**Round Table #3**

**Adult Choirs (under 40 members)**

**August 6th, 2020**

*[notes]*

Panelists:

Morna Edmundson, *Artistic Director – Elektra, EnChor*

Willi Zwozdesky, *Artistic Director – VMC, Executive Director - BCCF*

Nina Horvath, *Executive Director – Vancouver Bach Choirs*

Sarona Mynhardt, *Artistic Director – In Spirito*

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

BC: welcome, introductions, Zoom etiquette, agenda for meeting

NH: A few documents to share:

* Carrie Tennant and Diana Clark’s doc currently titled *“Let’s Sing Safely”:* a comprehensive document, pulling from different sources, compiled into one spot to suggest ways to proceed safely in the fall. It has gone to BC CDC, waiting for vetting. Purpose of doc is to determine processes to return to in person singing safely; the measures you need to undertake; and what you need to do in order to plan if you should have a case happen that is traced back to a rehearsal. General takeaways: can’t have more than 50 people in a room at a time, air circulation is important, masks are important. Most regulations say you shouldn’t go beyond 30 minutes of singing. *“Let’s Sing Safely”* will be updated as new research comes out.
* Covid-19 Airborne Transmission Estimator tool: a daunting read-through but very helpful and useful.
* CU Boulder study results came out two weeks ago and second part came out just today. Five principal takeaways: masks are important (well-fitting), distance, time singing 30 minutes, clear for minimum of one air cycle change, air flow, hygiene important.
* WorkSafe BC back to work plan has a safe template of checklist of things to do in order to be ready to go back.

Bach Choir is planning to be on Zoom for the fall. Too complex to navigate 30 minute rehearsals for now, can’t expect people to travel long distances for 30 minutes. Important to have equity around access to rehearsals. Don’t want people who are immune-compromised to feel excluded. As things get going they may have four section leaders in a room in person with conductor/pianist. Adult chamber choir will still be a combination of zoom and a few outdoor events while weather permits.

WZ: Title of document of Diana/Carrie presumes that there is going to be in person safe singing. BCCF position is that there is no safe singing at this moment. Have been waiting for pronouncements and science. Not much has changed. Guidance such as 5 points (masks, distancing etc.) remain constant.

BCCF concern that we get this information to the next level of participants – down to the level of our singers so that they, too, are able to make an informed decision on whether or not they want to participate. VMC members were polled and were willing to try something. Education is key. Make sure that we’re all coming at this from the same direction. All of this information is playing differently for each of us. We need to get this information out to our singers so that we’re moving forward in an informed manner. PHO said there would be a specific announcement and nothing has yet come. Instead, we got a very short summary from BC CDC that is going to require some interpretation. BCCF will take that guidance from them and interpret it through a choral lens: how to translate numbers of people and physical distances, individual bubbles guidelines (etc.) to a choral setting. It’s very complex to reconcile. If you have been looking to BCCF for anything hard and fast, our answer is that there is insufficient info. There is no safe singing until there is a vaccine or preventative maintenance. In the meantime we’re working very actively to see what is coming out in research. In constant contact with Choral Canada and other organizations across the country. We are all doing the same work across the country. We are not operating in a vacuum. Trying to get BC CDC to respond on *“Let’s Sing Safely”* document. Education is key, as leaders. Make sure that we’re communicating with our singers.

ME (Morna): We’ve never had to be so flexible as we are right now. EnChor is 55+ in age and 60 people. Decided to pull the plug on outdoor get-together as it caused distress to members who couldn’t come. Realized that the choir needs to be together as a community when pandemic ends. Didn’t want to leave anyone behind. Will meet at regular time on Zoom. Not going to keep flirting with getting together in person. It’s too distressing for members. At least until Christmas and likely for whole season it will be online. Will get together with pianist in one room and it will be a small social reward for members to see them together. Rehearsals will be shorter: an hour and a quarter. Will do some breakout rooms in the middle of rehearsals. Nice for people to see each other up closer to talk.

