

Advocacy Statement, April 2023

Breaking Down Walls -

A vision for increased unity and cooperation in the collective singing community

The world has undergone many changes in the last years, and this will influence the future of “collective singing” At the same time the world of collective singing is also changing from the inside. At our new event *Leading Voices* in Utrecht in July 2022 we had the aim to bring together different target groups (conductors and vocal leaders, composers and arrangers, music educators, managers, those working with professional choirs and those working with amateur choirs) in order to break down the walls between different genres, to cooperate with other art forms and to actively involve the audience. This was a big step towards uniting different collective singing genres and styles. There are so many different singing traditions that make up the collective singing community today, from 'classical choirs' to 'a capella' groups. Across Europe, there are now many new and strengthened connections between people from different genres and styles.

We also cooperated closely with EAS (the European Association for Music in Schools) reaching out to music educators who sing with their pupils, with TENSO (the association of professional chamber choirs) and with AEC (the European Association of conservatoires and music universities, dealing with higher education).

Reaching out to others who are dealing with the same topics means that we have started cooperating more closely with IFCM (the International Federation for Choral Music) which was a partner for *Leading Voices*. At their World Symposium on Choral Music in Istanbul at the end of April 2023 we will host a panel with speakers from different parts of the world and representatives of different musical genres to discuss how we can continue on this path, what we want to achieve with the next edition of *Leading Voices* in 2025 and how this spirit of cooperation and breaking down walls can also work at a global level.

At the same time, there are external issues that have a growing influence on our work. Some are connected to UN Sustainable Development Goals, namely, climate change and other environmental issues on the one hand, and reducing inequalities (fostering diversity, inclusion, and equity) on the other hand. Our experience in some countries demonstrates that there is strong grassroots demand for us to become active and contribute to these goals in the sector of collective singing and we have started working on strategies and policies that can guide our action plan for the future. In addition to these important issues, we know that collective singing is a powerful and life-enhancing activity. When we break down walls and barriers to participation we give more people the opportunity to experience the many artistic as well as social, physical, psychological and educational benefits that singing brings.

Of course, there are other unpredictable developments (such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine) that have had economic and other impacts on many people and have led to changed habits. Organisers of events will need to be responsive and adapt to all of these changes if they want to be successful in the future.

The Singtank created by the European Choral Association in the frame of the EU-funded project IGNITE, which gathers a diverse group of stakeholders active in the collective singing sector, will work on a strategy for the sector for the coming years.

With this statement we would like to call on all those who are working with collective singing on local, regional, national or transnational level:

Get inspired, reach out to others who are doing similar work, help us to break down barriers between the different parts of the collective singing sector in your country or region and help us spread the word about the big strategic and societal issues that we will need to think about going forward. Together we can develop a vision for the future, adapt the education and training of professionals and design actions and events that will make our sector resilient and sustainable.

And to all decision makers and funding bodies:

Please support collective singing events and organisations so that they can overcome current challenges and develop sustainable strategies for the future. This forward-looking approach will ensure that as many people as possible can experience the benefits of collective singing for themselves and for the societies in which they live.

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