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AMIS INTERNATIONAL HONOR BAND AND CHOIR FESTIVAL HOSTING HANDBOOK

Why host this Festival in your school?

Any AMIS Festival is an enrichment for a school community. It highlights the music department in your school and inspires everyone. It is a great community builder and a good way to liaise with your school administration, the PTO and the other members of your arts department.

Admittedly the hosting of this festival is a much greater undertaking in many respects than the smaller festivals, simply because of its sheer size. Instead of 60-90 participants as is generally the case for Middle School festivals or the Senior Orchestra Festival (or the 25-30 participants of the Honor Jazz Band Festival) you will be working with at least 225 students plus around 60 directors and chaperones if the festival consists only of the Mixed Choir and the Honor Band. If at all possible, this festival also should include the Women's Choir of 60 additional students. This will depend upon the facilities available and will need to be agreed with AMIS at the time you offer to host this festival.

Which facilities and equipment are required?

Each of the large groups will require a main rehearsal facility:

Honor Band will need approximately 90 students in the concert band setup, with stands and percussion equipment. Mixed Choir will need a room for approximately 120-130 singers with seats for all and choir risers for the group, plus a piano.

Women's Choir will need a room for 60 singers with seats and choir risers plus a piano.

There will need to be additional seats in all the rehearsal rooms so that directors can attend rehearsals.

In many cases the Mixed Choir rehearses principally in the school theatre, the Honor Band rehearses principally in the band room, and the Women's Choir rehearses principally in the choir room.

On the Thursday afternoon of the festival, the choirs will need testing rooms and the band will need rooms for testing and chair tryouts. In addition to the main rehearsal areas for the choirs, you will need two rooms with pianos that can accommodate 30 singers (standing) plus 5 teachers. Each of these rooms will be needed for approximately 90 minutes. If only the Mixed Choir is part of the festival, you will need only one of these rooms.

On the Thursday afternoon, generally after school has been dismissed, you will need approximately 8 rooms for instrumental testing which range in size to accommodate as few as 10 people or as many as 20, depending on the section.

If you are using an outside concert venue, it will be needed all day on the Saturday of the festival. Equipment will need to be moved if possible after rehearsal on Friday. If that is not possible, very early on Saturday morning. In either case there will be a group of teachers who can help with this, as well as any moving crew the school may be able to provide. In some instances equipment like chairs and stands, piano and even some percussion equipment and choral risers will be available at the concert site. This makes like a lot easier. All of this equipment, its availability, what it costs to rent it and to have appropriate technicians at the outside concert site will need to be gone into very thoroughly before the concert site is rented. **Making sure you have the concert site and the festival hotel and the two big items to have in place before you can be 100% sure you can host the festival. For this reason, the venue needs to be signed, sealed and delivered at least a year in advance in most instances.**

Rehearsal: You will need the large room for each group for the duration of the Festival (Thursday morning through Saturday evening). Take note of the requirements for Thursday afternoon as above.

It is desirable to have several rooms available for sectional rehearsals on Friday. These may or may not be used. Frequently the band conductor wishes to have sectionals for all sections.

On Saturday all the groups will need onstage time. You will need to structure this carefully. In school the choir usually finishes onstage fairly early in the day on Saturday (if there are two choirs the onstage time for the women's choir needs to be carefully thought out). The band equipment will usually be moved onstage in the afternoon so the band can have its full rehearsal. This is usually followed by a final rehearsal for the entire band and choir ensemble as they rehearse the finale. There is not always a finale, but most years there is one.

Concert: For the final concert on Saturday night the venue should be a suitable concert venue with appropriate acoustics, lighting and seating for both performers and audience. Ideally this will be the school theatre. However, it is frequently not possible to find a school with a large enough performance venue to accommodate the Honor groups plus an audience to allow for parents and some of the local school community (at the very least) to attend. In most instances it may be necessary to find out of school concert facilities. Cost and ease of getting to and from the concert site on the Saturday of the festival are both considerations. Some of the discussion about the concert facilities is covered earlier.

