

MASK UP & SING OUT – Sourcing Masks



Every face is different, everyone's facial muscles move differently, every mask will need to be fitted or adjusted differently, and will feel different for singing. Try different varieties, and see what feels right for you,

Medical masks are usually made of polypropylene, an excellent substance for filtering most particles out. Many members of the medical staff wear these masks ALL DAY with no ill health, and rely on them for protection.

Warning: they may "gap" at the sides, depending on the face, and may need to be adjusted. They are single-use masks, and generally available at drug stores and other places.

Made of similar material, but shaped differently, are black single-use masks, available from Vancouver-based Music Folder - <https://www.musicfolder.com/ca/music-accessories/3d-mask-for-singers-5> These are so-called 3-D masks, and stand away from the face.

KN95 masks are the high-bar of medical masks, used in higher-risk situations. They are not necessary for choir use – if the situation is that serious, then the choir should not be meeting! These masks should be closely-fitted.

Health Canada does not recommend the use of a bandana, scarf or neck gaiter for protection against anything more than dust. Cone-style (molded plastic masks) are a slight improvement, but not much...

Cloth masks have been shown to be effective, as long as they are made of the right materials. A single layer of cloth may protect against droplets, but probably not much more. What is recommended is at least three layers of closely woven fabric (high-count cotton is good). Still more effective are two layers of cotton with one of polypropylene between them.

Cloth masks come in various styles.

1. The basic close-fitting **panel** cloth mask can be found everywhere. As long as it has enough layers and fits well enough, it's fine for everyday wear – but probably not for comfortable singing. Typically it goes from the bridge of the nose to just below the chin, and when you open your mouth to sing properly, it comes adrift at either top or bottom. It might be wearable for someone with a small face, but it may not be a great choir option.

2. An alternative is a **pleated** mask, made in very much the same way as a medical mask. Again, it depends on face-shape as to how well it fits at top and bottom, and it may well gape at the sides. Both these can be combined with a face bracket to hold the mask away from the mouth.

3. A good option is the **3-D** mask, sometimes called the **origami** mask – so called because it's made from a single fabric template, with the shape of the mask given depth by folding and seaming. This is a mask that is fairly easy to make, with basic sewing skills. Look up the terms **3-D Mask** and **Origami Mask** on **Etsy** – there are many makers out there.

Locally, I recommend that you investigate the masks made by Barbra Allen Bradshaw, who sings with Phoenix Chamber Choir - <https://masksforsale.paperform.co/>

Barbra offers the standard panel mask, but with specific measurements, the 3-D mask which stands away from the face, and you can ask for a Singers Mask, which is a 3-D mask with more depth, and a stiffened panel that gives it more structure.

She has quite a long waiting list!

If you want to try making your own, there are several origami-based suggestions here:

<https://research.impact.iu.edu/our-strengths/coronavirus/origami-face-mask-pattern.html>

4. The seaming alone in an origami mask may give you enough structure to hold the shape. However, many singers prefer the form of **Singers Mask** developed by singer/sewer **Joan Fearnley** from Ottawa. Since the beginning of the pandemic, Joan has been experimenting with masks that will stand away from the face without collapsing, giving the singer a viable space to sing into.

Joan has also experimented with making masks entirely of polypropylene fabric, with edging of cotton where it fits against the face, and feels that it gives the most transparent sound – but it's very much a matter of personal taste and skin sensitivity.

Investigate **SopranoJoan** on YouTube – Joan has recorded all her different steps in creating masks that are effective and as good-looking as something that big on the face can be!

<https://www.youtube.com/user/SopranoJoan/videos> offers a series of video tutorials, and the patterns for the masks in question are available with the videos. The preferred version 3 has been tweaked so that it looks good inside and outside, and it has been taken up by makers across North America – mostly thanks to her creation of the Facebook group Masks for Performers. It's worth beginning with her most recent video, which offers a number of updates on the version 3 mask which was codified a year ago.

Here is a link to the Facebook group – you need to ask to be part of it (answer the questions, please!) and then find the FAQ, which includes info on mask-makers:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/3438493592850143>

She also offers some useful choir resources (some of these will be found on the BCCF page or on Choral Canada's page)

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uNLEjAQv76aHlrCzwd2pp2698yHo54aQjGT5e40gFgk/edit?fbclid=IwAR21efh9Eq93yR8B5Hz0hnYRCywV4R3mWKkxedTxQZgDTzv23uWwJi97tF8>

Commercially, you can find similar masks

<https://www.mymusicfolders.com/product/resonance-singers-mask-with-disposable-biofilters/>
\$37.52 US

<https://www.jwpepper.com/Sing-Safe-Singer%27s-Mask/11335409.item#.YTY1yI5KhPl>
\$30 US

<https://www.long-mcquade.com/193188/Band---Orchestral/Instrument-Aerosol-Reduction/Open-Jar-Studios/Singer-s-Mask--Adult-Size---Beige.htm> \$39.99 Cdn

<https://stores.inksoft.com/nats/shop/home> TMF Performers Mask, through NATS - \$12.95 US

As with the 3-D and Origami masks, you can also find makers for these Singers resonance masks on Etsy. My experience is that the best bet is to buy large size, and then take in little darts, or add elastic for a closer fit – but again, it will depend on face-shape.

There is more interesting information at <https://www.clothmasks.ca/blog> and <https://makermask.org/> - both offer research results on usage and making of masks; ClothMasks also has a link to sourcing non-woven polypropylene: <https://www.clothmasks.ca/polypropylene-suppliers>

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