Elektra is 45 people, wide age range but younger generally. Surveying them to see if they’re interested in getting together in small groups. Church will allow no more than 15 people together (13 singers + conductor/pianist). Strict rules about documenting who is there, sanitizing, putting things away, and what to do if there’s a case. Decided to make balanced sections in cohorts so that people at home can follow along and hear all parts. Will rotate through live cohorts every 3 or 4 weeks in person. Decided against a virtual project. Elektra is doing a recording project where they have 10 individual rooms (one per person) in a studio in September.

BC: You have to have the venue that will let you do it before you can make any live plans.

SM: Not tech-savvy but had to figure out what to do to keep community together. 31 of 45 were interested in Zoom. We are what our attitude is. Zoom was overwhelming but a changed attitude made all the difference. The more excited I became, the more excited my singers became. We all come from different choirs, different personalities, our organizations all look different. We must steer our ship safe and calm because we can’t control this storm. But we can direct the sails of the ship. We don’t know what the fall will bring. Because it’s August you must prepare and do the as best you can with what we have now. We have to be flexible and we have to improvise. Decided that my choir will be better after Covid. “Every set-back, heart-ache, and adversity in life carries within it the seed of an equal or greater benefit.” How can we improve our choirs. There have already been many positive outcomes from my choir. Autumn shows us how beautiful it is to let things go (picture of autumn forests). We have to let go of those things we did before. We have to shift our focus from recruiting to retaining; from what we cannot do to what we can do; from performance to meaningful musical experience/opportunities. Think on how to keep our music families together in a safe and exciting way. Don’t get overwhelmed. Don’t overwhelm yourself, don’t overwhelm your singers. Move away from season planning to modular learning. Take a couple of songs over 3 or 4 weeks and incorporate: theory, ear training, vocal challenges, sight singing, vocal technique, movement, things we don’t usually have time for. In In Spirito has a Rosen movement specialist who takes the beginning of each rehearsal in regular rehearsals and they would do 10 or 12 minutes of movement. Movement creates mental focus for singers but gives a feeling of community. Continued doing this on Zoom. They could see each other all on screen and moving together. Did a sight-singing course with some of the singers. Things to incorporate to reduce actual singing because people don’t enjoy listening to their own voices: Spoken chorus (speaking text): Inflections, syllable stress, rhythm; body percussion, 50% of sight-reading difficulties are related to rhythm. Get them to do some rhythmic exercises. Listen and follow along without singing. Listen to your part. Mix it up. Choose a theme that speaks to your singers right now during this time. Positive and uplifting is great but singers also need new music speaks to how they are feeling. Anger, fear, loss, loneliness. We have to address it because singing is an emotional outlet. Important to choose simple structure and that are easy enough to teach on Zoom. Something simple that they feel good about themselves. Different styles, genres. Allow for teaching/learning. Goal is not to perform music. It’s about learning new songs, being exposed to new texts, keep brains healthy and active and most of all to just be together. Coffee time 45/week just to talk. Will try a virtual choir project. Will put together a cook book. They suddenly got to know other singers in the choir better this way on Zoom. Unison, folk songs, text on screen and just sing for fun for 5 or 10 minutes. Be excited, be inclusive, stay true to yourselves, stay passionate, create FOMO, create something that your singers don’t want to miss.

BC: Shorter rehearsals yet more planning is needed. Important for choir boards to remember, too. Don’t reduce fees. Directors are still doing as much if not more prep.

**Breakout rooms**

* Robert (Orpheus) Zoom sessions since pandemic started going beyond learning songs it has improved singers’ skills. Separate session for aural skills. Few members are proficient with reading. One member has put on a listening program: songs by the Beatles and find how other musicians and groups have translated that song.
* BC: People have to assess their own risks and all choirs need to make decisions as individuals. Accessibility is an issue.

ME: thinking about how many risks people take in the rest of their life. Every other thing that each chorister is doing in the rest of their life is a factor for what they’re going to bring into the rehearsal and how they’re going to feel about it. Don’t show up sick. We all know you can carry virus asymptomatically. Very used to people sitting in pew if sick. Those days are over for many years. When we do all of those mitigating things….

* ??: Members had music in hand and were ready to go. Will start season with the music we were going to perform (not full concert). It will be a refresher. Surveyed membership and most everyone was interested in Zoom. We intend to have accompanist and director at church using their video equipment. ….
* NH: having tech help for zoom rehearsals. Draw from expertise within choir – people who are happy to do tech help. Could help outside of rehearsals for set-up.

