

The logo for 'making music' features the words 'making' and 'music' in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font, stacked vertically. The text is set against a red background that is shaped like a rounded rectangle with a curved bottom-right corner.

**SUPPORTING &
CHAMPIONING
VOLUNTARY MUSIC**

*Making Music South East
Hot Topics #2:*

*Recruiting the Next
Generation of Musicians*

This second article comes complete with a little music quiz – can you name the composers/artists of the musical titles scattered throughout the article? Answers at the end!

One of the most common issues raised by members at the Getting to Know You workshops around the South East is ‘How do we recruit new players/singers to our group?’. It is unsurprising that this is at the top of the list of development needs as so many other things flow from it: not only will it increase your subscription levels and allow your group to continue making music in the long term, but it may also allow you to perform new or bigger repertoire, bring in new audiences, rejuvenate the sound you make, the social life, the committee meetings and on and on!

So how to do it? Well, just as in my last Hot Topics article, you will need to begin by asking yourself some questions.

First and foremost, ‘why do we want to recruit new members?’: to put on different or larger scale works? to help with financial difficulties? for a more diverse mix of people? to attract a different or larger audience? for an injection of creative energy or improved artistic standards? to replace members who are retiring? to attract new potential committee members?

The question which then leads on from this is, ‘who do we want to recruit?’. Are you looking for people like yourselves who share your interests and will take an active role in the social and organisational side of the group? Do you want more people from a different age group to the current profile of your group? Are you looking for experienced musicians who can improve the quality of your music making, or novices whose talent you can nurture? A mix of all of these and more?

The answer to this question will help to shape your recruitment campaign strategy.

♪ **Give me More More More**

In many ways, the most likely answer to this question is ‘We want to recruit more like-minded people who will fit into our group’. This is understandable – you choose to keep coming to rehearsals because you like the atmosphere, the repertoire, the people: why should you want to change any of that?

♪ *Sell, Sell, Sell*

So ask yourselves – the committee and the group as a whole – what have you done so far to encourage your friends, relatives and colleagues to come along to rehearsals or concerts? If you spend time at the local library, have you thought to advertise there? If you are also a member of a tennis club, golf, bowls, canoeing, Women’s Institute, HE college – whatever other activities your members also enjoy – why not put up posters or hand out flyers, or best of all, talk to people about what great fun it is in your choir/orchestra/band/club. Send information out to local singing or instrumental teachers and ask them to let their students know about you.

How easy is it really for people to find out about your group and what you do? Do you have a website and a designated contact who is accessible, welcoming and enthusiastic about the group?

You can also ask yourselves what can be done to make it easier for people to attend rehearsals. Is the rehearsal venue easily accessible by public transport? Is there sufficient parking? Can people share lifts with other members? Is there a nice pub nearby for a post-rehearsal sherbet? Are there tasty refreshments and buzzing conversation in the break? Is it warm enough and comfortable?

Are your rehearsals fun and do you learn a lot about performing and technical skills along the way? If not, it may be that you need to take a look at what you are getting from your Musical Director: if your current membership are not enthusiastic, motivated and excited by rehearsals and performances, they are not likely to enthrall anyone else to join, so encourage your MD to teach you all some new skills along the way.

Do you audition people before they are allowed to attend, or can they come along for a few rehearsals before they have a more informal audition, or do you not audition at all? Do people need good sight-reading skills in order to feel comfortable with the pace of rehearsals, and if so do you make that clear to them before they join? Are there mechanisms in place to help those who are less experienced in reading music? If you have not already done so, consider supplying tapes or CDs of individual lines, or perhaps operating a 'buddy' scheme, where more experienced musicians partner new or less confident members to help and encourage them.

Do new members have to supply all their own music from the start, or can they share or borrow until they get a feel for whether they want to keep coming? Can new members attend on a trial basis before they need to commit to paying annual subs? Are there concessionary rates available on subs? Is the level of subs generally affordable?