AMIS Headquarters: The AMIS organisers will need a place to hook up their computer and printer (two plugs), internet access, access to a photocopier, a fairly large work surface for assembling packets. A phone is helpful but not absolutely necessary as they will have a mobile with them. This will need to be available on the Tuesday before the festival so all registration materials are ready for Wednesday arrival of participants. It is helpful if this is not in a classroom full of students or in the staff lounge. However, sometimes a corner of a lounge or classroom is the best space available. Sometimes the AMIS Headquarters and the Teacher Headquarters are in the same room.

Teacher Headquarters: The teachers will need a room to work, relax, gather, store coats, etc. A supply of suitable drinks and snacks is always appreciated. Usually the school or the PTO will donate coffee, tea, water, etc. However, if necessary, AMIS can pay for some basics like instant coffee and teabags. A bit of fruit or a few cookies is an added bonus, but not absolutely necessary. Either in that room or somewhere else in the school, it is really helpful for teachers to have somewhere to check email. Often a school's IT department will assign a temporary sign in password for the teachers for the duration of the festival. **There will also need to be a room where all the attending teachers can be present for the festival business meeting and AMIS annual general meeting.**

Medical/health facilities: If possible a nurse should be present throughout the Festival and be provided with an appropriate room and equipment. Usually the school nurse can be available through Friday, and is sometimes on duty on Saturday due to sporting events taking place at the school. If not, someone who has had first aid training and who has access to a first aid box should be available throughout the day and evening on Saturday.

Dressing rooms: Students and teachers will need somewhere to store their concert clothes during the day on Saturday. You will need to use classrooms as dressing rooms unless your school theatre, or the theatre being used for the concert, has large dressing room areas. You'll need to find clothes racks that can be put into the dressing rooms for hanging concert clothes. In most out of school venues there will be dressing rooms available. Sometimes it is possible for everyone to change at the hotel before the concert, if the hotel is where the pre-concert dinner is given. Usually this is not possible, meaning students and teachers must all bring concert gear to the Saturday rehearsal/performance site.

Dining Area: Sometimes lunches can be scheduled before or after the regular school lunches so the musicians can eat in the cafeteria. Sometimes it is necessary to find hallway or classroom spaces where students can eat sandwich lunches provided by the cafeteria, the PTO or arts support parents, or an outside caterer such as Subway. This will vary from school to school, but you do need to think about this. Snacks of fruit and water or juice can usually be served just outside the rehearsal hall or in a nearby room. The pre-concert dinner is sometimes catered by the school catering staff; sometimes it is catered by a group from the PTO or arts support group; sometimes a meal is organized at the hotel or near the performance venue. Sometimes a facility near the concert venue (such as a college cafeteria) can be used. Cost for this meal is always an issue. It is a bonus if this can be at least partially sponsored. The question of having a snack available after the concert is an important one. If substantial refreshments (such as drinks and sandwiches) are not offered at the concert site itself, it may be necessary to organize a simple snack back at the hotel after the concert so students will not need to go out.

What housing requirements will the community need to provide?

Because this is a large group to house in a hotel, it is absolutely crucial to find that hotel and secure the rooms approximately a year in advance. AMIS will be responsible for collecting the hotel fees and organizing the rooms according to student and teacher preferences
YOU WILL NEED A HOUSING PERSON TO BE THE LIAISON WITH THE HOTEL UNLESS YOU CHOOSE TO DO THIS DUTY YOURSELF.

The AMIS team usually arrives on the Sunday before the festival. Guest conductors generally arrive, if at all possible, a day or two ahead of the student participants.

Transport: In some cases public transport can be used almost exclusively during the festival, if it is very good and convenient. If groups are expected to take public transport to the hotel upon arrival, you will need to provide really detailed information to help them. It is daunting to be in a new city with a group of students and their instruments. Sometimes it is school policy to meet visiting groups at the airport or train station. This is always really appreciated by the visitors! Find out if this is a possibility at your school. Sometimes teachers will be glad to pay for minibus

transportation upon arrival. If your school doesn't meet visitors, try to find out about this option and how to arrange it so teachers can make a decision about whether or not they want to use it.

