

Peterborough Singers Recovery Committee Report: July 10, 2020

Committee Members: Syd Birrell, Dr. Christie Freeman, Carey Gibson, Neil Macdonald, Peg McCracken, Sarah McGuire, Li Robbins

Meetings: June 23 (Zoom), June 29 and July 6 (Live trial “rehearsals”)

Introduction: Discussions were primarily focused on safety, risk, physically-distanced small-group singing, and ideas for potential projects involving choir members. The biggest emphasis was on exploring small-group singing. Accordingly, Syd proposed doing a trial run. Two trials took place, both using measures currently approved or suggested by government regulations. (Under ten people, using COVID screening, hand sanitizer, masks, physically distanced positions etc.) Dr. Christie Freeman created “small-group rehearsal” guidelines and Peterborough Singers COVID-19 screening checklist. (See pp 4-5.)

June 29 Rehearsal: Murray St. Baptist Church

Participants: Syd Birrell, Pam Birrell, Christie Freeman, Carey Gibson, Neil Macdonald, Peg McCracken, Li Robbins

Set up: Singers 12 feet apart, masked, semi-circle, Syd on organ and piano, plus a cappella.

July 6 Rehearsal: Nicholls Oval Park

Participants: Syd Birrell, Pam Birrell, Max DeBues, Christie Freeman, Carey Gibson, Neil Macdonald, Peg McCracken, Anne Normand, Li Robbins

Set up: 1. Grassy open area. 2. Beneath building overhang. 3. Beneath fully covered oval.

Singers 10 feet apart, not masked, semi-circles and circles. Anne Normand on keyboard, plus a cappella

Discoveries:

- Masking creates significant breathing difficulties for some; others find it uncomfortable/hot but doable
- Hearing other singers (indoors, masked) very difficult at 12 feet
- Hearing other singers (outdoors, not masked) at ten feet marginally better than above
- Singing in open grassy area hard and no fun for some, others found it doable and enjoyable
- Singing outside under overhang or roof better for purposes of hearing other singers
- Small-group singing can be challenging for choristers used to being in larger sections
- Balance and blend difficult to achieve under trial conditions
- Outdoor singing will be unpredictable: weather, bugs, changing seasons etc.
- Maintaining protocols challenging, particularly when moving equipment or distributing new music

Suggestions:

- Consider using “watchers,” designated non-singers keeping close eye on protocols/procedures. The role would require definition
- Explore other venues/locations e.g., Beavermead Park picnic shelters, St. Joseph’s, Zoo bandstand, baseball bleacher, Ptbo Folk Fest stage
- Consider trying lightweight portable baffles outdoors
- Explore amplification of voices outdoors
- Consider using oxygen sensors
- Record small-group singing to assess sound
- Try “canned music” vs. keyboard, given the challenges of moving keyboard etc., particularly with issues of sanitization
- Create clear protocol for use/movement of equipment and distribution of music
- Virtual choir recordings: Use song choristers know well, record two-three people in distanced groups (rather than solo) to increase comfort level
- Record in same location to unify sound. (Venues suggested: Airplane hangar, former St. Joseph’s chapel at The Mount)
- Virtual concert: Solos, duets, small groups. Put together digitally as a “concert.” Choir member-instrumentalists could pre-record accompaniment
- Digital singalong Messiah
- Live Zoom un-concert (soloists and duos in own homes)
- Online workshops: e.g., St. Matthew Passion lectures, sight-singing
- Socializing, observing all protocols. Online possibilities including Zoom and Slack
- Survey members re: small-group singing to assess degree of interest

Concerns:

Lack of Verifiable Facts: A lack of verifiable info re: safety of singing in groups. At this time it’s thought singing may be safe if there are: no warm-ups, 6 feet distancing (though recent results of Prof Matthias Echternach with the Bavarian Radio Chorus study suggests 2.5 metres), staggered formation, masks when not singing, shields, mechanically increased ventilation, no socializing

Individual Discomfort Levels: Within committee itself there was discomfort expressed by some re: singing indoors, and one member of the committee chooses not to sing with others until availability of vaccine

Perceived Risk: When will choir members and audiences feel safe to return? Two surveys re: audiences returning to live cultural events were discussed, Nanos and IMPACTS Research and Development (See Resources, pp 3-4.) Two significant factors influencing audience decision to return: 1. Government dictates (Though economic considerations may not always be the same as health considerations). 2. Availability of vaccine

Musical Issues: Small-group repertoire different from large-choir repertoire, requiring new online practice recordings, possibly with guidance from section leads. Recognition that small

group singing creates logistical challenges. Who conducts and accompanies each small group? If small groups perform separately, how does that reflect the name and “brand” of the Peterborough Singers? How to maintain a high level of music excellence?