You might like to consider advertising an open rehearsal, or ask each choir member to bring a friend to a rehearsal at the beginning of each new term or year, so that people can come along and try it without feeling like the only new person there and without having to commit financially before they know whether they want to join.

♪ *There's No Business like Show Business*

Your concerts can be fertile ground for recruitment: the audience has been willing to switch off the footie and brave the blizzards on a cold December night to come and listen to you perform – that is half the battle won!

Think about how you come across to the audience: are you well choreographed, well turned out and most important of all: do you smile? Do you look like you are having fun? Is there passion and enthusiasm in your performing? Few people will be inspired to join a group if most of the participants look like they want the ground to swallow them up, or to be left in peace to go back to sleep! Does your MD or one of your members speak to the audience in concerts? This is a good opportunity to make the audience (and potential recruits) feel included in the event, and to offer a warm and friendly welcome. Make sure you invite them along to the next rehearsal!

How do your audience perceive you based on your image in concerts? Do you wear very traditional uniform? Do you look distinctive? Professional? Fun? Informal? Think about the impression you want to create – what would attract *you* to join a new choir or orchestra?

Do you always perform in the same venues or the same types of venues? Some people may be put off at the idea of performing in a church, or singing exclusively religious repertoire, or intimidated by trying to sing a whole programme in unfamiliar languages. Do you perform light or contemporary music as well as traditional repertoire? Do you always perform on a Saturday evening? If so, why? Would you be willing to consider other days and times? Sunday afternoon? Thursday night?

If you are a choir, do you perform your concerts with orchestras or a keyboard? Many choral singers would prefer to sing with an orchestra, and it need not cost an arm and a leg – again, networking with your local MM network members may provide the opportunity to collaborate with an orchestra, band or ensemble for a concert: pool your audiences and your recruitment potential!

♪ *If You Can't Beat Them*

You are not really competing with your neighbouring brass band, string quartet or barbershop group for the attention of your target recruits, you are competing with the TV, the theatre, the cinema, the internet, Sky sports, family commitments, inertia... People who are inclined to play or sing in one group are often inclined to attend more than one (the same goes for your audiences of course), so co-ordinate with your neighbouring music-makers – again, your local network of MM members is a great place to start: make sure that your rehearsals, concerts and tours do not coincide and then advertise to each other's members. There is a concert listing on MM South East website, and an anti-clash page on the local contact network online forum – use it when you are planning your season to avoid clashes. You could even agree between you to offer concessionary rates to each other's concerts or reduced subscriptions if you subscribe to both groups.

♪ **From the New World**

If your answer to the question of who you wish to attract was 'younger people' or you would like to open your doors to a whole new membership demographic, then all of the above still applies, but you will also need to put some more thought into what exactly you want from your new membership, and what you can offer them in return.

♪ *De innocentibus*

The most common question I seem to have heard from members in relation to recruitment is 'how do we encourage young people to join us?'. By younger people, do you mean under 50s? Under 35s? Under 20s? If you are looking to recruit members from the 16 – 35 age group, then bear in mind the other pressures and life events which will take priority for them: exams, going away to university, having families or relocating with a new job, travelling round the world, commuting long distances. This does not mean that these people are not going to want to join or to commit, but a little

flexibility on your part will go a long way to helping. If somebody has to miss a few rehearsals, will they be too scared to come back?

The approach most of us generally take is along the lines of 'you'll like it if you try it!', and whilst I have no doubts whatsoever that this is the truth, this message does not always reap dividends.

Crawley District Council Arts Development team in West Sussex have been tackling this very issue. They surveyed 13-25 year olds in the area, asking them to list the things they most wanted out of the Council Arts programme. At the top of those lists was 'I want to sing'. Now, this should not exactly come as a surprise to any of us, but if the appetite is there amongst young people, how is it that our groups are not attracting them in droves?