If participants can take public transport, or better yet walk, between the hotel and school they will do so. If not, you will need to organize bus transport to and from school each day. It will be necessary to plan this transport with a reliable bus company, preferably one your school normally uses. This is something major which needs to be organized (and costed out carefully) well in advance. You will also need to provide telephone numbers for a reliable taxi firm or two that teachers can use if they need to make any personal trips during the festival.

Which date?

There is a specific date for this festival. It is held on the weekend in March containing the third Saturday. This is not a flexible date as more than 60 schools are usually involved and they know this is a date they can put into their calendars well in advance.

What should be done well in advance?

You will need help organizing this festival. Although AMIS will do as much as possible, you will need someone else to be in charge of major segments of this festival. It seems to work best when you designate specific area (such as hotel and transport liaison) that your co-organizer will take responsibility for.

1. Preparing for the Festival: Talk to the school administration, faculty, facility maintenance people and PTO early on and explain to them the nature of the Festival and request their support. Ask specific questions about what the school will be willing to pay for and what expenses they would have to incur while the Festival is in the school. Usually schools will absorb photocopying costs, paper for the program, custodial and cleaning costs, telephone and fax costs to schools requiring specific information. Frequently they will also cover at least some of the following festival costs: food for breaks for directors or students, post-concert reception, flowers for the concert venue, some transportation.

Check (with the help of officials or secretaries within the school) to see what the **visa requirements** are for visitors from various countries. **This needs to be done early on in the planning** because in today's world it sometimes takes a long while to secure visas. Draft a letter of invitation which can be personalized for students requiring visas. It will generally need to be sent by fax to the consulate where the student is requesting the visa and to the music teacher bringing the students. It will then need to be sent as a hard copy to the music teacher so the student can also have it in hand when applying for the visa. AMIS can help with a draft visa letter.

Contact the school community to generate support for the Festival and help with the housing. (see housing guidelines) Explain the complete programme and needs to all of these people well ahead of time.

Keep everyone informed of arrangements at all times and send out several reminders in the months/weeks preceding the Festival. Invite all helpers to the concert.

Arrange for the AMIS banner to be hung above the performance area. It will be necessary to request release time for yourself for the duration of the festival, beginning with Wednesday when schools arrive. It may be necessary to ask for some release time for other members of the music faculty to aid in the running of the Festival.

Be prepared to be in constant touch with AMIS headquarters. The AMIS office will do everything it can to be sure you are not having to answer questions from participants. You will however need to be ready to answer a lot of questions from AMIS headquarters as well as asking for answers to your questions!

2. Housing: This is dealt with above since all are to be housed in a hotel. This is usually chosen largely by convenient location and its ability to house such a large group. Usually such hotels are four or five star hotels. Check with AMIS about the number of rooms you will probably need. Remember that student rooms should have twin beds, not double beds, in almost all cases. This is important to find out about because many hotels make no distinction between twin rooms and double rooms.

You will be asked to provide a few housing places with families for those students who are attending the festival on scholarship as this will remove a big cost obstacle for them. This will be only a few students.

3. Catering: Make sure that the **cafeteria** or your **food provider** knows about the extra numbers arriving at the school and what they need to cater for. Get a **food coordinator**. Arrange the most convenient time for the cafeteria to have these guests for lunch and then work the information into the rehearsal schedule.

Water should be available for students and fruit snacks and/or juice should be available for them at 1 breaks. Sometimes these snacks and the water are donated. If not, AMIS will reimburse for these expenses

.A pre-concert dinner for all participants and teachers involved with the Festival is normally held in the school prior to

the final concert on the Saturday night. It sometimes needs to be held at the concert venue or even at the festival hotel, depending on circumstances. It is usually a hot meal (such as pasta) with salad or soup and simple dessert.

