**Round Table #2**

**Youth Choirs**

**July 30th, 2020**

*[NOTES]*

Panelists:

Carrie Tennant, *Artistic Director – Vancouver Youth Choir*

Dr. Adam Con, *Acting Associate Dean - UVIC Faculty of Fine Arts*

Jim Sparks, *Adjunct Professor - UBC*

Liana Savard, *Director – Vancouver Orpheus Choir*

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

BC – introductions, Zoom etiquette, recording for archival purposes, etc.

JP – A good time to stand back with so much shifting information. In the middle of two storms: 1) health storm related to COVID and 2) BLM looking at choral music, power structures, appropriation. We are bewildered and don’t know what kind of questions to be asking. Through this discussion you’ll have more of a solid sense of perspective and 1) what we know about the new normal, 2) what we don’t know, and 3) what we’re still muddled about. It is messy. The three categories are going to continue until there’s a vaccine, at least. Carrie will go through what we know. Hope that you can come away from this session a little more clear these three things.

AC – Hope you’re all able to get R&R and downtime from stress of this time. There are thousands of pages of science. It’s ongoing. Some of it is conflicting. You have to take it all with a little bit of a grain of salt. Take everything at an arm’s length. Be mindful of looking for the research that backs up our hope of coming back or not – keep a jaundiced eye. Think of both sides. Who’s writing it? What are they writing it for? How are you reading it? Are you reading it for favour of what you need to support yourself when you go to your board, family members, principals, your singers? Or is it just trying to find the middle way to do this right? This is a really wonderful time to take the opportunity to start fresh. What kind of things can I do that I couldn’t do before because maybe I was too busy rehearsing? One of the things I’d love to do is spend more time talking about social justice and having conversations with students, youth, and intergenerational conversations to talk about what it was like in different times. It’s been especially important to have these conversations when we’re not seeing each other face to face as much as we used to. Focus on community building more than the rehearsal. We’ll get back to the rehearsal. Keep the faith. It will happen some day.

CT – Went through a number of stages of grief, despair, hopelessness, wine-drinking etc… One of the biggest sources of frustration was the conflicting science and the vagueness of policy and the “unknown”. Feeling less control and challenged. Bothered by the lack of fairness to learn that sports teams are able to go back to playing and volunteers protected from liability if anyone gets sick. Discovered that sports organizations went to deciding bodies with a plan to restart. Collaborated with Diana Clark of Coastal/Choral Canada and combined our documents together to form a plan that would work for each individual choir across the province. Document is called *“Let’s Sing Safely”* and it gives you clear guidelines about the things you need to consider if you are starting to think about singing together, in person, either outside or inside. Gathered as much information and science and approved policy from around the world but also within our province from different sectors. Policies on music-making were also taken from other provinces: Alberta and Ontario, as well as policies from Europe where they’ve been tried and tested. Document not yet endorsed but there have been very positive comments and feedback so far from the Vancouver Coastal Health. It is before the BC CDC for review, currently. It is also in the hands of Reka Gustafson, VP Deputy Public Health Officer.

Shares document on a screen share

Credits Diana Clark with the lion’s share of preparing this document by amalgamating the science. CT did a lot of the guidelines for singing indoors and outdoors. Three things:

* broad strokes of how to move towards singing safely in person
* specific measures to keep people safe to avoid further outbreak (nitty gritty policies of moving into and out of the space etc.)
* plan in place in the event an outbreak should occur

lots of information to look through

a couple of things that you might want to think about before we breakout

 what kind of health checks at the door, how to manage arrival and departure, hand washing/sanitizing, how many singers are you limiting rehearsal to, have you measured space to make sure you’re in guidelines for social distancing, how to change policies around shared items like food, paperwork, music, registration, payment, chairs, stands, equipment; what are the new social policies you have in place for things like gathering outside before rehearsal (hugs and handshakes); how will you communicate that to your membership; how will you facilitate the flow and entry through your venue (one way in/one way out and how will that be maintained with signage); how will you ensure social distancing inside the venue, how will you communicate and enforce it; does your venue have limitations or danger areas like narrow entryways; how will you use PPE and communicate and enforce with membership; how will you do cleaning/disinfection/sanitizing of people, staff, rooms, space, equipment; are you tracking who is coming and going from rehearsals; if meeting in small groups, are they consistent; if you have an outbreak can you do contact tracing; sample member agreements, sample policies for singers to sign-off on, a wealth of links to eternal science and protocol resources, as well.