Case Study:

Crawley District Council Arts Development Team

The Arts Development Team at Crawley DC were pretty sure that they were offering what their local youth community needed, and could not understand why the uptake of their services was consistently not as good as they hoped. So, they decided to ask the young people themselves, and the result is a new youth-led programme of events called 'Urban Sensations'. The programme is designed as a series of workshops and events over a two-year period.

When the AD team surveyed the young ambassadors who are leading the project, the results were difficult to swallow at first: their initial response to the results was "but that's not fair!". The services which they had been working hard to put in place and promote over previous years had clearly not reached their target audience, as that audience's perception was that nothing at all was being done for them or to include them. However unjust this might have seemed to the AD team at the Council, they quickly realised that if the perception existed that they had not been fulfilling the needs of the young community, then those needs were not fulfilled – however hard they had been trying to do just that.

The answer? To ask the young people what it is they wanted, rather than make assumptions, and then involve the same young people in the delivery of the services too. What did they want? Top of the list was singing techniques, then theatre skills, graffiti art, breakdancing and drumming skills. So, music features highly on the list, and features highly in the resulting programme. But the AD team went further still and asked the young ambassadors who they would like to learn from in workshops and involved them in decisions over booking artists and funding availability. When one music artist was reported to be involved in illegal activities, the young people themselves took the decision to remove them from the list of people they wanted to work with.

Carolyn Murphy, head of the AD team and leader of the 'Urban Sensations' programme, told me, "The process of opening your doors to new people is uncomfortable. You may hear things that seem unfair – it doesn't matter: it is that perception of you that you need to change. Do you want to stay in your comfort zone? If so, then enjoy what you have got. It is important that those new people can influence the group or there will always be a 'them and us' culture – you have to listen to what they want too. If you don't want to risk that, then you may decide to stay comfortable and gracefully decline!"

♪ Birds of a feather

I hope it is not too controversial for me to say that the majority of us tend to gravitate towards our own peer group. If your current membership mostly fall into one age group, it could be intimidating for somebody much older or younger to come along, or they may worry that they will have nothing in common with the other members.

If you have members in the age range you are hoping to recruit, then pick their brains: find out what persuaded them to join, what might attract their friends? Encourage them to invite their friends along to a rehearsal or two, perhaps just to listen if they are not very confident. Ask for their feedback too. Invite your children, nephews, nieces, grandchildren, younger colleagues or toyboys to come along to a 'taster' rehearsal, and suggest they bring a friend or two – it is far less intimidating to go along to a new experience if you have someone to hold your hand (and you may just recruit their friends while you are at it!).

Ask what would persuade them to come along regularly? What is it that currently stops them from wanting to join a music group or even attend a concert? You may be surprised at the responses: in previous surveys done by Making Music, that question has thrown up answers such as 'you need to be a Christian', 'you have to speak foreign languages', 'you need to own a dinner jacket'!

Once you know a bit more about the perception other people have of your group and what it entails, however just or unjust those may be, you can think about how to tackle those perceptions head on. For example, your rehearsals may be an absolute scream and you may have a right rollicking time in the pub afterwards, but if you only ever perform Requiem Masses in a draughty church, wearing black tie, then the life and soul of your choir might well not be coming across to your concert audiences.

♪ *24 Hour Party People*

MM surveys have highlighted that the social life of a music group is often the most important draw for members. Think of all those mobile young people who have just moved into the area for work, to bring up a family, to attend college. They will want to find a way of getting to know people in their new community – what better way than to join your music group?

Advertise your activities on the council website, at the local library, community centres, health centres, tourist information bureau and anywhere else where people new to the area might go.

If your group does not really go in for social events or post-rehearsal forays to the pub, why not? Are people genuinely not interested in socialising, or are people too shy to ask? Have the committee ever organised a Christmas party, or a fund-raising cabaret night or any other social get-together? Sound out your members on whether those kinds of initiatives would be welcome – many groups successfully use these kind of events to raise much needed funds for the coffers as well as creating a much stronger sense of teamwork and community. If your members are encouraged to invite their friends and partners, you may find a few more recruits to the group or to your Friends Scheme whilst chatting in the pub. If you have never gone out for a drink after rehearsal, or you don't actually know the name of the person who sits next to you – just ask!

