

## Safe singing during COVID: A letter to Jubilate choristers

September 25, 2020

Dear choristers,

As we embark on this unprecedented 2020/21 Jubilate Singers season, we are committed to singing together in a safe, interesting, and joyful way. We know that for some of you this will mean virtual participation only, and Isabel is designing our calendar to make sure this is always an option. We know too, though, that many of you miss the experience of singing together physically, and we are exploring several options that will allow those who wish to do this safely. It is possible!

### What's the science on safe singing?

The studies conducted so far show that the dangers of singing are mainly due to *aerosols* of smaller, lighter droplets (less than 5 microns), which can create *airborne transmission*. Speaking produces aerosols, but singing produces much more. So extra precautions are necessary to sing safely together:

- You do have to wear a decent mask. This significantly reduces the amount of aerosol. A little more than the usual 2 m social distance helps, too.
- It's important not to sing for too long in a space, again to limit the amount of aerosol. About half an hour is a good guideline. Ventilation is important if you're indoors, and it's critical to refresh the air before singing in the space again (more on this later).
- Even so, it's helpful to think of safety not as an "either-or" but as a spectrum. There are measures we can take to mitigate the risk and make it *more* safe to sing, but there will still be *some* risk. Each person ultimately has to decide their own level of risk tolerance.

### What are the specific limitations on singing in groups?

- 1) All singers have to wear well-fitting masks, all the time. (OK, except for quick sips of water!)
- 2) Distancing needs to be maintained at three metres, and singers should not face each other.
- 3) If a director and/or accompanist is present, and particularly if they are facing the singers, they need to be positioned at least five metres away.
- 4) A group of singers can only sing in blocks of up to roughly half an hour at a time.
- 5) For indoor singing, the air in the singing space has to be recirculated after each half-hour block to change it out as completely as possible.
- 6) A complete attendance record must be taken for contact tracing.

### What options are being studied for singing together?

- If you don't want to sing in any way except by Zoom, we completely respect your choice. We're planning our whole season to allow for this option.
- As was shared at the AGM back in June, we're also looking at hybrid rehearsals, to give singers the choice of in-person singing or joining from home via Zoom. Creating a safe format will require careful planning and close adherence to clear safety protocols, but it's not impossible. (In view of current covid trends, however, we don't anticipate moving to hybrid rehearsals soon.)
- As Pat mentioned at the start of the season, if any of you want to form groups of two to four singers in your homes, either to attend virtual rehearsals together or to practise on your own time, we support

that – and we’ve worked out guidelines so you know exactly what to do to stay safe. You can find these guidelines on our website (see below for the link).

- Finally, we are working on organizing some outdoor singing events. While masks and distancing are still necessary, this is really the safest way to sing together right now. Watch for announcements about these opportunities!

### **Is it hard to sing through a mask?**

It’s not nearly as big an issue as some of us initially feared. As long as the mask fits well, while allowing you open your mouth properly, it’s quite manageable after a little bit of practice. Singing organizations in Canada and the United States recommend three types of mask:

- Disposable medical masks – these are effective for reducing droplet and aerosol spread, and the pleats help you to move your mouth freely.
- Cotton two-or three-ply masks – these are also effective as long as you wash them regularly, although some singers (e.g. with larger jaws) find them awkward for mouth movement.
- The “Singer’s mask”: this Cadillac option uses wire inserts to create a breathing space in front of the mouth. You may look a bit like a dalek but you’ll be singing like a pro...

### **What else might I need to know?**

We’ve tried to keep this letter brief, but singing safely has some unavoidable technicalities. Here are some key resources:

- We have posted some important guidelines and protocols in the Member’s area of our website. Go to <http://www.jubilatessingers.ca/members/> and look for the document called **Jubilate COVID safety guidelines and protocols**. If you’re considering any form of physically present group singing with us, we **strongly recommend** you take a look at this document. Think of it as our “manual” for safe singing.

- If you’re interested in the singer’s mask, here’s a professionally made option: <https://www.broadwayreliefproject.com/singersmask>

It’s a relatively expensive item, but if there’s sufficient interest, we might put together an order to get a cheaper rate locally.

- If you have questions that haven’t been addressed here, please feel free to contact me at [tommossgamblin@gmail.com](mailto:tommossgamblin@gmail.com) or 416 577 9912.

- If you’re curious about the science and advice, and want to know more, a summary of one of the early studies can be found at <https://www.nfhs.org/media/4119369/aerosol-study-prelim-results-round-2-final-updated.pdf>. A webinar put on by NATS (the U.S. singing teacher’s body) about safe singing can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/oWlrV3rCao>, and a Choral Canada webinar on safe singing here: <https://youtu.be/AwoZj7SjKF8>.

Whatever your choices, good luck, stay safe, and happy singing!

Tom Moss Gamblin (Safety Officer), on behalf of Isabel and the Board