Hoping for concrete feedback within 10 days. This is a document that suggests things for you to think about and suggestions for ways it could be successful.

BC – extraordinary document with all sorts of ideas. Lots of support from BCCF. One query is title which infers that there is a way to sing safely and we know there’s no way to sing safely.

AC – something to add to document – look at diversity of health issues for students, if making plans to come in for person, some of them still can’t do that. Is there some way to still have an online component so that no one is left out. Can you include everything? How do you balance all of that stuff?

CT – third bullet point of BC CDC: if you have health conditions, don’t sing (very upsetting for some)

JS – thinking back to Michael Schwandt on first town hall to give context around the doom and gloom NATS webinar. NATS webinar unfortunate in some ways but also good at making the point of the seriousness of all of this. We were all still rehearsing during the week that the Skagit County Chorale had their fateful rehearsal. It’s been interesting to watch Bonnie Henry’s psychology on policies. She’s not likely to dabble in a cavalier approach to doing anything in an unsafe manner. Up to 40% asymptomatic transmission from cases that exist (8 times that which are reported). So COVID is here, lapping at our feet. If we can, treat a rehearsal as if one amongst us is infected and proceed on the basis of that. That is where Bonnie Henry is coming from.

CT – our document isn’t one that’s an advocacy for returning to in person singing. Because there’s so much mixed messaging and conflicting science we wanted to put it in one place and chart a path through

BC – it will be a developing document that will change as the science continues to come out

15 minute break outs (snippets from different rooms – warning: little context)

Dawson Creek Choral Society – artistic director, right now stagnated, lost their space, moved out and don’t have a home. Plan for September is to do things via Zoom. Kids got a little burned out during spring. Focus is to bring people back. Each week fewer and fewer people. Trying to get kids to learn in case they had a June concert. Need to switch focus from concert prep to whatever it is that will make kids sign up. Like the module idea. Giving kids the option of what they want to focus on.

Alana – Delta Choral Society – 4 choirs including a large community, chamber and youth. Online Zoom rehearsals weren’t well-attended and not a good response from them. Nothing since May. Because they have so many people they don’t feel it’s fair to do some choirs and not other. While younger choirs could probably meet not willing to do that until everybody can attend. No gaming money for years. Lean budget. Ran out of money. Couldn’t continue paying contractors. Everything is falling on the board to run. Trying to keep community together. Doing fundraising to get money to bring back contractors. Member-funded but it makes it very difficult.

Heidi Epp – trying a hybrid model.

AC- are we going to survive all the medical symptoms if you do get this? I’m not willing to risk that. What can I do online? What can I do in person? Make a list.

Ingrid – highschool will depend on the pod thing

Gordon – will have a test in parking lot and then in building using 4 people. Can we then live-stream the four live to four sitting at home? How is that experience of working with a live conductor different from what we’ve been having? Testing now.

Marnie?? – checking now so that we’re ready to roll in September

Mary – Quadra Singers, 50 and up, going to work on Zoom on 4 pieces we planned to sing in Spring, Thresshold choir can’t sing at bedside now. Two Zoom hour rehearsals 2x a week. Campbell River Singers no plans at all for fall term. Waiting to hear some good news.

BC – what are the big concerns?

Room 1 – AC, not a lot of questions. Everyone trying to stay on top of things. What kind of things are more appropriate for online and what are more appropriate for face to face? Is it possible to do things that are less safe and save it for online?

