

## Press Release - Statement on Covid-19 and Collective Singing, June 2020

### Singing improves people's lives, now as much as ever

**The world of collective singing has been severely hit by the Covid-19 pandemic.** Like most other activities, rehearsals, concerts and singing in schools ended abruptly when lockdown began. In most European countries, this took place in mid-March, and saw schools closed, church services stopped and people asked to stay at home to flatten the curve.

**Online singing boomed and people got inventive to keep singing together.** In lockdown, many tried different online tools to stay in touch and continue rehearsing. Unfortunately, latency substantially restricts digital possibilities for collective music-making, with everyone but the conductor usually having to mute their microphones. Still, the need to keep singing has led many to join sing-along and open singing sessions, to watch warm-up videos and to produce virtual choir videos. Beyond the digital, even car rehearsals with FM transmitters allowed some to sing together in a limited way.

The human contact for singers (albeit virtual) **lifted people's spirits in otherwise challenging times.** Many parents reported that weekly rehearsals were the only activity their children were looking forward to. Nevertheless, everyone eagerly awaited the end of the strict lockdown measures and their first real polyphonic collective singing experience in months.

**Is singing together really dangerous?** When lockdown started to ease across Europe, group activities such as sports were slowly allowed again, first outdoors then indoors. However, reports of 'superspreaders' causing numerous infections within some choirs led several governments to forbid choir rehearsals and performances in any form, indoors or outdoors. It should be noted that all reported cases of mass infections in choirs occurred shortly before lockdown. No cases have arisen, as far as we are aware of, in choirs that have since restarted their activity (as early as end of April in Norway), observing the same hygiene and distance rules that apply to other group activities, often with a bit of extra security, e.g. a bigger distance between singers.

Collective singing is an activity that actively supports the immune system, often recommended for those with breathing and lung disorders. It has suddenly been labelled as 'dangerous', despite limited scientific examination of the subject and with no clear evidence that infections occurring in a small number of choirs were caused by the act of singing itself. The European Choral Association - Europa Cantat has been gathering what scientific evidence exists to date in its Covid-19 Resources document (<https://cutt.ly/9u4VZ5h>). **Whatever science proves in the end, it is not singing that is dangerous, Covid-19 is.**

**Where can people sing together again?** Now, at the end of June, an increasing number of countries have started to allow rehearsals again. In most European countries, collective singing is allowed one way or another or will be allowed soon with regulations being prepared or already in place. Some recommend only singing outside, some allow indoor rehearsals in small groups, with detailed safety and hygiene protocols defining such factors as the distance between singers in all directions (as well as the conductor and audience), rehearsal duration, ventilation etc. While this is not the way choirs are used to rehearsing, this 'new normal' does at least allow the enjoyment of being able to sing together and hear each other again.

Unfortunately, prohibitions or strong recommendations against singing still exist in several European countries, such as the UK, Russia and Ukraine at this point. Other group activities that also involve heavy breathing (e.g. sports), loud speaking and laughing (e.g. social gatherings) are largely no longer forbidden.

Furthermore, the restrictions for choirs also represent a huge challenge to the many conductors who earn their living from choirs and are not currently permitted to pursue their work. Online rehearsals are not an option for all choirs, and not all choirs can continue paying their conductors when the choir is unable to rehearse and perform.

**We therefore call on governments to:**

- 1. monitor the general spread and containment of the virus and on this basis allow choral rehearsals where other group activities are permitted, on the condition that all necessary measures for safety and hygiene are respected.**
- 2. to offer financial help to professionals in need within the choral sector, in order to ensure choral activities survive the pandemic.**

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For more information on the situation of collective singing in Europe please contact the General Secretariat of the European Choral Association - Europa Cantat. You can find more information on our website, accessing [www.EuropeanChoralAssociation.org/Covid-19](http://www.EuropeanChoralAssociation.org/Covid-19).  
For any additional question, please write to [info@EuropeanChoralAssociation.org](mailto:info@EuropeanChoralAssociation.org)