**Round Table #1**

**Children’s Choirs**

**July 23rd, 2020**

Panelists:

Diana Clark, *Artistic Director - Coastal Sound*

Sarona Mynhardt, *Artistic Director - In Spirito*

Fiona Blackburn, *Artistic Director - BC Girls’ Choir*

Nina Horvath, *Executive Director - Vancouver Bach Choirs*

Facilitator:

Brigid Coult, *Project Manager & Administrative Assistant – BC Choral Federation*

BC: Introductions, welcome to everyone, BCCF acknowledgement of unceded land etc.

NH: Zoom etiquette: everyone muted, if you want to ask a question you can use chat or raise hand, choices of gallery view/speaker view

DC: greetings to everyone, lots of questions, oscillate between despair and hope, wondered if some of the questions would be answered by document

 Introduction of “Guidance for Faith-based Choirs in BC” put out by BC CDC

 Proposed guidelines for choir – screen-share of “Let’s Sing Safely”

 This has not yet been endorsed by BC Choral Federation

Together with Carrie Tennant, we asked ourselves what we’d need to do to restart our choirs. What are the guidelines and what are the official statements? Researched through WorkSafe BC and BC CDC for documents that talk about Singing and performing in choirs. As well, emerging evidence that is coming out. Everything in the document already exists in official documents collated from BC Centre for Disease Control, BC Ministry of Health, Worksafe BC, BC Return to Sport and current research.

She does not feel the government will give the go-ahead to start singing, per se. Instead we need to interpret the guidelines announced on May 6th to see how they will fit with our activity.

Vancouver Coastal Health has a mechanism in place where you can create a document of guidelines for a restart program, submit it to be approved or to get feedback on how it can be improved so that your restart plan is vetted by Vancouver Coastal Health.

Diana led us through a quick tour of the document, touching on all of the important aspects.

Restarting is NOT mandatory.

Purpose of document is to have done leg-work and research for you, already.

Three items must be covered in guidelines: Processes, Measures, a Plan.

No gatherings more than 50 people

No one with symptoms may come to choir

More frequent cleaning

More social distance

Contact intensity – how long

Number of people you are with

Physical distancing

Barriers

Increased ventilations

Posted guidelins/rules

Non-medical masks

Safety plan

Consider liability

 June 10th Mike Farnworth signed a Ministerial Order protecting amateur sports organizations, should someone contract COVID while following guidelines put in place by organization, thereby enabling them to play again. Amateur arts organizations do not have a Ministerial Order put in place to protect them. Hope is to lobby for such a thing.

Communication plans

Additional cleaning

Consider the Venue – outdoors always preferable

Consider singing with masks

Measures:

Facility access/control

Ventilations

Pathways

Safety protocols that should be in place

Indoors, limit number of people and time – aim for less than 30 minutes

Recommended rehearsal and event protocols

Factor in increased cleaning and disinfecting measures – might add to cost

Plan should someone contract COVID – three plans were shared by Arts Umbrella and adapted for choirs

Sample Participant Agreement – not a waiver

Resources at the end

Airborne Transmission Estimator tool – very interesting

Nina: corroborating another study (University of Boulder) showing 30 minutes being the maximum time one should spend singing in the same room because the density of aerosols spikes dramatically after 30 minutes.

Chat Question regarding faceshield as compared to masks.

Answer: Research seems to be indicating face shields are not effective at all.

Chat Question is 30 minutes specific to indoor or outdoor?

Answer: It is specific to indoor.

Chat Question: is the 30 minutes specific to total time or only singing time? Can you still spend time afterwards on non-singing activities?

 Answer: Consultation on the Faith-based choirs indicated 30 or less of singing. The panelists were inconclusive on whether one can stay in the room longer to do non-singing work. Fiona suggested making a rehearsal plan that included fewer than 30 minutes of singing to allow for the remainder of the half hour to be filled with theory and/or humming.

