

EADCA: CORONAVIRUS SITUATION WITH OUR MEMBER CHOIRS

BULLETIN 5 – NOVEMBER 2020

CHOIR	COMMENTS RECEIVED
BEXHILL CHORAL	<p>Bexhill Choral has carried on with weekly Zoom rehearsals, initially using the 'Great Choral Classics' music we all had (intended for May 2020, then October, now possibly May 2021!), then some other music possibly for 2021, and now with carols added into the mix. The rehearsals are taken by our MD playing piano. On average around 30 people attend each week, which is about half the choir, although in total around 40 have attended at some point. Everyone still gets a weekly email and we have also made some phone calls to keep in touch.</p> <p>In March we suspended subs (due 1st April) until September. We then decided to ask for a voluntary donation of half of the annual sub. The majority of members have paid this and apart from 3 people who have resigned (ill health or moving), everyone remains a member. We also held a virtual Zoom AGM in July with members voting by proxy (although most didn't bother!)</p> <p>A few weeks ago - before the most recent increase in covid case numbers - we carried out a survey (based on Making Music's template), of members' attitudes towards returning to in-person rehearsals. This was a response to two or three members suggesting we could start again. Only around half the members returned responses, but it showed a spread from a few who would be happy to return (with precautions), to a number who say they will not be returning until there is a vaccine/covid has disappeared/all restrictions are removed, with most people somewhere in between. Re-starting does not seem feasible at present.</p> <p>We are mulling over the possibility of a small group singing carols somewhere out of doors if this is allowable or feasible, and/or using recordings made last Christmas to put a short concert onto Youtube (we don't have the tech support to create one from fresh!)</p>
DOWNLAND SINGERS	<p>Downland Singers held Zoom rehearsals until the end of July and these were both appreciated and enjoyed by a small number of the choir. Our AGM was scheduled to take place in July at which the new committee is elected. As our Chairman had indicated he would be resigning (pre- Covid) I felt it important to have a new committee in place to take on monitoring the Covid situation with the aim of getting the choir back singing together as soon as possible. Knowing several of the members did not have internet access, a letter and voting paper was sent out to everyone together with a questionnaire (based on the Making Music template). The response was good resulting in the election of a committee and insight into the feeling of members returning to singing. Two members have resigned and, although there are just 5 we have not heard anything from since March, the majority are keen to return to rehearsing when it is felt safe to do so. Their concerns seem to be largely about the practicalities rather than a fear of the spread of the virus.</p> <p>Following current Covid guidelines we managed to hold a committee meeting (how lovely to see familiar faces in reality rather than on the "screen"!)</p> <p>Following considerable discussion, it was agreed that we would hold a 4 week "Christmas Special" via Zoom at the beginning of December and have tentatively put a date in our diaries for February seeing the start of small group sectional rehearsals. The format and frequency of which is still to be decided. In the meantime, I continue to produce a monthly Bulletin and members are in touch with each other by phone.</p> <p>Regarding subs the choir are extremely lucky not to have any on-going financial commitments. Most members pay termly and so this dove-tailed well with the start of lockdown. For those who pay an annual subscription we have put this on the agenda for the next committee meeting to be held in January 2021 by which time we hope to have some idea of what next year will bring.</p>

