sacramento MASTER SINGERS
Advancing the Art, Lifting the Soul

YEAR IN REVIEW

2025–26 Season

Choir in September 2026

One era closed with a standing ovation and the next one is already on the podium.

The 2025–26 season was the one where Sacramento Master Singers said goodbye to 40 years of one artistic director and said hello to the next, while still closing the books in the black and keeping rehearsals free of mandatory dues. Here's the year, in the moments that made it and the numbers behind them.

40 yrs

Dr. Ralph Hughes' tenure as Artistic Director, celebrated and closed out this season

$28,178

net surplus for the year — after opening the season expecting a deficit

$0

in mandatory dues — still true, every season, for every singer

PART ONE

The season's big story

Two chapters closed and opened this year, and SMS spent the season making sure both got their due.

After 40 years on the podium, Dr. Ralph Hughes led his final SMS concert this May, a program capped by Ola Gjeilo's *Sunrise Mass* and a tribute piece that brought SMS alumni back to sing alongside the current choir. The evening also premiered a work commissioned in his honor, *The Gift of Hands* by Robert Cohen, performed with a hired string ensemble. The board named him Artistic Director Laureate, presented him with lifetime season tickets, and secured a proclamation from the City of Sacramento recognizing his four decades of service.

Ralph conducting at his final concert in May 2026

Brett Epperson conducting SMS in March 2026

The handoff was years in the making, not a scramble. Dr. Brett Epperson served as Artistic Director Designate from January through June 2026, conducting two pieces in March to ease into the role, before formally becoming Artistic Director on July 1. SMS also welcomed Dr. Brett Judson as its new accompanist this season, succeeding longtime accompanist Heidi Van Regenmorter.

Heidi Van Regenmorter, longtime accompanist

Dr. Brett Judson, new accompanist

On stage, the season's other major program was a December 2025 performance of Rutter's *Gloria* with a full brass ensemble.

A Master Singers Christmas, December 2025

PART TWO

The year, by the numbers

Figures below are drawn from SMS's FY2025 financial summary, as presented to the board.

$247,858
total revenue

$219,680
total costs & expenses

34.5×
growth in grant funding over the prior year

$132,152
combined operating & savings reserves on hand

52%
of choir members are also donors to SMS

9 concerts / 3,155 seats
9 concerts performed & total audience reached this season

PART THREE

A surplus, with context

The books closed well this year — here's the fuller picture behind that number.

SMS opened the 2025–26 season projecting a deficit and closed it $28,178 ahead — largely on the strength of a single, unusually large grant year (funding grew more than 34× over the prior year) and a strong showing on Big Day of Giving, where matching gifts stretched every dollar donated. That grant growth came from California's Performing Arts Equitable Payroll Fund, a one-time relief program we don't expect to see again — so grant revenue, and total income with it, is projected to drop next season even though costs won't. Individual giving alone was down 18% year over year.

RESERVES

$132,152 sits in combined operating and savings reserves as of last summer — a cushion built specifically so one bad grant cycle or a slow ticket season doesn't put a concert, or a scholarship, at risk.

PART FOUR

Where the money came from — and where it went

Major categories from SMS's FY2025 income and expense statements.

Major income sources · $243,443

CATEGORY	AMOUNT	% OF TOTAL
Grants	$89,293	**36.7%**
Ticket Sales	$85,800	**35.2%**
Individual Giving	$55,088	**22.6%**
Annual Retreat choir member payments for retreat	$11,122	**4.6%**
Merchandise CD sales	$2,140	**0.8%**

Major expenses · $218,912

CATEGORY	AMOUNT	% OF TOTAL
Artistic personnel Artistic Director, Assistant Director, Accompanist, and Guest Musicians	$70,721	**32.3%**
Business operations insurance, worker's comp, payroll fees, taxes, credit card fees, internet, telephone, professional development, bookkeeping etc.	$28,547	**13.0%**
Spaces & storage includes concert and rehearsal space rental and storage locker rental	$24,640	**11.3%**
Marketing program printing, direct mail printing and mailing, advertisements	$24,312	**11.1%**
Patron Services and House Management part-time patron services coordinator and house management at concerts	$22,086	**10.1%**
Annual Retreat most money came back to organization through member payments	$13,282	**6.1%**
Production recording fees, concert supplies, equipment moving, piano moving & tuning	$11,776	**5.4%**
Sheet music & commissions	$9,859	**4.5%**
Employee goodwill Ralph Hughes' retirement reception, partially underwritten by a generous donation	$6,937	**3.2%**
Travel	$3,894	**1.8%**

Categories are as reported to the board; each list sums to slightly less than total revenue/expenses due to smaller uncategorized items.

