, play, or Broadway musical. Past trips have included Boston, Westminster Choir College (Princeton), New York City, and Gloucester, England.
Pyramid Concert (March)	A spectacular concert featuring choirs from each of the WPHS pyramid elementary schools, Sandburg Intermediate, and the WPHS choirs Over 400 students combine to sing the finale!
Spring Show (June)	A highly anticipated event by the entire school community, this is an original production, complete with staging, choreography, sets, costumes, multi-media slides, and an instrumental jazz combo. The show runs for three nights.