

A Message from our Musical Director

This spring, the planning group and myself have been quite occupied trying to find a way to keep singing and to maintain the community that we've built. Seeing the news evolve, I have done research, read articles, and attended webinars with other Canadian conductors, and I've worked to develop several potential plans for next season. Those plans went then through brainstorming with the planning group and, after many emails and two long meetings, we came up with the **hybrid-flexible** model that was presented to you in a Q & A format letter [also posted [here](#) on the members' area of our website, jubilatesingers.ca].

The hybrid-flexible plan is based on the premise that our new season will be a rehearsal-only season, leaving room for an informal presentation in the spring, depending on health regulations at that time. This plan includes the possibility that we will have both fully virtual sessions and hybrid rehearsals, and the premise that using one or the other kind of rehearsal will depend on public health regulations and advisories at all times. Let me explain what each means:

Virtual sessions will take place only on Zoom and will be up to 90 min. in length. I will be conducting along with a recording of the song or the voice parts and will be the only one with my microphone on. Each singer will sing along from home with their computer microphones muted. We will also use live piano accompaniment from Sherry as well as piano recordings made by her. There will also be a number of other activities during virtual sessions, like warm-ups and workshops. The goal is to create a *new learning environment* that may be fulfilling enough for music education and community connection; the goal is not to re-create a virtual version of what we do in real rehearsals (it isn't a "lack of" something, but a great opportunity to develop new ways, new strategies that won't only help us temporarily).

Hybrid rehearsals will take place with part of the choir in attendance with strict social distancing at St Leonard's, and part of the choir at home on Zoom following the St. Leonard's rehearsals. Singers will make *an individual choice* whether to be physically present and their decisions may change as the public health guidelines or their personal situation changes. Rehearsals will be 90 min. to 2 h. in length. Hybrid rehearsals will only take place both when we evaluate their safeness in view of the public health guidelines at the time, and when St. Leonard's opens the building to the public – and that depends on the Diocese of Toronto giving permission, based again on public health guidelines.

In essence, a virtual session will be different than what we normally do; by contrast, a hybrid rehearsal will be similar to what we normally do in rehearsals, but changed by the social distancing and the number of singers attending in person, plus the singers following through Zoom at home. It is very difficult for any organization to make firm future plans in this new reality, and specially for choirs! As things stand now, we should count on starting virtually in September, and probably on having a fair amount of virtual sessions next season; and, for some singers, a complete virtual season may be the best.

I would like to expand on what **virtual sessions** would look like, as they are the most different from what we usually do. Our goal in proposing virtual sessions is not to replicate a normal rehearsal but to provide a sense of community, make music together, and keep advancing our music skills. Maybe we are not going to create the greatest choral art, but it is better and healthier that we connect musically in a positive way than dread it.

I envision this season as an opportunity for improving the quality of our sound. Working virtually, we finally will be able to spend time on aspects of choral music making that we normally don't have enough time to work deep on when we are preparing for performances. Each Tuesday we will enjoy a variety of choral activities, and the activities will change depending on the week, except singing in harmony: that will happen every week. Some examples of the activities that we could do on the virtual sessions include:

- vocal training
- sectional practice
- songs in harmony (yes, in harmony, despite the virtual platforms limitations: we will use many resources like choir full recordings as background for harmony, singing against other parts, piano accompaniments...)
- for repertoire, we will start getting familiar with our new Internet platform by singing songs that we already know, and we will progress to new songs in time
- workshops with specialists
- "virtual choir" recording projects (a longer-term goal) will allow us to develop our individual musical skills further and will keep us connected with our audience
- practice for smaller groups
- music appreciation: some singers could present their prepared talks to the group (anybody interested in the music of Murray Schaffer, for example?)
- sessions with groupings by topics of interest (for example about specific composers or works, sight-singing and ear training, vocal improvisation, type or styles of repertoire, etc.)

The list of possible musical activities that I presented to the planning group is much longer, as the Internet opens us to many possibilities. And so are the possibilities for social activities: from groups on baking recipes or gardening tips, to "Coffee chat Thursdays". We also want the singers to have the opportunity to be involved in developing the plans and bring what you want to see developed. And be assured that technical support for virtual sessions will be offered all along.

Virtual sessions could be joined by anybody interested in developing skills through virtual workshops, so we could be open to new singers and potentially increase our membership to anybody interested in this format – with the advantage that anybody can join from anywhere in the world, can you imagine?

I learned in one of the choral community meetings I attended that "there are more choral singers in Canada than hockey players [about 2.5 million]." Can you believe it? So there are a lot of choral singers in Canada and all around the world in the exact same situation that we are in! Professional choirs, school music programs and choirs, universities, colleges... and all the community choirs around the world: we are all in it and all trying to do the best we can with our resources.

We are counting on you to make the best of our next season together. You can count on us to do everything we can to make the experience positive and worthwhile.