

Gay
Abandon
West Yorkshire's LGBT choir

Information pack for people

interested in

joining Gay Abandon.



Photographer: Dawn Kilner

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Gay Abandon knows that starting something new, like joining a choir, can sometimes be a nerve-wracking experience for people mostly because they often don't know what to expect.

This is why we have made this information pack – to give people all the information they need to know about what it's like being a member of Gay Abandon in the hope that they will feel more comfortable getting in touch.

The following pack contains everything from practical information, like where we practice and how much it costs, to what you can expect to be singing and what we do outside of rehearsals.

If, after reading this pack, you still have some questions, please feel free to get in touch with us at info@gay-abandon.co.uk and we'll get back to you as soon as we can with an answer.



Practical Things

People to Know

Before we get into the details, here are some people worth introducing you to:

Gay Abandon is managed by a Management Committee. This Committee looks after the choir, making sure that it runs smoothly and that the members of the choir are happy. The people who are on the Management Committee currently are:

Chair - Brian Rock

Committee Secretary - Neal Harris

Treasurer – Stuart Whittingham

Membership Secretary – Tray Yeadon-Lee
External Events - Tony Rider
Weekend Away Coordinator - Emma Harvey
Making Music Rep – Viv Jackson
Website and Marketing – Peter Zaprov
Soprano Rep – Clare Milton-Thompson
Tenor Rep – Darren O’Sullivan
Alto Rep – Gillian Lapsley
Bass Rep – Tony Rider

Supporting the committee are 2 other people:



Ian Akroyd is Gay Abandon’s Musical Director (MD for short). He leads all of Gay Abandon’s practices and conducts the choir when we perform.



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Jenny Wattis is Gay Abandon's Accompanist. She plays the keyboard or piano (whichever is handy at the time) while the choir learns songs and while the choir is performing.

Where and When Gay Abandon Practices

Gay Abandon currently sings at The Swarthmore Education Centre, in Leeds. The full address is:

The Swarthmore Education Centre

2-7 Woodhouse Square

Leeds

LS3 1AD

Swarthmore is a fully accessible building: it has a ramp leading up to the entrance of the building, a lift in the building to help people go from floor to floor, and disabled accessible toilets.

The choir practise Tuesday evenings during school term times (following the Leeds School Calendar) from 19:30 to 21:30. There is a 15min break in the middle of the practice.

Gay Abandon is quite informal, and while we do try to encourage people to turn up on time, people can arrive late or leave early if they need to.

Costs

Members of Gay Abandon pay a monthly membership fee to cover the costs associated with the choir. Members pay by Standing Order, and the payment is made every month, even when the choir isn't meeting.



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The choir recognises that income will vary for choir members and so different membership plans are offered. No matter what you pay, you will receive the same benefits as every other member of choir. The options are:

- £22 per month – Standard Membership Fee
- £11 per month – Low Income Membership Fee
- £5 per month – Student/Very Low Income Membership Fee



You decide which option will work best for you and your finances, though you can of course speak with a member of the choir if you would like advice on this. The choir also knows that sometimes people's circumstances change and that their membership fee amount will have to change as well. In this instance, all you would need to do is let the Treasurer know that you were changing your payment amount.

The fee that members pay covers:

- The hire of Swarthmore Education Centre

- Ian and Jenny's fees for leading and supporting practices
 - Fees for writing arrangements and creating learning tracks
 - Getting permission to sing the songs the choir sings
 - The choir's insurance
- Money needed to pay for equipment the choir needs, like keyboards, music stands etc.
- Membership to various organisations that provide advice and support to Gay Abandon, such as Making Music

Membership fees are not the only way that Gay Abandon makes money. The choir receives money from selling tickets to its annual concert, and sometimes gets paid to perform at gigs and events (such as Light Night Leeds). This money is spent on supporting other activity that Gay Abandon does, such as the costs associated with the annual concert.



Photographer: Karen Hope

As well as its rehearsals and annual concert, Gay Abandon also takes part in other activities such as Various Voices, an international LGBT+ choir festival, and Hand in Hand, the UK and Ireland's biennial LGBT+ choir festival. Cost can prevent some members of the choir taking part in these activities, and so Gay Abandon set up a bursary fund for members to apply to help cover costs associated with these kinds of things.