♪ *Two Way Street*

How adventurous is your programming? Have you considered doing a joint concert with some young people who are already performing other kinds of music? You might surprise yourselves by discovering your own latent passion for urban music, MCing, gospel, barbershop, electro-acoustic funk... who knows? Can you expect young people with little or no experience of classical music to appreciate the colourful jubilation of a Bach motet or the swelling passions of a Mahler symphony if you resolutely turn up your nose at R&B? 'You'll like it if you try it' works both ways!

♪ *Skin Deep*

Think about your image – I have sung in choirs where I have felt so utterly ridiculous dressed like a medieval peasant that I felt miserable every time I put on the uniform. Young people can be very self-conscious – why not ask the younger members of your group what they would like to wear? Even, if you are feeling very brave indeed, why not propose a project for fashion design students from a local college or nightschool to come up with a new look for you? You might persuade them and their friends to join you in performing at the first concert in your new outfits – you could offer to provide the music for their end of term showcase in return, and thereby advertise yourselves to all their friends and colleagues.

If that is a bit too adventurous, why not stick to something neutral like all black or black and white, but allow people to customise it in their own way, say by wearing trousers rather than skirts, choosing the length and style of the skirts, wearing jewellery, belts, something sparkly or colourful?

How do you advertise yourselves generally? Who is your marketing targeted towards? If it includes photographs of your group, do you come across as dynamic and fun with a mix of ages? If you have some young people in the group, get them into the front row of the photo! What is the style of the photograph and what does it say about you? Do you look neat and professional or a cheeky bunch of mischievous troublemakers?

If you have no young people at all in the group, then think about using another image for your publicity: anything from a landscape to stylised graphics – try putting together a few different ideas and ask some young people what they think. You could even run a competition for local school or college students to design a new publicity image which would appeal to their age group – just the kind of thing your local newspaper will love to help out with, so you could get some handy publicity too!

♪ *Why not?*

If you are looking to recruit significantly younger people than your current membership, you might think about creating a youth group as an offshoot of your main group, which is exactly what the Ocean Chorus men's barbershop group have done in Southampton.

Case Study:

Southampton Barbershop Youth Chorus

On a wild, wintery night in February, I popped down to Southampton for the evening to visit the 4th rehearsal of the new Southampton Barbershop Youth Chorus. The launch of the group was profiled in the MM SE February newsletter, and I was inspired by their article to find out for myself how they were getting along and how they had tackled the issue of recruiting young men.

It was immediately apparent on walking through the door of the rehearsal that the enthusiasm and charisma of two individuals in particular has been the impetus behind the group: the instigator of the project, Bill Smith, who as a member of the Southampton-based Ocean Harmony Barbershop Chorus had seen first-hand the need to recruit new young enthusiasts, and Timm Barkworth – MD and BABS National Youth Co-ordinator. Timm wrote an article about recruiting young singers and directors which inspired Bill to get this project up and running. Between them, they have started something very exciting...

Given that the rehearsal I attended was only their 4th, and the group was understrength (due to the wild weather and proximity to Valentine's Day!), the sound they produced was nothing short of extraordinary and the pride in Bill's eyes unmistakable. Several members of the Ocean Harmony Chorus come along to the rehearsals to support the project and sing along, so they produced a lovely blend of youthful and mature sounds.

Timm is an inspiring MD: he is direct and energetic, and as a vocal coach he has a fantastic understanding of how to develop young voices – a great testament to the BABS "Directors College". The hook for recruiting the members in the first place was to provide a number of free sessions in at the outset – for which Bill and Timm had obtained funding – which would provide singing training (vocal technique, singing in harmony, and ensemble), after which the chorus will hopefully become a self-sustaining training choir, which will in turn feed into the Ocean Harmony Chorus.

