**Round Table #4**

**Adult Choirs (over 40 members)**

**August 13th, 2020**

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Panelists:

Morna Edmundson, *Artistic Director – Elektra, EnChor*

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

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

Sarona Mynhardt, *Artistic Director – In Spirito*

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

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

WZ: Welcome to all across the province: the depth and scope of BCCF members is impressive. Wearing two hats tonight, first as Exec Director of BCCF. Please visit the BCCF resources page. Most up-to-date, relevant guidance from BC CDC, Diana Clark and Carrie Tennant’s document, and the detailed message from NCCEH (National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health). This document is one of the most in-depth choral discussions specifically about Covid and singing. Based locally NCCEH has national platform, gotten input from across all the provinces for this document.

As leaders, it is important that the information we have gets down to the level of our members. We have a virtual Choir workshop coming up, with the Phoenix Chamber Choir

Working on annual fund-raiser for choirs: BCCF Raffle, if you have signed up, please do fund-raising and getting that together

BCCF has been networking nationally with other choral organizations across the country, we are all pivoting, all figuring out how to keep members engaged, keep cash flow, keep us all safe, more online delivery

BCCF invites community’s input as to what we can do for you, please let us know if you have requests for specific presenters or people that we don’t know of.

VMC – surveyed membership to find out tolerance for risk and interests, developing a virtual plan for a holiday concert, shared information with board members, make sure they have the same information

ME: sharing what she is doing, it feels like we’re in for a long time. If you haven’t got the community still feeling like they’re a community of singers, then it doesn’t matter if the organization is still there after this is over, you haven’t got a choir. The other side: if your organization has gone under, it’s hard to start up again once this is over.

EnChor: 55+ yrs old not going to rehearse in person at all. Fall is entirely online. If anybody is meeting in person, those who couldn’t are feeling left out. A hybrid approach won’t keep community together. Will go to pianist’s house so choristers can see them interacting together (social reward) and Zoom rehearse to group from there. Keeping rehearsal time below usual 2 hrs. First Zoom rehearsal this week and it went ok. Strange not to hear everyone. Choristers lose out on visceral experience of learning music together. But there is a sense of social connection and being together. It was still moderately fun. There’s a benefit of seeing each others’ faces up closer. This medium will be a productive way to move forward. Working on repertoire toward a concert but not pretending we know when or if that concert will happen. No plans for a virtual choir video because of fears that it will separate the confident from the less confident choristers resulting in many not participating and consequently feeling left out.

Cathy (President of EnChor) over the summer they’ve continued weekly zoom social sessions. Community is stronger thanks to these sessions. It’s brought them together as a community in a way that’s been unexpected and rewarding.

Nancy (Board of EnChor) – thinks that when they do get together in person again that it will be different because they have learned a lot about each other through these social Zoom sessions.

ME: Elektra 20 – 70 yrs old. Surveyed choir to ask:

1) are you definitely wanting to get together in person if we can do it “safely”? 42% (18 people)

2) You would like to participate in person but you’re keeping an eye on the numbers of the situation in BC and you may opt out? 39%

3) You would rather stay on line for the foreseeable future? 9%

It is made clear that there is NO pressure on you to come and participate in person.

Will do 3 small, mixed groups (mixed parts which allows the people at home to hear all the voice parts) in person, one group per rehearsal, distanced throughout church sanctuary, working on challenging music with no idea of when they will be able to perform