Accessibility and Inclusion

Gay Abandon believes that anyone and everyone should have the chance to sing and be a part of a choir. It is a safe and harmonious community that celebrates and welcomes individuals from all walks of life, regardless of sexual identity and gender expression.



Current systems and procedures that the choir has in place are:

- The spaces that Gay Abandon uses for its regular activity (practices, annual concert, and the weekend away) are all fully accessible to anyone that has mobility needs. The choir also tries to ensure that the venues for one-off performances are also fully accessible, and when they aren't, advocates for change
- The choir has a behavioural code that is in place when Ian is teaching to ensure that those who may have hearing difficulties can still hear
- Gay Abandon is intolerant of any form of discrimination, and has a policy for dealing with complaints between members of the choir
- The choir has a 3-tier subscription system that has been informed by feedback from members of the choir to ensure that cost is not a barrier to people, and has set up the bursary fund to enable members to take part in *all* choir activity, not just rehearsals and the annual concert
- There is an "open door" policy on giving feedback to Ian and the Management Committee, and these regularly consult members of the choir about how to tackle the challenges that the choir may be facing
- All decision-making processes in the choir are made "by committee", involving members of the Management Committee and, where needed, all members of the choir



Photographer: Dawn Kilner

If you have any access requirements (this could be for a physical disability, for support with your mental health, for financial reasons, or for any other reason), then please get in touch with the Membership Secretary at newmembers@gay-abandon.co.uk and they will work with you to try and ensure you can join the choir.

How to Join

Gay Abandon asks that everyone who is interested in joining the choir contacts us about this beforehand. There are many reasons for this:

- The choir likes to make sure you will be greeted warmly
- The choir likes to make sure you will get everything you need to take part in your first rehearsal
- The choir might be full. If the choir is full, you will be added to a waiting list.

You can let Gay Abandon know you would like to join by:

- E-mailing the choir's Membership Secretary at newmembers@gay-abandon.co.uk
- Send us a private message on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/GayAbandonChoir> or Twitter: @GayAbandonChoir
- Let a current member of the choir know. They'll then make sure the Membership Secretary knows to get in touch with you



Photographer: Karen Hope

You will not have to audition or be able to read music, and Ian does not expect you to know whether your voice is low or high. As you sing with the choir, Ian will help you find which section works best for you.

Gay Abandon usually only accepts new members in September and January, but accepts enquiries all year round. This is so the choir can be ready for performances.

What to Expect at your First Practice?

Gay Abandon's Membership Secretary will arrange to meet you about 15 minutes before the start of practice. They will arrange for you to get the music you'll need, will introduce you to Ian and the Section Lead of the section you will be singing in, and then will walk with you to practice.



Photographer: Helen Padwick

You'll then join in with the session and will be able to move between sections depending on how you find singing in each part.

You won't be expected to pay for your first 3 sessions. At your third practice, the membership Secretary will check in with you to make sure you are enjoying it, and will give you the relevant forms you need to fill in to be a member of Gay Abandon.

Singing with Gay Abandon

What Does Gay Abandon Sing?

Gay Abandon sings a wide variety of music and have sung New Zealand folk songs, hits by the Spice Girls, and 18th Century French drinking songs. The only thing the choir does not sing is sacred music.



Photographer: Dawn Kilner

What Gay Abandon sings is determined by the theme of its annual concert, which is usually performed in the summer around June/July time. With support from members of the choir, Ian selects songs that fit the theme that the choir learns and rehearses from September until the concert.

Gay Abandon is what is known as an SATB choir. This means the choir is split into 4 parts, and each part sings a different melody that together creates a beautiful sound. Sometimes, Ian uses music that has already been arranged to be SATB, but more often than not he re-writes the music himself so that it becomes 4 parts. These arrangements are what the choir sings and they can sometimes sound a little different from the song the arrangement is based on. The choir also likes to sometimes be a little bit activist in the music it sings, changing lyrics to make them more LGBT+ friendly.

How do Members learn the songs?

Ian teaches the choir about 3 songs at a time, ensuring that the choir learns the melodies before moving on to something new. He also teaches songs in sections, so one week the choir might learn the start of a song, and then the week after will learn the middle bit.



