

Chapter History of Casco Bay Threshold Singers, North Yarmouth Maine

2025

Origin and Founding

In December 2020, Ann Dillon and Jamila Knox decided to start a Threshold Choir in the Portland, Maine area, creating the first chapter in Maine. Jamila's introduction to Threshold singing came at the Women Singing in Circle retreat in 2019, and was deepened by a pilgrimage to New Zealand with Kate Munger and eleven Threshold singers. Ann joined with strong, fond memories of singing for each of her parents and later for a partner as they neared the end of their lives. Together they sent invitations and welcomed twelve women into the new group.

First Rehearsals and Transition to In-Person

The choir's first rehearsal took place on January 27, 2021, over Zoom during COVID. For the first six months the group met every other week online, learning the core songs and building musical foundations. The limitations of virtual harmony were readily apparent, and when members finally gathered in person in the summer of 2021—outside, in a member's driveway—the improvement was striking. Ann, the music director, was thrilled to hear the group sing in harmony in real life, a quality difficult to achieve over Zoom.

Rehearsal Rhythm and Musical Practice

The choir established a steady rehearsal schedule, meeting the first and third Wednesday of each month. Repertoire practice balances ongoing learning with frequent review: new songs are introduced regularly while the required 13 core songs are practiced often so newer members can become fluent. Musical expectations for singers are explicit and skill-based: members must sing melody and at least one other part in a trio before advancing to bedside singing.

Membership and Community

Membership has grown steadily. The group currently includes 21 singers and five additional women who have expressed interest. Of the 21, seventeen sing regularly or are actively shadowing. Seven of the original twelve founders remain active in the choir. The membership includes multiple family connections—a mother and daughter and two sets of sisters—with the possibility of another sister joining. New members are invited to attend a rehearsal to assess fit, and if both the choir and the newcomer agree, she is asked to attend three rehearsals before officially joining Threshold Choir.

Service, Performances, and Outreach

The choir sings regularly at three facilities: an independent living facility, a memory care unit, and a hospice house, and is pursuing adding a multi-level care facility in the near future. In addition to scheduled facility visits, the group performs at memorials and accepts occasional

requests to sing in private homes for people in hospice care. On average the choir performs about 28 sings per month, including roughly three song baths per month.

Training and Leadership

Training and progression are structured and deliberate. After learning core repertoire and completing Bedside Singer training, a new singer is invited to shadow five scheduled sings before becoming a full-fledged bedside singer. Leadership responsibilities are shared: Ann serves as music director, another leader functions as scheduler for two facilities, and the narrator acts as administrator of the choir. Together they are two of six song leaders who guide rehearsals, training, and scheduling. The choir's culture emphasizes musical readiness, compassionate service, and steady growth as they continue to expand their presence in the community.

Rebecca Steven's house, Portland, Maine.

Shelly Kirpatrick, Kim Moody, Monique Cornett, Salima Greaves, Rebecca Stevens, Linda Snow, Cathy Grigsby, Rita Rubin-Long, Ann Dillon (on table)



From left to right standing: Kristen Gustavson, Jo Fein, Brittney Smith, Ann Dillon, Connie Schmalz, Salima Greaves, Marguerite Walker, Naomi Schick, Cathy Grigsby, Jamila Knox

Crouched from left to right: Denise Reynolds, Kirsten Platt, Linda Snow, Elisha Emerson, Meg Emerson, Lynne Gammon, Lisa Derman

