

# Music Group Guidelines

*Singing bhajans is a sacred practice. We strive to be Amma's instruments for enabling an atmosphere of devotion through music.*

The following is written with the intention of providing guidelines for the Music Group members' roles and conduct at Music Practice, Satsang and various programs throughout the year.

## Satsang and Music Group Guidelines

The following guidelines aim to support the roles and conduct of music group members, ensuring that we are Amma's instruments in creating an atmosphere of devotion through music. Participation in the Music Group can take on various forms, as outlined below:

1. **Silent Participant:** This role is ideal for those who are new to Amma or Amma's bhajans. Maintaining silence, particularly during Satsang and between bhajans, is encouraged throughout the duration to help create a spiritual atmosphere.
2. **Backup Singer:** Those participating in backup singing should sing in the key of the lead singer, and have consistent tempo. While some may find this natural as they are familiar with the bhajan, and are comfortable with pronunciation, others are encouraged to dedicate time to practice both at music practice and additional time at home.
3. **Lead Singer Responsibilities:** The lead singer holds a central role in initiating and sustaining the devotional energy of the bhajan. The lead singer is expected to sing **on key, on tempo, and with correct pronunciation** throughout the duration of their bhajan before singing as lead singer at Satsang. If these responsibilities are challenging to maintain, we encourage you to attend regular music practice to build up the skill.
4. **Instrumental Support:** The lead singer should communicate any specific Bhajan notes to ensure the musicians can provide confident and accurate accompaniment. For example:
  - **Harmonium/keyboard:** Know the correct key and provide an opening melodic line.
  - **Mridangam / Tabla:** Follows the tempo of the singer and keeps a consistent tempo during the duration of the song. They watch for key signals from the singer for faster tempo changes, or the end of the bhajan.

- **Percussion (kaimani/tambourine/etc.):** Follows the tempo of the drums, additionally watches for key signals for tempo changes, or the end of the bhajan.
  - **Other Instruments** (non-standard) can be used in arrangements according to the lead singer's preference.
5. **Activity Coordinator, Equipment Coordinator:** This role includes logistical support to ensure the smooth flow of the Satsang, such as:
    - Create an inventory of the MA Center LA sound equipment, work with the music coordinator in arranging for sound equipment for House Satsangs and communicating how many mics are needed for Satsangs and Programs at the Center.
    - Assisting with the sound system set up and breakdown.
    - Organizing a sign-up sheet for Satsang lead singers to select their songs
  6. **Music Coach:** An experienced member with special skills in the bhajan format who can enhance the quality of the Satsang through teaching and mentoring.
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## General Principles for Participation

1. **Respect for All Skill Levels:** Our aim is to foster a supportive atmosphere where musicians, whether experienced or beginner, have a place to practice, express their devotion and musically grow.
2. **Focus on Pitch, Rhythm, Tempo and Pronunciation:** All participants should focus on singing/playing in tune, with consistent tempo, accurate rhythm and correct pronunciation. If you are a beginner, listen to the harmonium to match pitch.
3. **Creating a Unified Sound:** Everyone should align their key, timing and tempo to create a cohesive sound.
4. **Sing to Your Strengths:** If you are a beginner, start with simple bhajans, gradually introducing more complex ones as your comfort and expertise grow.
5. **Music Practice Structure:** Each singer should know which song they want to practice, and if necessary they should have additionally practiced the song prior to the Music Practice. If possible, please know your key ahead of time (the harmonium/keyboard players are available to help with this). At the end of the bhajan we use the last few minutes to recap and highlight areas for improvement.
6. **Communication is Key:** While playing bhajans as a group, regularly be aware of all the lead musicians. Eye contact and non verbal communication is key especially during tempo changes, and queuing for the end of the bhajan.
7. **Group Participation:** We encourage regular practice to create a strong Satsang which will provide a rich spiritual experience together year round.

8. **Handling Conflicts or Differences:** Address conflicts in a respectful and open-minded way. There will need to be flexibility and compromise when it comes to musical decisions and participation during various Satsangs and programs.

## Music Group Practice

1. Share which song you are practicing, or singing at Satsang, to the Whatsapp music group. If the song is not part of the regular repertoire, share a link of the song so the keyboard/harmonium and musicians can familiarize themselves with the song.
2. The order of the practice is according to the arrival of the participants. Pending on how many singers are at practice each singer can sing one bhajan to start.
3. The individual with the most music skills at each practice will be the lead music coach for that day. They will take the lead in providing feedback to individuals, ensuring that feedback is not coming from multiple sources.
4. If the singer is a beginner, and has difficulty staying on tempo, follow the tabla/mridangam closely for correct timing.
5. For some of the more complicated bhajans, work with a native speaker during music practice for correct pronunciation.
6. Every active participant (singing or rhythm, not observing or meditating) is asked to sign up with their name, phone number, name of bhajan, singing or playing an instrument. The music group organizers will transfer their participation to a google sheet. This is to track attendance and bhajans that are practiced.
7. The music practices will be held at different places in different parts of Los Angeles.
8. We have a Whatsapp LA Music practice group, please use this link if you wish to be added. <https://chat.whatsapp.com/G4C8aVfDv7B5DxTAkP3GdA>

## Offering Singing for Amma

Priority in singing for Amma will be to those who have been consistently active in the music group for at least **four** months prior to Amma's arrival. Our singing guidelines remind us that the purpose of singing bhajans is to uplift the program while Amma gives darshan. This is a privilege to serve, not a given right to anyone who wants to lead.

The tour guidelines require that each lead singer, backup singers on mic, percussion or other instrumental players must...

- Be able to consistently show that they can sing on key, and in tempo
- Be able to pronounce the lyrics

If you are not able to meet these requirements, remember you can sing with the group, without being on mic, in the same space in front of Amma, as it is still a beautiful gift to sing to Amma.

*Aum Amriteshwaryai Namah*