



North Hills High School Music Department

Fall 2023 Symphonic Choir & Chorale Classes

www.nhchoiranddrama.net

Instructor: Mr. Cloonan (cloonans@staff.nhsd.net) • Room: B119 • Periods 5 & 8 (Chorale), 6 & 9 (Symphonic Choir)

Welcome to choir at North Hills High School!

I'm Mr. Cloonan, and I'm starting my 22nd year working at North Hills. Over the years I've taught general music K-6, middle and high school choir, music theory, music technology, and this year I have 6th grade chorus, the high school choirs, am taking over the MS musical again, and work as producer for the HS drama club. Outside of NH, I've been minister of music at the First Presbyterian Church of Edgewood since 2003, and I sing with a semi-professional chamber choir called Voces Solis that performs a few concerts each year. I also serve as Communications Chair for the American Choral Directors Association of PA. Oh yeah, and I go a little overboard about my Irish background (**just wait til March**) and have a mild obsession with Reese's peanut butter cups. 🍫

The High School Choral Program

During the academic day, there are 2 ensembles that meet each day in 4 different class periods. Chorale (our treble ensemble of soprano & alto voices) meets periods 5 and 8 and Symphonic Choir (mixed ensemble of SATB) is periods 6 and 9. The 2 different choirs meet in 2 sections/periods each day and come together to perform as individual choirs and as a full combined group at our concerts. Outside of the school day, the North Hills Singers is our auditioned ensemble that performs out in the community at athletic events and for community groups (mostly at the holidays). Finally, there is an opportunity to do some performing in Renaissance costumes with our Madrigal skit. More on that later!

Daily Class Structure

As much as possible, a daily routine will be established. Every class will begin with warm-up exercises that are focused on muscles, breathing, and singing. Much like playing a sport, you must learn to use the muscles needed in the game by stretching, doing exercises, and practicing proper technique to get better so you can win the game. Our "games" are our public performances/concerts, and a "win" is us singing the songs we have prepared with the best technique and musical expression possible.

Here's what to expect when you enter the classroom:

1. You will take a music folder from the cabinet and quickly find your assigned seat, throwing away any gum or candy you may have before class begins. Chorus is a "no gum zone!"
2. As soon as the late bell rings, you should end any conversations, stand up and face the front of the room, and begin silent stretching along with whoever is leading warm-ups. Our general warm-up routine will be stretching, then breathing, then singing exercises.
3. During warm-ups, talking is not permitted, as you must focus completely on relaxing your muscles, focusing your breathing and singing, and following the directions of the teacher. If you are carrying on a conversation with your neighbor, you will distract others, and we will not be acting like the "team" we need to be. Also, announcements are made, and attendance is taken, during warm-ups. If you are in an incorrect seat or are wandering around the room, you may be marked absent or written up for a class cut.
4. The hall pass may be used **after warm-ups are completed**, one at a time. If you need to see the nurse, come to Mr. Cloonan directly, as the nurse's office will not allow you in without a note from your teacher. Please do not abuse the hall pass or the privilege will be taken away from you
5. Keep homework put away unless you are specifically told you may work quietly (for example, if Mr. Cloonan is going to spend 20 minutes working with the sopranos only on a section and you sing alto, you may be given permission to quietly work until the group rehearses together again). Since we do not have desks or books, our choir music is like our textbook, and should always be out so that when parts of the music are discussed, you can follow along.
6. When class is over, make sure that your music is put neatly back in your folder and that you return your folder to the cabinet. Mr. Cloonan's job is not to be your personal butler... take pride in your classroom. "Always leave a place better than how you've found it."

Grading

The largest part of being in an ensemble is actively participating. As this is an elective course, you are choosing to be here and to make the best music together. Here is the breakdown:

50% of your grade is **daily participation**. Everyone starts with a 100% - you get 5 points per day literally just for showing up and doing what is asked of you! The only way you lose those points is by not following rules: having gum/food/candy, not having your music/folder/iPad, choosing not to sing when asked, playing on devices instead of paying attention, showing any amount of disrespect.

