

# TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR THE CARE AND FEEDING OF A CONSORT

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The material in this chapter is excerpted from an article in *American Recorder*, Vol. XXXI, No. 3 (September 1990), pp. 7-10.

The "Ten Commandments" presented here were developed by the author's own consort, a group of six players with a fairly wide range of musical abilities.

- 1. Meet at a regular time and set starting and ending times.** We meet once a week for two hours. Some of us get so carried away with the music we want to play all night. Much better to "leave 'em wanting more." And a fixed time focuses the rehearsal on the things that are most important.
- 2. At some point choose a leader.** We tried to operate as six equals, but the best and only professional musician among us emerged as our leader.... We expect him to consult us on all operating decisions of the group (when and where we play, how we spend our money, etc.), but we let him settle the musical disputes. Someone should have the final word.
- 3. If you start to earn money, open a separate account and appoint a treasurer.**
- 4. Break bread together from time to time.** Musical rehearsals can be serious business, especially on the verge of a performance. It helps your musical interaction to have some casual interaction as well.
- 5. Criticize or comment on the music, not the musicians.** "That passage might sound better if we did..." rather than "You're bellowing so hard on that alto we can't hear the soprano."
- 6. Agree on the general purpose of the group and to what extent you will deviate from that purpose.** We got together to play, and very soon found ourselves with invitations to perform. As it happens, we were all rather taken with the idea and have basically refocused on performance repertoire, but we still try to sight-read for 15 minutes or so during each rehearsal, and occasionally devote an entire session to it.
- 7. If you have a group that works well together, don't tamper with it by adding "just one more person."** You don't need to tell me about the proverbial straw.... Remember that group dynamics are fragile and can easily be destroyed.
- 8. Don't let little things fester.** Best to bring up a grievance quickly, and resolve it quickly. Little annoyances become big issues if allowed to grow. If you don't want him to put his chewing gum on your antique music stand, say so at once.

9. **Relax and enjoy it for what it is, while it lasts....** Recognize that in any group greater than one, someone may be having an off night—musically or personally. (Not you, of course!) We have found that the best thing is to just ignore it, and start fresh the next week. No explanations required.
10. **Finally, be prepared to fall in love with someone or everyone.** Music is a very emotional experience.... To share in that experience is, in some sense, to fall in love, and can be confused with the real thing. Be forewarned. It's not the least of the hazards involved in group playing.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Green, Barry, with W. Timothy Gallway. *The Inner Game of Music*. Garden City, NJ: Anchor/Doubleday, 1986. See Chapter 14, "Ensemble Playing" (pp. 189-205).

White, Beverly. "Consensus Musicus and the Small Ensemble." *American Recorder*, Vol. XIII, No. 4 (November 1972), pp. 122-123.  
This article advocates teamwork and shared leadership in small ensembles. It is most applicable to experienced ensembles.