Laura Lang: what is the advantage of breakout rooms if you can’t still sing together?

NH: gives you a little bit more focussed attention.

Joel Tranquilla: Haven’t used Zoom much yet but not rehearsed with it. People will feel more comfortable sharing questions in a smaller setting.

Joelle: has anyone done a survey of their choir to see what they would like?

NH: Bach choir did one. Answers varied. General consensus was that technology got better as time went on. People wanted routine, to see their friends, they want that community of coming together. People definitely like the break out rooms. Everyone universally struggles with the fact that you’re singing with yourself at home. Simpler repertoire works better. Try rounds so that conductor sings one part and you sing a different.

Beverly: curious about 30 minute limit – what is that based on and what can we do to clear the air?

NH: if you look in the CU Boulder study there are some compelling visualizations which show you how the aerosols grow exponentially at 30 minute mark. Safest amount of time is 30 minutes. Airflow question is trickier because it depends on the space that you’re in. Safest is somewhere where the airflow is such that the room is being refreshed every 20 minutes (3 in an hour). Most churches/halls don’t have that. Looking into buying air purifiers to clean the air fast enough to do a couple of 30 minute sessions in a row.

Laura Lang: at the back of the church there are doors leading out of church on both sides use air flow coming through – wondering if wind direction prohibits

NH: CU Boulder either outside or inside you should be limiting time – not sure on details

??: has anyone looked at warehouses with EVAC systems as a rehearsal venue

**Review of breakout rooms:**

NH: a lot of questions about how to increase our own ease with Zoom and are there any good resources for this? What techniques have worked best what have our singers found most useful? Where we can rehearse and how?

SM: Talked about Orpheus sight-singing program. Feel free to contact us. I make all my singers to sing all parts, no matter what the arrangement. Every singer learns every part. Makes Zoom more effective if everybody is constantly singing and busy. You understand the harmonies better, too. Talked about wearing masks, 30 minutes, make sure that small groups stay within their bubbles.

ME: Many concerned about leaving people behind who weren’t comfortable on zoom. Trying to buddy them up? Some have done wonderful small groups outside visiting. Finding a venue that’s willing to have you is not a given. Alison in Whistler is talking to hotels in hopes of getting a big ball room. Not an option for everybody. Is anyone planning to do concerts with audiences?

Steven Belanger: counting on having venue for performances that will be live-streamed, live audience of fewer than 50.

Linda: Vancouver Island Symphony is doing pop up concerts all held outside. Tickets are sold via VIS. Venues are large outdoor yards, gardens overlooking ocean. Maximum number of people 50. 40 tickets sold per concert. More like 4 – 6 instrumentalists per concert. What they’re doing, choirs can also do. Need to keep it under 50, keep people spaced out.

ME: contact info?

Linda: yes, they are being very careful, give all contact info, checked off on entry, spaced 6 feet circles, own chairs, own sanitizers, no refreshments. Just come and hear music.

SM: 50 (includes choir and audience?)

Steven B: 50 does not include artists or crew but does include staff and volunteers

??: North Health professional choir has a different rubric. Community choir is 50 total. Professional choir looks at maximum square footage. If you’re considered a business then you have a different mandate than a community group.

WZ: focussed on a couple of things, a question about how to fund the season with reserves or donations. Keeping members together is a big concern. Many people are maxed out with on-line offerings, so what to do? People are feeling overwhelmed not knowing how to proceed with the season:  what activities to undertake, how to fund the season (cash reserves, donations), future plans. The effect of springtime COVID cancellations is now clear. Trying to hire an artistic director at this time is very challenging. It’s not possible to have in-person auditions; short term fill in sought (interestingly, this person got an immediate response from someone in the break out room!  I hope they’ve connected.)

BC: feel free to reach out to facilitators, peers, etc. Thank you to panelists and Christine. Upcoming session for choirs more than 40. Week after for Seniors’ Choirs: question of risk assessment. Virtual Choir workshop. Stay in touch, let us know how BCCF can help you. Good luck for planning for fall.