Photographer: Karen Hope

Ian also teaches songs part by part. Above the choir is described as SATB. This stands for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. Sopranos sing quite high notes, Basses sing the low notes, and Altos and Tenors sing the mid-range notes (Altos usually sing higher than Tenor). Traditionally, you would see women singing Soprano and Alto, and men singing Tenor and Bass, but in Gay Abandon people sing in whichever section suits their voice best, and sometimes even change sections depending on the song the choir is singing. Ian will teach each separate part their section of the song, and then will get parts to sing the same sections together so they can get used to singing different things at the same time.

Don't worry if you don't know which section you would like to sing in. Ian and the Section Leads will help you find out what works for you, and the choir members are very accepting of people changing where they sing until they settle.



Photographer: Karen Hope

Ian teaches "by ear", which means he will sing the notes to a part and the part will then copy him. To help with learning songs, Ian e-mails every member of the choir a copy of the sheet music for each song. Sheet music is how music is written down or notated, and some people

can read it and follow the notes as they sing. However, no-one in Gay Abandon is expected to be able to read music, and most members use the sheet music for the lyrics that are printed underneath the musical notes.

Ian also provides learning tracks to help members learn their parts. He creates a separate track for each part of a song, and a track that combines the 4 parts so members can hear what it is supposed to sound like when it is put together.



Photographer: Viperia Images

Occasionally, Ian will choose a song that requires a soloist to perform with the choir. The soloist is chosen from amongst the members of the choir and works with Ian outside of standard practice times to get the part right before singing it with the choir.

How does a practice usually run?

A standard practice usually runs like this:

- Before Tuesday night, Ian will e-mail out the sheet music for the songs the choir will be learning
- 19:15 – The chairs get put out in the room the choir is practising in. This is done by whichever section has been allocated the job that term
- 19:30 – Ian begins the warm up
- 19:45 – Ian starts the first half of the rehearsal
- 20:30 – Break and choir notices. Choir notices are when members of the choir share information with each other. This can involve someone from committee letting the choir know about an upcoming performance, members of the choir informally voting on something, or the choir being told of an event they might like to attend.
- 20:45 – End of break and start of second half of the rehearsal
- 21:30 – End of rehearsal, Choir members put the chairs away



Performances

For many members of Gay Abandon, a real highlight is taking part in the performances that the choir does. These range from Gay Abandon's annual concert, to taking part in the international LGBTQ+ choir festival 'Various Voices', and other people's events (such as Light Night Leeds), or being guest performers at special occasions such as weddings.



Photographer: Viperia Images

The choir enjoys doing performances because they give motivation and drive. Practices before performances are more focussed than usual, and the atmosphere in them is more electric and exciting. However, Gay Abandon does not expect every person in the choir to perform at every performance and understands that for many the thing they enjoy most is just being able to turn up every Tuesday and sing. No-one is ever pressured to perform.

Outside of Practice

Social Events

Gay Abandon is a social choir, and members often get together outside of rehearsals to participate in various social activities and spend time with each other.



Photographer: Karen Hope

Members of the choir also get in touch with each other to organise walks (taking advantage of the beautiful Yorkshire countryside), book clubs, going to café's and dances (a particular favourite is the Lavender Café), and even doing silly digital challenges such as lip-sync karaoke.

The Weekend Away

The highlight of Gay Abandon's social calendar is the weekend away in May where the choir spends a weekend in the Yorkshire countryside singing together and taking part in activities. The weekend away is usually held at Scargill Movement in Kettlewell, Skipton.



Photographer: Viperia Images

The weekend away serves two purposes: giving the choir dedicated time to prepare for the annual concert, and encouraging the choir to bond. Members travel down on the Friday and leave on the Sunday, and the days are spent either in rehearsals led by Ian or doing activities such as Knit and Knatter, going for a walk/to the pub, book club, or dance classes. There is even a disco on the Saturday night!

Members do need to pay to attend the Weekend Away (to cover the cost of accommodation and food), but can use the Bursary fund or opt to only come on one of the days.

Time to Join?

Thank you for reading through this information pack. We hope it's been helpful in giving you a flavour of what it's like to be a part of the choir!



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If you are still interested in joining, then please get in touch:

- With the Membership secretary at newmembers@gay-abandon.co.uk
- On Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/GayAbandonChoir>
- On Twitter @GayAbandonChoir

See you soon!