The cost of lunches on Thursday, Friday and Saturday and the pre-concert dinner on Saturday are covered in the registration fees paid by each participant. Other meals are at the expense of the participants.

4. **Budget:** You will be asked to prepare costs estimates and to establish what your school community plans to cover and what AMIS will need to reimburse you for. As a general rule, the basic budget should be no more than £40 or € 60 per person to include food, transport, and incidentals like renting of instruments. Sometimes in exceptional circumstances it needs to be higher but this should be worked out with the AMIS office ahead of time. If someone donates items we generally must pay for from the budget, this amount, or most of it can often be added to the scholarship fund, unless it is needed for other budget items which are greater than usual. Possible donors should be made aware of this.

5. **Travel:** Provide detailed and accurate instructions on how to get to your school from the airport or main railway station. Provide road directions too, in case some people are coming by car. It is a very good idea if all this information can be supplied early so it can go on the web site. If possible arrange for someone to greet the visitors on arrival, either at the airport/station or at the school entrance.

4. **Directors' dinner:(s)** Arrange a suitable venue for the Directors' dinner and make the necessary reservations for this. It is normally held on Friday evening, although it could be on Thursday if necessary. The cost is generally under € 50, in some cases considerably less than that, depending on the festival venue. It would be a good idea to try to organize this dinner in the festival hotel so teachers can be onhand to supervise their students and still attend this dinner. This can be either a buffet or a three course sit-down dinner. It should simply be a time for teachers and conductors and hosts from the school to come together and spend some time while enjoying a nice meal together. Everyone is usually tired enough that they welcome a chance to get together without having to travel to another venue as well as taking care of the supervision issue.

There is sometimes a Directors' informal reception or get-together of some kind on Thursday following the first day of rehearsals. If there is no special event on the Thursday, you should have some restaurants to suggest to the visitors in case they would like to go out individually or in small groups or with their students. Most teachers will need to have the evening free to eat with their students and supervise them for the evening.

5. **Instrumental Rental:** (when necessary). If special instruments or extra equipment is required, arrange to rent what you do not have. Usually the band music requires sufficiently varied percussion equipment that much of this will need to be borrowed from schools or other musical groups close at hand, or it will have to be rented with suitable insurance. You should receive a list of percussion instruments required several months before the festival so you can organize this.

Check with your administration about how much(if any) they are willing to pay, what the insurance situation is for items like this, whether the school can provide transport for these instruments and how much AMIS will need to pay. Sometimes a visiting student will ask you to rent them a tuba, since these are very hard to transport. In that case they will arrange to pay you for the rental costs.

6. **Concert Recording:** Festival concerts are recorded, and a CD sent out to each participating school for them to copy and distribute to the participating students. This should be of good sound quality professionally mixed. If you have a good technical department in the school or if the concert venue has their own sound engineers they will help out. If you must hire a professional, research this carefully. You will usually need to pay for the actual recording of the concert, the mixing and preparation of two master CD's from which the school's master recordings can be made. Check with AMIS before contracting the company to do this. Each school has paid a specific amount for the archive recording. You will be expected to copy the master CD for each school or if necessary AMIS will do this copying and post the CD to each participating school. AMIS will reimburse you for the materials and postage, if you take care of this through a school department, unless your school wishes to donate these costs.

7. **Rehearsal schedule:** Create a schedule of rehearsals for the Festival. You will want to send your draft to the conductor and to AMIS for feedback before it is finalized. AMIS will provide an outline for you to work from. There will probably need to be lots of consultation on this. Schedules for teachers and students will be available in all their registration packets. Pin up rehearsal schedules on all the doors of the rehearsal rooms and anywhere else you think people will need to look for them.

The draft schedules will be sent to schools by AMIS ahead of time.

8. **Signs:** Signs indicating important locations such as bathrooms and rehearsal rooms should be put up for your visitors. It is also good if you have a welcome sign of some sort at the school entrance to greet the festival participants.