EASTBOURNE CHORAL	<p>Hello Fellow Singers, I hope you are all well. Eastbourne Choral Society committee met on Monday to evaluate what we had been doing so far this term and to plan for the near future. Since September we have been having weekly Zoom rehearsals with John, our MD, for an hour. So far we have sung music from Messiah and Vivaldi Gloria as it was felt it would be helpful to sing some reasonably familiar music whilst people got used to the technology and how Zoom singing works. John has become very experienced with using Zoom and the sessions have been very much enjoyed by those who have joined in, although sadly only about a third of the choir are taking part. We gather from about 7.15pm and have a chat, then John mutes us all about 7.30 and rehearsals begin with a variety of warm ups. We then work on a chorus, followed by John playing a recording from You Tube for us to sing along to, so we don't feel we are in total isolation. and the rehearsals continue thus until a little chat at the end. We have not tried to sing "live" together as John knows from experience that this doesn't work due to various internet speeds etc.</p> <p>We plan to continue on Zoom, after a half term break, into December with Bach Christmas Oratorio and carols. The final rehearsal will be "bring a glass of wine and a Green carol book for some Christmas Cheer." The invite will be sent out to all choir members to try and encourage a few more to come along.</p> <p>We plan to continue with Zoom for next term, with a review in February, learning some pieces that we could hopefully put into a concert at some time, later in the year. Meanwhile, yet again, we are cancelling all our arrangements, including events and concerts in November and December. We already had several Christmas bookings which were made in January! Also, it seems that our St John Passion concert postponed from April 2020 and rebooked for March 2021 will need to be postponed until 2022. Maybe things will be back to somewhere near normal by the summer? We live in hopes as, the members of ECS, like all our singing friends in other choirs, I'm sure, are missing being able to be together to make music, chat, drink tea and eat cake in person!</p> <p>On behalf of all of us in ECS good luck with all your singing and Happy, if not "normal" Christmas</p>
HAILSHAM CHORAL	<p>It is interesting to read Jenny's report on what Bexhill is doing at the moment. Hailsham Choral has done very similar things. We too started online rehearsals in September, and they have proven to be very enjoyable, if different. We are learning some shorter pieces, which will be useful for Summer concerts and encores. Our MD has worked really hard to put together vocal learning tracks which our accompanist helps with (as well as Rosie singing both Sop and Alto and her father Bass and Tenor!). Like Bexhill we too have about half the choir attending, around 30 weekly. Some members have left (as it happens we too had three resignations) - the double whammy of having a new MD (with naturally a different approach) and advancing years, plus the long break because of Covid, has made some people make the decision now perhaps, rather than later.</p> <p>With regard to subs, as most had already paid up for the year 2019-20, we decided to collect the last remaining instalments, but suspended subs for the time being from September, until we can meet in person again. Some choir members suggested we should ask for donations, so we did that about ten days ago with a suggested sum of £30, but I don't know yet how many have paid this. We have continued to pay our MD and accompanist and the online rehearsals are free. We are lucky that we have some savings in the bank to tide us over at least for this FY. We held our AGM on 1 October also via Zoom, but having done all the business side of things (adopting of minutes, accounts, election of Committee) beforehand via email, to make it fair to those who are not on Zoom. We had the shortest ever AGM lasting only 15 minutes!!</p> <p>We decided to cancel our performance of Samson altogether and have collected in all the hired scores now. Our concert was scheduled on 28 March, so we were almost ready to perform when we had to stop rehearsals and postponed the concert in the first instance. It</p>

	<p>was felt best to cancel altogether now, rather than keep postponing to later dates. We will need a fresh start once all this is behind us.</p> <p>Our MD suggested singing carols in Hailsham outside and we are at present investigating the possibilities of that. I surveyed the choir and about half were keen to do this, or at least would consider it, the other half either did not respond or were not happy to take part. I am in touch with the town council, who seem happy for us to do this, but there are inevitably discussions to be had and decisions to be made. Moreover things may change, as the pandemic changes, and we just don't know if this is going to be possible.</p> <p>We too have made the decision we won't be rehearsing in person for the time being. Asking the choir about singing carols outside gave a good indication of whether people would sing in person indoors again, and it seems a lot of hard work would be involved in any case. We will of course review this as time moves on. We will be celebrating our 60th anniversary next year, so fingers crossed we can actually celebrate with a concert!!</p>
HEATHFIELD CHORAL	<p>At Heathfield, we ran Zoom sessions from April to July. These were useful to do to keep the choir engaged (we allowed for breakout sessions during the call so that members could chat to each other) but the musical outcome was less clear. We tried doing a normal rehearsal, but the technical issues of so many people with different connection speeds made this almost impossible. So we switched to singing through some simple songs, and this was far more popular. We also had around 30 out of 80 dialling in each week - OK, but better than nothing. We suspect that the fact that people can only hear themselves when they are singing meant that many people were rather put off - they are used to hearing their voice in a blend with others!</p> <p>Then in September, we restarted in-person rehearsals. We switched to a larger venue that allowed us to sit at 2m distancing, and split those that wanted to attend into 2 groups who sang on alternate weeks. Those whose turn it was to remain at home - and those who preferred not to attend at all - could watch / join in via a live stream we set up on YouTube. This worked very well. Although we sang with masks on, the overall effect was much better, as you had other choir members, the MD and the accompanist in the same room. And the feedback on the live stream was also much better, it was more like being at a normal rehearsal as those at home could hear the rest of the choir singing.</p> <p>This all seemed to be working just fine, but of course with lockdown v2 starting, we're back to the drawing board! We will revert to some kind of stream, but exactly how this will be done will be decided in the coming days. So we shall wait and see what the future holds, but we will be carrying on doing something.</p> <p>Incidentally, for those of you who have been watching Roadkill on BBC1 on Sunday evenings, the choir you saw and heard in episodes 2 and 3 was Heathfield CS! We recorded and filmed this back in January in the halcyon days when we were allowed to stand and sing next to each other, but were sworn to secrecy by the BBC until the programme aired. We had great fun doing it though, although it was a long day filming in Sunbury on Thames.</p> <p>Finally, as I think you know I'm taking over the website admin from Roger. I'm having to recreate the site as part of this process, and hopefully this will be done in the next week or so. I've assumed that all events that were planned for 2020 have now been cancelled, if that is NOT the case please can you let me know. Also, if you had events planned for the start of 2021 that you know are cancelled or postponed, please let me know. I'll leave all 2021 events in place for the moment unless I hear otherwise.</p> <p>Good luck to all.</p>