25% of your grade is **"assignments."** These may be listening assignments with a question to answer in Google Classroom, it could be a memorization check on parts, a small group vocal singing test (of material we've gone over to make sure you know parts), or a sight-reading exercise to submit. Assignments will always be announced ahead of time to allow for adequate preparation and to minimize anxiety.

25% of your grade is **concerts & rehearsals**. Due to the fact that the classes meet as smaller sections each day, we don't get to hear what the full Chorale or Symphonic Choir sounds like unless we have a combined rehearsal. There will be 3 after school rehearsals in December to prepare for the Holiday Concert. Please mark these dates down and make appointments around them. They are part of your grade and required. Please make arrangements for transportation with friends/family for these 3 days after school, and most especially the concert night.

Wednesday, December 6, 2023	2:00-3:00PM	Symphonic Choir (B119)
Wednesday, December 13, 2023	2:00-3:00PM	Chorale (B119)

CONCERT WEEK:

Monday, December 18, 2023	2:00-2:45PM	ALL Choir Members – Riser Logistics (HS Auditorium)
Tuesday, December 19, 2023	2:00-4:00PM	ALL Choir Members – Concert Run-thru (HS Aud)
Wednesday, December 20, 2023	7:00PM	Winter Concert in HS Aud (Report at 6pm for YB photos)

Extra-Curricular Ensembles

As mentioned earlier, we have opportunities for singing outside of the regular school day classes. Those interested in auditioning for our chamber choir, the North Hills Singers, should plan to attend the auditions on Wednesday, September 14 after school. There will be individual and group singing that takes place during this time. Singers generally rehearse on Mondays after school from 2:00-3:30 (exceptions when needed to accommodate the drama calendar). Typically the group performs at some community events particularly around the holidays.

Due to my new responsibilities at the middle school and taking over the MS musical, there's no way for me to physically make the rehearsals leading up to the madrigal dinner work this year. In years past, we'd have a very intense one-week period of 2-hour practices every day leading up to the Saturday event. I can't cancel 5 MS musical practices in a row to make that happen, so what we're going to do is perform the skit and songs as a full section of the winter concert, have an intermission where the raffle baskets we typically had at the dinner will be on display in the hallway, then come back after intermission to perform our regular concert in our robes. More details will be communicated in November as we get closer to the concert, but we'll carve out time during class to read through the script and have 2 Monday after-school practices with just the performers to do some general blocking and pick out costumes. Everyone else will sit on the risers wearing their concert black and white and stand up to sing the Madrigal Songs (mostly Christmas carols).

It's not exactly how I wanted this to happen, but the November-December calendar gets very busy between Marching Band ending, One Act Play performance, Spring Musical auditions, the MS show rehearsals beginning, and music department holiday concert rehearsals and performances. I basically ran out of days and times to make it work without coming in the evenings, and no one wants to do that after a full day of school and after-school activities!

ALLEGHENY COUNTY CHORUS FESTIVAL

New this year: Gateway High School is hosting a one-day festival open to high school programs in Allegheny County. It will be run by several area high school directors. We'll bring a bag-lunch and dinner with us, spend the day working on 4 or 5 songs, and perform a concert at 7PM in the Gateway HS auditorium. The date is **Tuesday, October 10, 2023**. There are **NO AUDITIONS** for this group, just a requirement that we send quartets of students for either the mixed (SATB) or treble (SSAA) groups that will rehearse at the same time in 2 different spaces in their building. This is a great way to get a feel for how the PMEA festival system works by being with singers from other schools without the stress of preparing for an audition.

I would love to be able to send 2 SATB and 2 SSAA quartets to participate in this event, which would be 16 students. Let me know ASAP if you are interested and I'll put you on my list to submit to the host. You would miss one day of school for this festival.