These guidelines and restrictions will likely incur a lot more preparatory time for the directors so as to be efficient as possible when in-person as well as tailoring plans for online learning. Leaders will have to be extremely organized.

Chat Question: Could you have kids sing for 30 minutes and then move into another room while first room is being sanitized then return to the first room and rehearse more?

 Best guess answer: Nina surmised that you probably could but you would have to take into consideration what the circulation and airflow are like in that room. It’s not just about sanitizing surfaces, it’s about the concentration of aerosols in the air.h

Chat Question: Does that take into account the size of the space?

 Answer: Likely the studies did take this into account as they provide all the specific parameters. Obviously two singers in a giant gymnasium could probably sing for longer than 30 minutes.

BC Girls’ Choir decided to plan for 4 or 5 different scenarios for fall start-up. Totally in-person, hybrid in-person/online, starting up later in fall, starting in January, and having a dark year. For each they figured out a budget. They found there wasn’t much difference, financially, amongst the scenarios except for the dark year which presented financial instability. Following the “Let’s Sing Safely” document meant they had to modify their plans slightly: limit the number of singers; no recruitment; shorter rehearsals; longer breaks in between to clean (will have to factor this into the budget for venue rental); no snacks; no breaks; no transfer of music/paper; no sharing. How to translate all of this to the parents requires a well thought-out Covid Plan. This allows parents to see upfront what expectations and guidelines are and then they can decide if it will work for them. One stipulation requires that only one parent can bring them to rehearsal. Rehearsals used to be open and now they will be closed. Chaperones will work two or three weeks consecutively rather than having people come and go in an effort to keep the groups the same. This plan will help parents to see that you are taking their child’s health seriously and will hopefully help create buy-in from the parents. Fees will try to remain the same. It is encouraged to keep fees the same because there is still good teaching going on. Listing the things that parents do not have to pay for: camp, concert tickets, etc. Singing outdoors was challenging. Children became discombobulated by lack of acoustic and sang timidly as a result. The challenges of singing outdoors can also be embraced as it forces the singer to sing out, be less reliant on their neighbour, and ultimately more independent, confident singers.

Chat Question: How many singers will BC Girls’ Choir be having this fall?

 Answer: They will be rehearsing in a gymnasium. No grade 1. Grades 2/3 15-18 singers. Grades 4-7 20-25 singers. Teenagers 20-25. Not sure what return rate will be like.

Chat Request for sharing of BC Girls’ Choir Plan. Fiona will check with administration first. If approved, then it will be emailed out to participants.

Sarona: How do we plan for a fall amidst all of this uncertainty? We also must realize the vulnerability of this age group and the emotional needs for children in these difficult times where poverty and domestic violence are more of a threat. Recruiting is not important right now, aim for retaining, instead. How do we stay calm and how do we have a calming influence? Move from what we cannot do to what we can do. Shift focus from performance to a meaningful musical experience. As teachers we don’t teach music, we teach compassion, love, joy, and humanity. We can still do this through Zoom and virtually connecting with our people. We need to be flexible and we have to improvise. Our main purpose is to keep our musical communities as together and healthy as we can. What, when and how to do this is an individual decision unique to each circumstance. One of the most important take-aways from leading on Zoom is to not become overwhelmed. Don’t become overwhelmed yourself and don’t overwhelm your singers. Move away from long-term, seasonal planning and instead create modules of content. Do 4 weeks at a time. Plan short periods of time rather than larger periods. Take 2 songs only and address theory and vocal technique. Or have them compose their own songs. Whether or not we go to in-person, the hybrid model is so important because there will likely always be those who won’t come back. Music is a place for kids who aren’t as involved in sports and who might have underlying medical conditions. With Sarona’s adult choir she did an online sight-singing course and taught solfege. She also did 7 week course to learn 7 songs where the focus was on text and the actual learning, not performance. Once people understood what it experience was about, it was very meaningful for them. Other ideas would include spoken chorus. Speak the text: phrasing, inflection, syllable stress, rhythm. Use rap as a focus for learning – Hamilton. Body percussion. Listening to music.