Concepts:

- Consider small-group singing not as translating to choir — but as a new way for the P.S. to exist until a vaccine is available. May mean putting choir to bed for a year or two
- Offer a completely new set of experiences/options for those interested, e.g., mix of small-group singing, virtual activities, lectures, social times, online learning
- Consider new name, since the above will not be the Peterborough Singers choir (though some affiliation with P.S. name may be a good for communications/marketing)
- Consider letting go of established notions of “choral excellence”
- Focus on promotion of past choral excellence through recordings
- Explore how to foster future excellence via sight singing, theory etc.
- Set up realistic expectations for members, audiences, donors

Resources/References:

Church Times (July 9): [Safety of Singing Under More Scrutiny](#)

CBC (July 8): [How choral music can restart 'in the safest way possible' during pandemic](#)

Globe and Mail (June 27) : [Across Canada, choirs struggle to find their postpandemic future](#)

The Scoop (June 24): [Canadian Choirs Write Letter Calling for Fair Consideration to Re-Open](#)

CBC: (June 20) [Choirs reimagine themselves as singing proves an effective way to spread COVID-19](#)

CBC (June 16) [No singing or dancing allowed even as Ontario patios, places of worship reopen](#)

American Choral Directors Association (June 15): [Covid-19 Response Committee Report](#)

The Guardian (June 12) [All Together Now: Virtual Choirs Thrive Amid Lockdown](#)

New York Times (June 9): [When Will It Be Safe to Sing Together Again?](#)

Church Times (June 4) [Singing Might Not Be So Great a Risk, After All](#)

LA Times (June 1) [Scientists to choirs: Group singing can spread the coronavirus, despite what CDC may say](#)

Video (Posted May 11): [Collegium 1704 Live Distanced Performance](#)

Resource List from Electric City Culture Council (June 16)

Impact Assessment and Scenario Planning:

Accounting firm BDO provides a very helpful tool [COVID-19 Crisis Management Questions Checklist for Not-For-Profits](#).

Reopening:

Business/Arts hosted a webinar on the topic [What will it take for people to return to the arts?](#), which is now available to watch on their [blog](#), and [read the NANOS report](#) it was based on.

The Ontario government has set up a page with [Resources to prevent COVID-19 in the workplace](#), including industry-specific best-practices guides for reopening.

The Canadian government’s extensive article [Risk-informed decision-making for mass gatherings during COVID-19 pandemic](#) provides useful guidance for anyone planning an event or gathering.

The World Health Organization's document [Getting your workplace ready for COVID-19](#) (PDF) is full of useful advice, including a section on running events and meetings.

Accounting firm BDO provides a very helpful tool [COVID-19 Crisis Management Questions Checklist for Not-For-Profits](#).

The Peterborough Chamber of Commerce has set up the [Peterborough PPE Retail Hub](#), a list of local businesses selling personal protective equipment (PPE), including masks, gloves, plexiglass shields, and other supplies necessary for making your space COVID-compliant.

AUDIENCE RESEARCH

The Canadian Association for the Performing Arts (CAPACOA) has published an excellent review of recent audience surveys and research, [What will make audiences feel safe to return to live performances?](#), as well as a [template for audience surveys](#), particularly for performing arts organizations.

Peterborough Singer Small Group Rehearsal Guidelines [Draft]:

- All members invited should be sent COVID screening protocol and asked to complete it the day of rehearsal.
- Pre-Rehearsal Set Up: Prop doors open to avoid high-touch surfaces. Open garbage for disposable gloves. Position chairs/mark floors for distance. Bring tape measure
- Maintain distancing entering. Enter with mask on, gloves off.
- Hand sanitizer at entrance (preferably foot-pumped)
- Singers go straight to marked spot
- Possible formation: Large semi-circle facing forward. Singers at least 12 feet from conductor.
- Bring own pencils; music. (Following initial distribution of music packages put together in sanitized fashion.)
- Post-rehearsal sanitizing of chairs. Preferably with disposable gloves, disposed of in open garbage. Sanitize hands on exit. (Best for singers to bring own sanitizer if door is touched on exit.)

Peterborough Singers Small Group Rehearsal COVID-19 Screening Checklist

In order to enter the rehearsal you must meet the following conditions:

1. I have completed and signed the COVID-19 screening checklist below
2. I am wearing a mask
3. I am alone (no visitors)
4. I am not wearing gloves- you will be asked to sanitize your hands
5. I have my own music and pencil and will not share these or borrow items from other members.

Do not come to the rehearsal if you answer “yes” to ANY of the following questions.

Do you have any COVID-19 symptoms listed below?

1. Fever/chills, cough, difficulty breathing, sore throat, congestion, sneezing, runny nose, difficulty swallowing, loss of taste/smell, headache, unexplained fatigue, diarrhea, pink eye, abdominal pain, nausea/vomiting, chest pain, confusion, increase in falls
2. Do you have a close contact with anyone with COVID-19 symptoms listed above?
3. Are you awaiting COVID-19 test results?
4. Is someone you have close contact with awaiting COVID-19 test results?
5. Have you travelled outside of Canada within the last 14 days?
6. Has someone you have close contact with travelled within the past 14 days?
7. Have you entered a long-term care facility experiencing an unresolved outbreak (declared by public health) within the past 14 days?

I certify that I have met the above conditions and answered NO to the 7 screening questions.

NAME

DATE

SIGNATURE

Peterborough Singers recovery committee report by Li Robbins: July 10, 2020