PMEA

There is an opportunity to sing with students from other schools in the festival system through the Pennsylvania Music Educators Association (PMEA). Auditions have returned to in-person, and we will go over the requirements in class for those interested. The senior high festivals are open to students in grades 10-12, and freshman are able to apply to sing in the junior high festival (date and location still TBD). The high school festivals are as follows:

Auditions: Monday, November 20 at Bethel Park (music and practice files in Google Classroom & choir website)

District Chorus Festival: January 25-26 at Canon-McMillan (audition for Regions at this festival)

Region Chorus Festival: March 6-8 at Mars (audition for All-State at this festival)

All State Chorus Festival: April 17-20 in Erie

Music Department Performance Tour to Virginia Beach/Busch Gardens/Williamsburg

We are just in the beginning planning stages of this, but the School Board has approved our participation in the Music in the Parks festival at Busch Gardens in Virginia in April 2024! We plan to stay at a hotel on Virginia Beach, have some beach and swimming time, visit Colonial Williamsburg, spend a day at Busch Gardens amusement park, and of course perform for ratings by judges as part of the festival. The last time we did this tour was 2016, as the 2020 tour was canceled.

Costs haven't yet been determined, but it will be hopefully around \$800-900 per student. In years past, the Choral Parents Association has coordinated multiple fundraisers to help offset individual contributions toward the group's financial goal.

We need help from parents to make that happen! The Choral Parents Association officers have met and are already planning fundraisers and activities for the year. We will have a meeting for choral families in mid-September to provide an overview of the tour and fundraising opportunities. Announcements will be made after the parent officers meet.

Communication

Communication is the key to success for any organization or group. I promise that as your teacher, I will always share expectations, deadlines, and important dates to you with as much advance notice as possible. Ways that you can access that information are as follows:

Google Classroom – join your class period with the codes below:

Period 5 Chorale – nmyqt7o

Period 6 Symphonic Choir – ciwvcf3

Period 8 Chorale – qfudojb

Period 9 Symphonic Choir – uola72d

Remind texts – join our class using the Remind App, or by sending a text to 81010 with these class codes:

Symphonic Choir – @nhhssympho

Chorale – @nh-chorale

The choir & drama website: nhchoiranddrama.net

Social Media

Facebook: North Hills Choirs

Twitter: @northhillschoir

Instagram: @northhillschoirs

YouTube: NorthHillsChoirs

Email:

Mr. Cloonan – cloonans@staff.nhsd.net

Choral Parents – nhchoralparents@gmail.com

Important 2023-24 Dates

Wednesday, September 13 – North Hills Singers auditions, 2:00-4:00PM

Thursday, September 15 – Choral Parents/Families Kick-off Night, 7:00PM, HS Auditorium

Tuesday, October 10 – Allegheny County Chorus Festival at Gateway HS, all day, concert at 7:00PM

Monday, November 20 – PMEA District Chorus Auditions at Bethel Park HS, after school

Tuesday, December 5 – North Hills Singers performance for NHSD Retirees' Luncheon at Shannopin Country Club

Friday, December 8? – North Hills Singers performance at NH Cares Community of Music (Block Northway), evening TBA

Wednesday, December 20 – Winter Holiday Concert, HS Auditorium, 7:00PM

Friday, February 16 – Cabaret Night, HS Cafeteria, 7:00PM

Thursday-Sunday, April 11-14 – Music Department Tour to Virginia Beach/Williamsburg/Busch Gardens

Thursday, May 16 – Spring Concert & Senior Recognition, HS Auditorium

May, TBD – Senior Choir Banquet, HS Cafeteria

Student-Parent-Teacher Agreement

Please go into our Google Classroom and complete the first assignment WITH YOUR FAMILIES so that we have everyone's proper contact info for communication this year. Thanks, and I can't wait to start singing with you! -- Mr. Cloonan *