



Remuneration for Choir Directors

Doctor: *You only have six months to live.*

Musician: *On what?*

NZCF frequently receives requests from choirs for suggestions about appropriate payment for choir directors, so here are a few thoughts compiled by Peter Watts and members of the ACD Committee.

Every choir is going to be in a different position regarding the level of expertise and experience they expect of their music director (MD), the choir ethos, and their approach to financial matters. Every MD will also be in a different position. For some it will be purely a hobby; for others it will be part of a portfolio of activities that make up a living. Where a MD has founded the choir themselves and then later brings on board a committee to run the choir, the transition from 'founder' to 'employee' can be a delicate one. So it's very difficult to suggest fees or even a range of fees.

Many choirs try to fund their running expenses, including MD fees, from subscriptions, and plan for the concerts to pay for themselves. That way, the choir's ability to engage an appropriate MD is not compromised by the success or otherwise of the concerts.

Payment could be worked out on an hourly rate, or an annual or 'per project' fee could be negotiated. Either way, the following areas should be considered by the choir and the MD as they approach the subject. Not all will apply to every choir. Don't avoid talking about money. Once you've got over the initial hurdle, it's easy! The skills, qualifications and experience of the MD and their professional or amateur status need to be considered.

1. Rehearsals: an hourly rate should recognise the time that goes into preparing for rehearsals, not just the time taking rehearsals.
2. Meetings: some choirs make substantial demands on their MD in terms of meetings to attend. Do these need to be part of the payment package?
3. Planning: planning of programmes for a concert or for a season can be immensely time-consuming. Is this job left to the MD alone? Does it need recompense as part of the package?
4. Concerts: some choirs pay a concert fee on top of the rehearsal fee, as this recognises the extra time that goes into final rehearsals with soloists and players/orchestra as well as with the choir. This fee recognises the 'danger' money earned by the conductor in performance.
5. Outside engagements: the MD is responsible for making sure the choir is at an appropriate level for an outside engagement. A percentage of any fee paid to the choir could be allocated to the MD.
6. Professional development: a sum could be set aside each year for regular upskilling of the MD.

You can find out what other similar organisations do if they are registered as Incorporated Societies.

Visit www.societies.govt.nz to view annual accounts that might provide interesting information. You will see the number of people employed by the choir and a total figure for the fees paid. This won't necessarily indicate exactly what the conductor is paid, but the figures will provide food for thought.