9. Rehearsal spaces: Prepare the rehearsal spaces. Arrange the chairs, stands, amps and other equipment and hang the name of each participating student over their music stand. AMIS will make the signs for the stands.

Provide a box of pencils for rehearsal.

10. Concert Set-up. In setting up for the concert, you will have help from the assigned stage manager for the festival and from the other teachers. Ensure that microphones and any other necessary equipment are in the right place for recording the performance. At least one public address microphone should be set up for the speakers who will address the audience unless the theatre has very good acoustics.

12. Lighting: Check that the lighting is sufficient for the musicians. If you have a stage with lighting make sure someone is available to do the lighting for you. The lighting set up should be done before the Festival rehearsals begin although it will need adjusting. Do not allow lighting checks to be done during rehearsals if it is at all possible to avoid this.

13. Information packages: You will need to help the AMIS crew to prepare information packages for the participating schools with schedules, information about the school, cafeteria vouchers (if you are using them), name tags, concert tickets, etc., but AMIS will provide the name tags and most of the other paperwork. Most of the information will be generated by AMIS but you may have additional information to prepare for the packets about your school Maps are something you should organize.

14: T-shirt: There are not tee shirts for this festival.

15. Extras.

Poster and program: You will need a concert poster and a design for the concert programme You may wish to use the regular AMIS logo on the program. It looks quite effective and has been used on a variety of programs. The program will need to be printed on A3 paper of 120-160 grams. Most good photocopiers can handle these weights. Depending on the size of your concert venue and your expected audience, you should advertise to the wider community so as many people as possible hear the final concert. You may want to make tickets and sell them prior to the concert night, you may want to give tickets but not charge for them, or you may decide not to use tickets, depending on the usual practice at your school. When an outside facility is used, it is generally necessary to sell tickets in order to defray the cost of renting the facility. In most instances we encourage donations to the AMIS scholarship fund instead of charging for tickets. If you use tickets, you will need to provide tickets for all participating Directors, AMIS staff and guests as well as host families. Your PTO or your arts support organization should be involved if possible. They may want to offer refreshments at the end of the concert. Pre-festival orders will be taken for tickets for the families of performers. AMIS will handle this.

Concert details: Arrange for someone to prepare the concert location – clean up after final rehearsal, prepare seats, decorate with plants/flowers, etc., provide a table with reserved/paid tickets, check tickets, give out programmes, prepare and serve refreshments if offered. Teachers will be happy to help in tidying up before the concert but will want to be free to greet parents and talk with students immediately before and after the concert.

Assembly: It may be possible for your High School (or other sections of your school community) to be offered a brief assembly performance, usually done at the end of the day on Friday. This should be arranged in consultation with the Festival conductor and AMIS, as well as the relevant administrators. It's a great chance to publicise music in your school! Since this takes valuable rehearsal time, this needs to be cleared with the conductors and AMIS. In some instances it may be possible for some of your music classes to come with their teachers to see and hear part of the rehearsal.

Performing Rights: You will need to find out from the performing rights society in your city/country what fees must be paid for the right to perform our concert. You probably already pay this organization for the right to perform your own concerts. In fact the school may have an annual agreement with this organization to cover all performances in your school. You will need to emphasize that only archive recordings are made of the concert and that CD's will not be sold to the public. You should make sure it is known that AMIS is a registered charity.

Sightseeing or other activities: Usually at some time during the festival it is possible to allow a couple of hours of free time for sightseeing. This often works well as part of the Saturday program, especially if the concert facility is at your school. Great care needs to be taken not to have too many hours of rehearsal on Saturday where students may become overtired and unable to enjoy and perform well in their final concert.

Thank you's: Make sure you have a complete list of all who need to be thanked. These should include your housers, administration & secretaries, Director, PTO people, custodians, sound & lights people, catering, parent & student volunteer workers. These will also be included in the program so AMIS will need the list ahead of time. And

remember, you can never write too many thank-you notes!