

Dear Jubilate Singers,

In normal times, there are many reasons why we join choirs: to learn a certain repertoire; to gain or improve musical skills; and to enjoy the feeling of community that a choir such as Jubilate creates. In these far from normal times, finding and maintaining community is more important than ever. As the number of online offerings shows, we all feel the need for the arts, even—or especially—when we can't be together.

In order to keep singing and to maintain the community that we've built, Isabel and the Board have devised a **hybrid-flexible** model of rehearsal (similar to what U of T is doing for fall classes). *Hybrid* means that Isabel and some singers may be physically present, while others will participate via Zoom from home. *Flexible* means that singers can make an individual choice whether to be physically present, and that those decisions may change as the public health guidelines or your personal situation changes. If you think of a spectrum from 100% online to 100% in-person, we may have to begin entirely online and gradually add in-person participation when it is safe to do so, but we probably will not get to 100% in-person any time this year (or until there is a vaccine for COVID-19). So *flexible* also means that we can quickly shift back to being entirely online if there is a second wave. Our goal is not to replicate a normal rehearsal but to provide a sense of community, make music together, and keep advancing our music skills.

How is it possible to sing online?

In a virtual rehearsal, everyone participates via Zoom from home. Isabel (at home) will be conducting along with a recording of the song or the voice parts and will be the only one with her microphone on. The rest of us will sing along from home with our computer microphones muted. We won't be able to hear each other, but we'll hear what Isabel is transmitting.

Why can't we all sing together online? What about all those Virtual Choirs?

Zoom, like any videoconferencing software, has a time lag in transmission that varies according to people's individual internet speeds. This is why, if you're singing from home, you'll mute your microphone; otherwise the sound just becomes cacophony.

Virtual choir or orchestra performances are made up of individual videos that each performer records and sends to a video editor to put together. There is quite a bit of work to put together all the separate pieces into a single video.

So then what's a hybrid rehearsal?

If it is possible for small groups to meet in person, Isabel and a small number of volunteer singers will rehearse at St. Leonard's, with (live or recorded) piano accompaniment. Those choosing to participate from home will see and hear Isabel and hear the full harmony through their computer speakers but keep their own microphone muted. So, although no one else can hear you, and you won't have anyone standing next to you, you'll still hear and be singing with other choir members.

I don't know how to use video technology. Do I need a lot of equipment?

Zoom is fairly easy to use, and you don't even need an account. All you need is a computer, tablet, or smartphone and an internet connection. You can even participate by a regular phone, although the experience won't be the same. We will send out detailed instructions and hope to have one or more people volunteer as "tech support."

How will I know if it is safe to come to rehearsal?

We will be monitoring the public health guidelines for physical distancing and size of in-person gatherings. Possible measures include spacing of chairs 6 feet or more apart; print-at-home scores; hand sanitizers; no shared snacks; and limited social interaction. We may recommend that choristers wear non-medical masks or plastic face shields. We are in touch with the church about their plans for cleaning and distancing measures when they reopen.

If you have personal health concerns, live with someone with health concerns, or are concerned about transit, you may always choose to participate from home. Anyone who feels unwell or suspects they have been in contact with someone who is sick is urged to stay home. *Please note that we will unavoidably be using electronic devices and wi-fi at St. Leonard's.*

What about all those studies that indicate choral singing spreads the virus even faster than coughing or sneezing?

We are carefully monitoring reports of that research, which has not been peer-reviewed and is not yet widely accepted. As well, Isabel is in contact with music professionals across North America to determine best practices for choral rehearsals. You can be sure that if it is not safe to sing in even a large room, none of us wants to risk it.

Do I have to pay dues for what is clearly not a regular choir season?

We recognize that the coronavirus has affected many people's financial situation. At the same time, the choir will have expenses to pay: for the musical personnel, space rental, insurance, etc. If you are able to pay the regular dues of \$225, it would help to sustain the choir in this strange season. If you can't afford the full dues, please pay what you feel you can. The main goal this season is to keep the choir going and make music together. We don't want financial considerations to prevent anyone from participating!

What about performing?

Like other arts organizations, we are taking a wait-and-see attitude toward live performances with an in-person audience, but we will certainly not have a normal season of three concerts. It may be possible to present a shorter, informal concert in the winter or spring, perhaps with a physically-distanced audience or as a live-streamed video. We also plan to make some virtual choir videos to post on our website or on YouTube.

What will we be singing? What kind of music can we rehearse in this way?

Isabel is selecting music that will be satisfying for both Chorus and Chamber Choir members to sing. We may start with pieces we've sung recently, or pieces for which we have our own recording, so that we can have an enjoyable experience while getting used to the format. And although we can't work on pitch and blend in the normal way, we will still be able to work on musical skills, through exercises and occasional guest clinicians. There will also be occasional sectional and small-group rehearsals.

What can I do to help?

Thank you for asking! We will need volunteers to help those who are new to videoconferencing technology; we will also need people with experience in video editing to make virtual choir videos. If we are unable to meet in person, we may need people (section leads or any other volunteers) to record voice parts, transcribe music on MuseScore, and assist with safe conditions at St. Leonard's. And as always, your dues and contributions are greatly appreciated.

Isabel and the Board