Liana – encourage Will to speak to this. Module idea: one hour a month and also a choice.

Will – Coastal Sound: spread things out between artistic team. Once/week singers still meeting with usual group/conductor but will also have an hour a week where they’re doing these modules. Someone’s running a vocal technique module, piano module, sight singing module. When doing some of the more technical things you get a choice of what you’re wanting to focus in on.

CT – if doing all online one of the only upsides is the removal of geographic boundaries so they are combining with other choirs to cost share bringing someone in to do a workshop that normally you couldn’t afford. Silver lining.

Heidi – doing the same thing. Talking with colleagues all over the world and have them zoom in to a rehearsals for warm-ups etc. Shared a handful of singers with each other. Shared a simple folk-song from one side and the other.

CT – you could bring someone in to do a vocal technique masterclass. Also in other countries there is more in-person singing (Europe) and you could get a quartet together in the same room, teaching on Zoom. A much different experience to just one voice. Everybody is missing singing harmony.

AC – BC Ministry just out with guidelines on September. Teachers are bound by pods and how that will work. Advise you about being pro-active about determining the students that come together. If you have a large choir you’re likely to not be able to do that but could you have more smaller groups, repeating lessons. Maybe you will be doing a lot of repeating with smaller groups but that’s still better than no choir.

JS – how to reconcile school cohort size with community/real life??

?? – is there any point in trying to do something in person when kids are being told to go back to school and will be in this large pods and those pods will be their main priority for being with other people?

AC – Is it possible to apply the same social distancing phase that we’re going through now? Is it possible to have smaller bubbles to meet and half a year through you switch them around.

BC – the groups of 6

AC – Ministry was thinking of music as a core subject to how pods would work

Susan Kiddie – how do music teachers provide preps from K up to 8 and not be in many pods? The middle school prep schedule. You’d have to go to semestered and divide year in to four terms. For 10 weeks pods will be 120 and they will deliver every day for 4 or 5 classes. I feel like they haven’t thought that one through very well.

AC – I agree – talk to your administrators. We want to do music and creation. How do we promote that? It’s different than the community setting

CT – important for us who are in community choirs to be aware of our vulnerability. No protection of union or ministry or school board. Encourage you to talk to insurance company, be transparent with membership. Think about waiver or paperwork if you’re doing any in person rehearsal.

CT – weird outside the box ideas: outside is safer. Rented Thunderbird Parkade tower. Open walls, great acoustic. Outdoors but has life to space. Lots of covered space in elementary schools that are good options. Four kids in forest with mega phones and were able to stand far apart. Singing in the forest has a natural acoustic. There was life to the space, outdoors.

JS – Reminded of Central Province, Kenya – they sang outside. That was their singing time every day. Kenya Boys Choir, central rehearsal place is outdoors. Back in our histories we did it, as well.

CT – a lot of music has been written for outside singing.

Heidi – camp is all outside in the forest. Song-writing is a focus. Wonderful time to work on this. What is essential to you? Use that as the platform and work on song-writing. Let’s compose “where we’re at” and leave our mark on history

BC – We’re so busy getting somewhere that we don’t enjoy the process of journeying.

AC – Judy Bowers video on rounds, partner songs, how they work well. Highly recommend it.

LS – That session was on ChorAmor and the link was posted in the chat

BC – further questions?

JS – above all I hope that you take care of yourselves. This is a sacrifice. Be kind to yourself. Our grandchildren will know how we did in this. We don’t know how this ripple of time will be. There’s an opportunity to re-think what choral music is in terms of big things that have come up during this storm. Making space for Marcus Mosley, Dee Daniels, Pay them to share, if they’re willing. Indigenous leaders, people who are minoritized.

BC – Enjoy the journey

CT – Happy to answer questions. Reach out any time.

BC – Thank you to all for participating. Upcoming Round Tables and Phoenix workshops on Virtual Choir.