I took the opportunity in the break and afterwards to put a few questions to the new members:

- 1. How did they hear about the group?** From flyers handed out by the Student Union; from posters in school and college; from newspaper ads; from another choir where they were a member; from a singing teacher.
- 2. What persuaded them to try it?** All were interested to trying something new.
- 3. Previous and current musical experience?** All those I spoke to had some previous experience of music-making: a Grade 8 Percussionist; a treble in the church choir before voice broke; studying performing arts at college and taking singing lessons; singing in other choirs. Some were members of many different groups at the same time, and others have too many time pressures to manage more than one musical commitment.
- 4. Had they considered joining other groups before? What has put them off joining in the past?** A very revealing answer to this question was: "I haven't heard of any other groups, otherwise I probably would have joined them"! (Given that this response came from a tenor, I bet some of you will be kicking yourselves!) Other reasons given were "too busy", "it hadn't occurred to me to join anything outside school before".
- 5. Are they planning to stay in SBYC and how would they like to see the group evolve?** This elicited a unanimous response: yes, they are all planning to stay for the foreseeable future, and they would like the group to recruit more people!
- 6. I asked the lads to rate how much different aspects mattered to them, and in order of importance, they said:**
Highest importance:
 1. The quality of the MD
 2. The opportunity to learn new musical skillsMedium:
 1. Meeting new people/social events
 2. The cost of involvement
 3. The type of music
 4. The age range of members
 5. The public image of the groupLowest importance:
 1. The opportunity to perform or sing in competitions (although on average this ranked as low, the answers were the most widely divergent, with some marking it as the most important factor, and others the least)
 2. The age of the MD.
- 7. Finally, I asked them what they would do to recruit their friends to come along.** The majority said talk to them and persuade them, and one replied "put up posters around college".

Timm told me that managing to get the involvement of Southampton University and in particular the Student Union was a watershed in their recruitment drive. It was not easy to find the right people to contact, but with help from the University printers, Performing Arts Department and Student Union events team, they managed to get the publicity out there in the end. Persevere, persevere, persevere!

♪ *We've only just begun*

If you are thinking of trying to recruit people with little or no musical experience, great! But you need to put some thought into how you can support their development if they and the group are to get something out of the experience.

You could introduce a mentoring or 'buddy' scheme as mentioned above. You could also take a leaf out of the hugely popular salsa clubs' book and provide an hour of group singing or ensemble playing lessons at the beginning of each rehearsal for beginners and improvers, followed by an open rehearsal, and then finish with a rehearsal just for those more experience musicians who want to stretch themselves. You could put on concerts consisting of simple pieces for the beginners, more complex repertoire for the experienced, and some for both to perform together.

The advantage of doing something along these lines is not just that it might attract new people who are nervous about their lack of experience, but also that the confidence and artistic standards of the group overall will improve in time, and those who have more experience can still continue to develop themselves.

♪ **My Home Town**

If your answer to the question of who you want to attract is ‘anyone and everyone’, then why not do a bit of research into the demographics of your local area – who might be interested in what you have to offer?

You may feel that you already know your town or district like the back of your hand, but try having a look on your local council website, the Government Office of National Statistics (<http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/>), ACORN (www.caci.org.uk/acorn/) or Up My Street (www.upmystreet.com).

You may learn some surprising things, for example, did those of you living in the Chichester area know that:

109,000 people live in the area covered by Chichester District Council, of whom 23% are over 65, 26% are aged 45-65 and 28% fall into the 20-44 range. In the 2001 census, 77% said they were Christian, 21% said they were not religious or did not state a religion, with the remaining 2% split between Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, Sikh and Other.

Did you know that the ACORN classification for Canterbury indicates that:

“With so little spare money, spending is limited to a funeral plan, playing bingo and the lottery, betting and going to the pub. These people are unlikely to be frequent high street shoppers, preferring to buy from catalogues by mail order. Leisure activities are similarly limited. Some may do a little gardening or go fishing.”