SM: Most of don’t have young, willing, able singers that are able to go. We have older people who tend to be stubborn and not willing to learn the technology. I decided to make Zoom my best friend and I have learned a lot. We have only missed one rehearsal since March. We were all hit by this storm. We can’t take control of the wind but we can direct our sails. Our only job is to steer through the storm safely and calmly. We don’t know what September is going to bring. We have to plan the best we can with what we have. The key is flexibility. We have to improvise. Our attitude is what makes a difference. Our attitudes determine who are choirs are. We have to be excited about Zoom so that our choirs are excited. Create FOMO. We can have a better choir after COVID. See this cup half full. What can this situation teach us? Autumn shows us how beautiful it is to let things go. As we plan we have to shift from recruiting to retaining. Keep your people together. Forget on what we cannot do. Shift from performance and concert to meaningful music experience. Our main purpose is to keep our respective communities together. The most important thing in your organization is your people. Highly recommend this as a good time to read Dale Carnegie’s book “How to Win Friends and Influence People”. It’s very important not to get overwhelmed. If we are overwhelmed, we overwhelm our singers. Don’t do a virtual choir project if your choir is not ready. Very important to move away from planning the whole season. Instead go back to the old school of modular learning. Do small little chunks at a time and by the time. Take 2 to 4 songs and incorporate things that are simple but meaningful. Theory, ear-training, vocal challenges, sight-singing, vocal technique, movement – all things you can incorporate to get your singers to the next level. People don’t really like to listen to themselves for an hour or two. Try speaking text: phrasing, inflection, syllable stress, rhythm, where’s the emphasis – by speaking through text this is a great way to address these points. Body percussion. 50% of sightreading difficulties are related to rhythm. Do funky rhythm exercises with singers on Zoom to reduce the actual singing. Listening: listen to your part, listen to other choirs, as a group together. In Spirito is going to be on Zoom and most are between 55-85. Small themes, small seasons (micro-seasons). Choose an overall theme. Choose something that speaks to your singers right now. People want to sing about how they feel. Choose something with simple structure, different styles, genres, focus on the learning and teaching and building musicianship skills. Goal is to learn. Music is another language and this is keeping our brains healthy and active. We are together, even on screen. We do coffee time once a week where we just talk. Discussions include all sorts of things. Planning to do a short-story recipe book just for the group. Focus is on the group to learn more about each other. Will do a sing-along where they do well-known songs. The theme is “Stars I Shall Find”: despite all this darkness, we will find stars; sing we shall sing. Be excited, be inclusive, stay true to yourself and stay passionate. Keep your community together.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS:

AC: My group is a large ensemble (170) 16 – 95 yrs old, would rather see my choir members above ground in a few years as opposed to below. We need to be singing somehow, somewhere for the sake of the activity of their brain. Whatever you can do keep it going especially for community-building. One thing that we don’t know is how much exposure of aerosols, of droplets of virus do you need to be infected? What risk are you willing to take? As a scientist, you need to be careful and expecting things that are gospel truth that fit your scenario of what you’re like it to look like. This is called implicit bias. Also, remember that some of the science that is out there is outdated and things are changing and we’re learning more all the time. Some things that weren’t covered in the “Sing Safely” document… think about where your personal perspective is. Does your desire to come back to singing trump the safety protocols that need to come in to play. If you have a large choir you’re probably not going to have a big enough space to socially distance yourselves. The research is clear about peoples’ attention span for online rehearsals indicates 50 minutes is the maximum. In education classes will be scheduled to 50 minutes because most students can’t handle more than that. You might be able to have smaller groups come together for 30 minutes, let the room air settle and then try a different group for 30 minutes. This feels like a huge risk. One thing I want to mention about protocols of returning safely: what happens if one of your singers gets sick. If one of your singers feels sick, you’re expecting that they are going to self-identify. What about your singers who might be asymptomatic? I try to find the good news. What are things that we can do? At UVIC they are going totally on line. Paired with two other universities: King and Concordia. They are going to meet for an hour as a massed group. Van Chamber Choir helping with vocal excerpts on voice health. Songs of Justice are relevant right now. Going to do an orchestral arrangement of We Rise Again so that it’s ready for when we can come back together in person.

“Let’s Sing” has been looked at by the BC CDC and has been given the nod. There is a disclaimer on the document to not use it as a legal basis. Use it wisely.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

ME: Leaders are feeling alone – it is suggested to take the problem to the group and ask for suggestions on how to move forward so that they become invested in the process, too.

SM: We all agree that unity is the most important thing – staying positive

AC: Worry about drop in membership. Many choirs had higher enrolment in spring and it waned. How do we deal with this problem? How do we encourage our singers to stay with the community?

WZ: Commiseration session. A lot of concern about going forward with membership, venues, expenses and impacts on organizations. Lots of administrative questions about what’s actually going to be possible.