



Western Reserve Chorale

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To Western Reserve Chorale Singers

(and Anyone Considering Singing with the Chorale!) –

Status Report on Return to In-person Singing

The Western Reserve Chorale provides an opportunity for people from all walks of life to work together to create community and collaborative outcomes. That has been significantly curtailed for over a year, and you have been clear that there is a desire (hunger, even) to return to an ensemble singing experience when it is safe to do so.

We now have a plan for doing just that, though it will necessarily be different from what you were used to prior to March of 2020. This plan has been generated by a small “return to ensemble singing” committee (comprised of David Gilson, Nell Davidson, Mark Wakefield, Stacy Newman, and Dave Bell). This plan can only be as good as the available information. Since that information continues to evolve, as will our experience, the plan will need to change over time. Because of that, we ask you to continue to be flexible.

Background

Vaccination rates in Cuyahoga County are ahead of state and national averages. However, the vaccination rate is still short of curtailing transmission, the Delta variant is more readily transmitted than the original virus, and levels of community transmission in the county have just been upgraded to “substantial,” which triggers the CDC recommendation that even vaccinated people wear masks in indoor public settings. In addition, the recent study of data from Provincetown, MA has shown that vaccinated individuals carried as much virus in their noses as unvaccinated individuals, strongly suggesting that vaccinated people could spread the virus to others.

Therefore, while gathering maskless might have been possible a month ago, the presence of the Delta variant currently makes that no longer an option. The level of risk is dependent on both time and intensity of potential exposure, so we have examined ways to rehearse that will allow continued distancing, and minimize the

time required for us to be in rehearsals, but still allow the ability to sing together in the same space, for all the benefits that we experience from singing together.

Factors that affect our options:

- Vaccination is critical to halting the spread of COVID-19.
- The Delta variant shows higher transmissibility.
- Even those who have been vaccinated can still be carriers of the virus.
- Limited air exchange rate in the Gesu building (older HVAC systems were typically designed for ~0.3 air exchanges per hour, whereas rates to minimize virus transmission calls for 6 to 10 air exchanges/hour, preferably with HEPA filters).
- A significant proportion of WRC singers are in age groups at increased risk from COVID.
- We can split the chorale into 2 or more “choirs,” each with SATB (like the “choir 1/choir 2 division we have used before), rehearsing only one choir at a time, to provide rehearsal singing experience with other voices, yet still limit the number of people in the room.
- Length of rehearsals will be impacted by the need to continue to minimize exposures.
- We can broadcast rehearsals over Zoom so that those in the “choir” not rehearsing in person can participate remotely.

Current Plan

Our current plan is described below. Reminder: this is our current best guess – as we gain experience, and as conditions and available information changes, the plan may have to change. As always, “stay tuned”!

Rehearsals will resume on Tuesday, September 14, with the following protocol:

- Each singer will be assigned to one of 2 separate “choirs” for purposes of rehearsals. The two choirs will rehearse in person on alternate weeks. Each rehearsal will be on Zoom for singers in the other choir (or other singers at home) to watch.
 - o Rehearsal time will be shortened to minimize exposure – precise timing to be determined.
 - o Those rehearsals will also be recorded, for viewing after the fact.
 - o Opportunities to interact online during zoom rehearsals will be very limited, to facilitate efficient use of time in rehearsal.
 - o Choir “assignments” will be established shortly. We are asking section leaders to contact singers about your plans for singing. If you commute to rehearsals with others, please let us know, so we can take that into account in making assignments. As soon as we have identified choir 1 and choir 2, we will let you know.
- Everyone at rehearsal must show a one-time proof of vaccination for COVID-19

- Each singer will need to show a vaccination card indicating type of vaccine (e.g. – Pfizer, Moderna, etc.) and date(s) of vaccination. WRC will record your name and date(s) of vaccination. Unless booster shots are later advised by CDC, that card should not need to be shown again.
 - In order to minimize contact, please let Stacy know if you would be willing to submit electronically a photo of your vaccination card (obscuring any medical record number or other sensitive information), rather than showing it in person. We would delete any such photo promptly upon recording the date of vaccination.
- In the event some singers are medically not able to be vaccinated, but remain interested in singing, we may be able to establish an alternate protocol for those people – any such protocol will require some dedication on the part of the singer. Let us know if you would need this accommodation.
- Anyone exhibiting any symptoms of upper respiratory infection needs to stay home.
- All singers will be required to wear masks. Information will be separately distributed regarding masks specifically designed for use while singing. (Costs are in the \$25-30 range. We may be able to obtain some discount for bulk purchases.)
 - We will be asking whether you want to obtain a mask through WRC, or on your own, so we know how many masks to order (and what sizes)
- Singers will be seated at physical distances from each other (exception for members of the same household or who commute together), forcing limitations on numbers.
- Rehearsals will be focused initially on re-establishing the practice of singing together, more than preparation for performances.
- There will be only 2 “concerts” this season –December and May.
- Presentation of performances has yet to be determined - whether we perform with an audience or sing together and generate a video recording of that performance for later viewing online (e.g. – on YouTube). A video recording would allow us to sing together to create the video. It would also avoid having to ask an audience to gather for a concert, and at the same time avoid the multiple difficulties of creating a “virtual performance” like we did this past season where each singer records their voice part alone, and the ensemble is then created electronically.
- There are still some procedures we have not fully developed such as traffic plans for entering and exiting the building; the number of persons who can attend a rehearsal while maintaining social distancing and the process by which those persons will be selected. Those decisions are in process and will be forwarded as soon as they are available.

We have asked section leaders to reach out to the people in their section to gauge reaction to this plan, and to gather information for choir assignments (whether Choir 1 or Choir 2). If you do not hear from them by August 20, please email Stacy indicating 1) whether you are interested in singing this fall; 2) what part you sing (Alto 1, Alto 2, etc.); and 3) whether you regularly commute to rehearsal or reside with other singers, as that will affect both choir assignments and distancing

(i.e. – if people are living or commuting together, it would be sensible for them to be able to sit together in rehearsal).

We look forward to seeing you on either September 14 or September 21!

Let's sing in September!

Dave Bell,
President, Western Reserve Chorale

Selected Data Sources:

- Community Transmission rates: <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view>
- CDC Guidance: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- Cuyahoga County Board of Health data: <https://www.ccbh.net/covid-19-information-and-resources/>
- News story on Massachusetts outbreak: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2021/07/30/provincetown-covid-outbreak-vaccinated/>
- Provincetown Study Report: https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7031e2.htm?s_cid=mm7031e2_w