PART FIVE

The people behind the music

A working choir runs on far more than the people who sing.

A Season of Gratitude, May 2026

ARTISTIC & PATRON STAFF

Dr. Brett Epperson	**Artistic Director since July 1, 2026**
Emily Carbrey	**Assistant Conductor**
Dr. Brett Judson	**Accompanist** · joined this season, succeeding Heidi Van Regenmorter
Julia Dean	**Patron Services Coordinator**
Dr. Ralph Hughes	**Artistic Director Laureate** · led SMS for 40 years, retired May 2026

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Caroline Bamforth	**President**
Chris Dainard	**Vice President**
Chris Goff	**Treasurer**
Carol McCormick	**Secretary**
Maddy Walton-Hadlock	**Choral Liaison**

Several board members volunteer many hours a week on top of their day jobs, since SMS has no full-time administrative staff.

56

total singers currently in the choir

9

new members welcomed this season

PART SIX

Reaching beyond the risers

Community and youth outreach is a stated board priority for the year ahead.

SMS also awards scholarships to young choral singers each April — our scholarship was established in 2003 and we have awarded over 150 monetary prizes over the last 23 years.

Race for the Arts, August 2026

First rehearsal of the season, August 2026

PART SEVEN

What's ahead for 2026–27

What this season is already building toward.

01 **Remain fiscally sound**

02 **Grow a culture of volunteerism among members and patrons**

03 **Build and maintain our audience through social media and other engagement**

04 **Improve community and youth outreach efforts**

05 **Support new artistic leadership**

06 **Steward donors and patrons**

ON THE HORIZON

A 2028 concert tour to Finland & the Baltics — four concerts in Helsinki, Tallinn, Riga, and Vilnius, carrying SMS's repertoire to audiences well outside Sacramento.

PART EIGHT

In their own words

Patrons and singers on why this music matters to them.

> *I have been surrounded by choral music for as long as I can remember — it has been part of the soundtrack of my life. As the daughter of a local chorale conductor and a friend of Ralph Hughes, I learned early that there is something almost magical about a choir: individual voices, each with its own character and story, becoming something greater together. Supporting choral music is deeply personal for me. It honors my mother and the love she instilled in me for this art form, and it invests in what I believe matters most: community, artistry, tradition, and connection. I am especially excited to see Sacramento Master Singers begin this new chapter under the dynamic leadership of Dr. Brett D. Epperson.*
>
> **MARIE FOURNIER** · SMS Patron

> *I've loved choral music my whole life. Like many of us, I started singing in school and church choruses, and that love never really goes away — it needs feeding and nurturing. That's where the Sacramento Master Singers come in. For thoughtful and eclectic programming, masterful direction, and consistently high-quality singing, there is simply no better choral experience in the Sacramento region. My advice: buy a season subscription, then drop out of the stresses of everyday life and drop into a few afternoons or evenings with the Master Singers for a sublime re-set.*
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> **DENNIS MANGERS** · SMS Patron

> *When my granddaughter was tiny, we brought her to the Children's Christmas concerts. What I've never forgotten is the total engagement and joy on each singer's face — they weren't just a crowd on stage; they genuinely wanted the audience to share in the experience. I needed this! Seven years into singing with the group, I now see many of the same people in the audience each concert, with the same joy in their faces that we have on stage. My community has grown to include people of all ages and backgrounds. When I see young people in the audience, I hope their love of choral music grows because we shared ours. They are the Master Singers of the future!*
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> **LAURA SHEARS** · SMS Singer

NOTES & SOURCES

Financial figures, board goals, and staff/board rosters are drawn from SMS's FY2025 Financial Status Summary and 2026 Annual Meeting materials as presented to the membership; season narrative details were provided directly by SMS leadership. Sacramento Master Singers is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, EIN 94-2850445.

Photos by Bruce Patt & Serge Kuzmin.