Heidi Epp shared what she’s been doing. Body percussion, Kodaly and solfège. Kids enthusiastically responded to challenges of singing the solfege hand gestures Heidi made. She tried humming songs that incorporated familiar tunes. They would build chords and move one note at a time. Will spend more time on song writing. Trying to use the time to address the essentials. Highly advocates the software, Musico for logging kids usage/homework, tracking progress, and creating sound/video files. By fall Musico promises to have the technology for 5 to 6 people to make music together without any lag.

Chat Question: What is the concern regarding circles for in-person singing?

 Answer: Concern is about direction of aerosols. Diana confirmed that the information is outlined in some of the research presented in links provided.

Chat Question: Is there a formula to figure out the square footage per child in a space?

 Answer: Diana said that the aerosol simulator tool she referenced would help provide answers here but to also consider that the equation is impacted by ventilation in the room.

Nina suggested that we should frame this time as a time to look at different ways of working together instead of waiting for that platform that will give us an online solution to rehearsing together as we used to do.

Question regarding the NCCEH document Diana posted a link to, alluding it would be given to Dr. Henry’s office.

Brigid spoke on the pros and cons of virtual choir videos. She stressed that it is not as much a choral experience as an engineering accomplishment. But suggested they are useful as a “final product” for choirs. They are challenging to make and require some technologically experienced help. Phoenix Chamber Choir will be offering tutorial videos on the process. Links for these are on the BCCF website.

Having just created a virtual choir video, Fiona offered her best wisdom on pros and cons regarding the creation of virtual choir videos. And invited anyone who is interested to email her.

Brigid invited her to put her email into the chat. Nina instructed the group on how to save the chat session.

Sarona encouraged us all to be enthusiastic about the online learning. She suggested creating a “fear of missing out” to get the kids involved.

Diana continued “Campfire Sing-a-longs” throughout the summer on Tuesday evenings just as a way to keep kids used to singing with a screen. And for all of the leaders to get used to singing and teaching into what can sometimes feel like a black hole. 2 hour rehearsal is now 1 hour. 90 minutes is now 50. Given up the idea of being “choir as we’ve known it” and opted for things that are simpler like rounds, using the looper (so they can do things in parts). Trying to be passionate and making it fun. Using Jam Boards in Google so that kids get some interaction with each other. Having group leaders lead activities so that it’s not always Diana singing. Whatever you can do to keep it fun and engaging.

Marnie Setka-Mooney reiterated importance of having purely social gatherings online. Use of snacks and movies play an important bonding role. Queried Diana on the “looper”.

 Diana: you can use Garage Band or get a looper app on the phone. It will allow you to record multiple tracks. A 4 part round could be recorded, one part on each of those tracks.

Nina said that lots of kids don’t like the Zoom format but the come because they like to see their teacher and their friends. Expect some attrition. It is inevitable. Brigid added that the usual expectations around attendance should not apply right now. If they are having troubles coping, definitely give them a break. Another base to cover is to check in with parents at home to see how they are set up for online rehearsing: are there siblings or animals distracting them? Be prepared to work around kids whose computers are in the family room (a space that doesn’t lend itself well to focussed engagement). What room is the computer in? Nina said the Bach choir prepared a list of best practice suggestions for each family such as having a space for yourself, having headphones etc.

Sarona offered her words of encouragement to please remember that we are all in this together, across the world. We have to remember this and that we’ll all get through it, together.

Heidi Epp has connected with directors from around the world and invited them to come in to give a warm-up for 5 minutes or similar. It’s been a great way to connect with colleagues around the world to see how others are coping, too.

Brigid offered thanks to all the facilitators, and to those who attended. Youth Choir RoundTable next week; Adult and Seniors Choirs in August.