I can hardly say that was my impression at the GTKY event in Canterbury, but I will leave it to those of you who live in the area to confirm or deny!

Put the name of your local area into an internet search engine and see what comes up: you may discover community organisations which you did not know existed – which might enable you to promote your group with a local community group, such as the Woking Asian Women’s Association, or the Elmbridge Multi-Faith Forum.

♪ **A Change is Gonna Come**

Making approaches to new people and committing to the changes necessary for them to want to be part of your group is not necessarily going to be easy. It could also be a fabulous journey of development and creativity both for the group as a whole and the individuals within it: challenge yourselves to embrace the new, whether that be new repertoire, collaborations, styles, techniques, cultures, languages.

You will have as much to learn from your new members as you will have to teach them – make sure that everybody feels like a part of the same team, whether they are new to the group or were a founder member back in the ‘good old days’. Listen to the opinions of the younger members and encourage them to join the committee. Get them involved in any other ways that suit their skills, like publicity, recruitment, webdesign, concert management, marketing strategy – it could be just the injection of fresh enthusiasm your group needs, and it may give confidence to shy new members to have their own respected role in the group, especially if they are worried about their lack of musical experience. Make it known that everybody has something to offer and all offers are appreciated!

Keep an open mind – if you have ambitious recruitment plans, and your campaign is successful, that carries some risk. The culture of your group may change in proportion to the change in balance of the membership. You need to decide whether you are willing to take that risk: are you happy enough with the status quo, or is it time to shake things up a bit? If you decide that it is too much effort or it might actually transform your group to the point that you no longer want to be there yourselves, then fine – think again about what direction you really want to take your group in and how best to do that.

If you would like to put on larger or more challenging works, could you combine forces with a neighbouring society for one or two concerts a year? The network of members who you will have met at your local Getting to Know You workshops provide the perfect platform to do this. If financial difficulties are the problem, can you increase your funds in another way, perhaps through sponsorship, foundations or Awards for All, creating a Friends Society or by increasing the level of subs?

If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always got!

Good luck!

Joanna

With thanks to Carolyn Murphy at Crawley DC, all the lads at the Ocean Barbershop Youth Chorus and Tom and Heather in MM London.

Answers to the Quiz:

1. 'Give me More More More' from Lefty Frizzell's 1950s album of the same name.
2. 'Sell Sell Sell' is by David Gray from the 1996 album of the same name.
3. 'There's No Business Like Show Business' from the classic 1946 Irving Berlin Musical, *Annie Get Your Gun*.
4. 'If You Can't Beat Them' is from Queen's 1978 album, *Jazz*.
5. 'From the New World' is the title of Dvořák's 9th Symphony in E Minor, Opus 95.
6. 'De Innocentibus' is one of Hildegard von Bingen's glorious plainsongs.
7. 'Birds of a Feather' is the second song on Phish's 1998 album, *The Story of the Ghost*.
8. '24 Hour Party People' was a 1987 hit for the Happy Mondays from their first album *Squirrel and G-Man Twenty Four Hour Party People Plastic Face Carnt Smile (White Out)*.
9. 'Two Way Street' is by Jake Jacas on the 1996 album *The Very Best of Jake Jacas*.
10. 'Skin Deep' was a 1984 single by The Stranglers which reached No. 15 in the singles charts – did you know they were originally called "The Guildford Stranglers", although the band members came from London, Essex, Brighton and Sweden?!
11. 'Why Not' is a song by the actor/singer Hilary Duff, remixed for her 2000 album, *Most Wanted*.
12. 'We've Only Just Begun' was of course a smash hit for The Carpenters, released in August 1970, but did you know that it was originally written for a TV advert for a bank?
13. 'My Home Town' is a typically satirical Tom Lehrer song which is on the album *Songs and More Songs by Tom Lehrer* released in 1997.
14. 'A Change is Gonna Come' is a classic 60s civil rights song, written and recorded by Sam Cooke and released posthumously in 1965.

How did you get on?

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