



Choral Canada
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Canada Choral

TECH TALKS NATIONAL ROUNDTABLES FOR THE CANADIAN CHORAL ARTS SECTOR: SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS FROM FEBRUARY 7 & 13, 2021

On February 7 and February 13, Choral Canada's Advocacy Committee hosted national roundtables for the Canadian choral arts sector and community. The theme for these roundtables was the use of technology in a group singing setting, focusing on both online and hybrid rehearsal and performance formats. We asked participants to share their experiences surrounding three themes: 1) Successful Strategies, 2) Resources (programs/equipment), and 3) Post Pandemic Plans - what technology will you still use when we return to "normal"?

The roundtables were led by moderator Joel Tranquilla (Trinity Western University, BC). The breakout room discussion moderators included:

- Faith based choirs: Ki Adams (St. Thomas' Anglican Church, NL) and Brigid Coult (St. Mary's Kerrisdale Anglican Church BC)
- Children's Community Choirs: Charissa Bagan (Bach Children's Chorus, ON) and Julie Freeman-Smith (Choir Alberta, AB)
- Youth Choirs/Post Secondary: Elaine Choi (Timothy Eaton Memorial Church, U of T, ON) and Laurier Fagnan (University of Alberta, AB)
- Adult Community Choirs: Antonio Llacca (Carleton University and Coro Vivo, ON), and Ieva Wool (High Spirits Choir, BC)
- Semi Pro/Pro Choirs: Amy Henderson (Bruneau Centre for Choral Music, NL) and Tim Shantz (Luminous Voices, AB)
- School Based Programs: Geung Kroeker-Lee (St. John's-Ravenscourt School, MB)

In partnership with Alliance chorale du Québec, Choral Canada hosted a french national roundtable on the same theme of technology. The roundtable was moderated by Marie-Élène Lamoureux. The presenters included:

- Julien Proulx (Chœur de la montagne, Orchestre symphonique de Drummondville)
- François A. Ouimet (Les Voix ferrées, Chœur de l'Orchestre Métropolitain, chœurs de l'École de musique Vincent-d'Indy);
- David Rompré (Les Rhapsodes, Chœur de l'Orchestre symphonique de Québec, enseignant en musique école secondaire, professeur privé de technique vocale)
- Janice Goodfellow – Chœur classique des Basses-Laurentides, Petit chœur de Rosemère

Continue the conversation! Join us in Choral Canada's Facebook group "Canadian Choral Community - Advocates and Enthusiasts!"

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/canadianchoralcommunityadvocatesandenthusiasts>

We would also like to thank our international guest presenters who discussed platforms for choirs to reduce latency.

Digital Stage: www.digitalstage.org

Presented by Sonja Greiner - Secretary General of the European Choral Association - Germany

Contact Sonja Greiner: SecretaryGeneral@europeanchoralassociation.org

Jacktrip Foundation: <https://www.jacktrip.org/index.html>

Presented by Elena Sharkova - Cantabile Youth Singers - Silicon Valley, CA

Two other platforms were discussed that reduce latency:

Sync Space Live - www.syncspace.live - a new, Canadian-developed audio/video platform with similar possibilities as Digital Stage. It is still in the testing phase. Not too complex to install.

My Choral Coach partners with RealTime Audio - <https://realtimeaudio.com/> - leading edge technology for simultaneous group singing. Minimal setup, external boxes to be purchased for each choir member, fast internet connection required. Not yet available for small batch purchases.

The English roundtables had the participants go into different breakout rooms separated by choir type. These types were children, youth, adult community, professional/semi-professional, post-secondary, and faith-based. The French roundtable had all participants stay together. Participants were sent detailed notes and information from all the sessions and presentations. These can be requested by emailing programs@choralcanada.org. Here is a summary of their discussions:

THEME #1: SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES

COLLABORATIONS:

- Create partnerships with other choirs: you can combine your choirs' rehearsals; exchange or share workshops or clinics; have your choral rehearsal led by the conductor of the other choir; switch things up by bringing a fresh face and new perspective
- www.bridgechoralcollective.ca - Workshops
- Commissioning projects - working with composers
- Recommending the [Sonictimelapse.com](http://sonictimelapse.com) project for new Canadian repertoire commissioned during this time of COVID-19

REHEARSALS STRATEGIES:

- Change it up: alternate the whole group time with sectionals and small group breakout rooms.
- Using chorister/section leaders to enhance the online rehearsal experience with various warmup and other enrichment activities.
- Work with good equipment! Mics (Blue Yeti brand is affordable), cameras, document camera (Epson ELPDC21 for example), taking advantage of equipment purchased for use by rehearsal venue
- Individual voice focus- work on technique and everyone singing the melody (One group is using RCM vocal series)
- Getting singers up and moving
- Working with a team to run rehearsals (accompanists and conductors in the same space was helpful)
- Have singers/students submit audio recordings each week/bi-weekly
- One large piece of repertoire for everybody, work on movements in breakout rooms and sectionals.
- Second language pronunciation, working on diction coaching on Zoom, with native speaking singers
- Rehearsal one week, next week is a special event/workshop -- good motivation and keeping things mixed up
- Concentrating on SKILLS rather than performance and repertoire - theory workbooks, where singers have the hard copy workbook and instructor can screen share resources:
- Mini “choir courses”
- Learning through games, skills, movement
- Chain singing, partner songs... things to keep singers connected and singing
- Using a looper (RC505) for the sensation of “singing with others”; rounds groove-based pieces/ circle songs and quodlibets work well here

REPERTOIRE and PERFORMANCES:

- Virtual choir projects well received by singers and families (Created with Logic Pro and Final Cut) Some raised more money than a normal concert.
- Vulnerability issues with visual recording – especially with students who are new to choral singing. Consider audio recording vs. video recording to lessen singer stress.
- Solid foundation tracks are very helpful for choristers when recording virtual choir videos.
- Incorporating other elements to virtual choir videos such as story telling can create a more meaningful experience for the listeners. Work with videographer to create value added, filming in outdoor spaces. Record audio ahead indoors, and add visual interest.

SOCIAL/COMMUNITY BUILDING:

- Rehearsals now are often more about pastoral work than musical work
- Singers CRAVING connection the most; they need this connection more than simply being able to sing from home. Motivating and engaging singers when they are entirely online is tough.

- Building in social time each week: With “speed dating” type questions for small group breakout rooms; Kahoot trivia challenges (there are even pre-made theory challenges done for you already)
- Partner singing, echo songs, games nights, social nights, talent nights. Use breakout rooms for discussions, team building, trivia games
- Listening party with students, sharing songs, playlists
- Family singalongs to end rehearsal to keep parents involved.

OPPORTUNITIES TO SING:

- **Online-only cross-Canada choir (singthenorth.ca)** that is working very well. A very successful, community-building activity on Zoom has been their virtual tour bus, in which they take an hour on a Saturday to go to different destinations.

THEME #2 - RESOURCES (SITES/PROGRAMS/EQUIPMENT):

Organization:

- Choir Genius (use by some members began pre-pandemic and continues to be a useful tool for sharing teaching materials, scores, sharing videos, providing feedback to individual singers) <https://www.choirgenius.com/>
- www.band.us - App - looks like a Facebook page but closed system for choir. Many capabilities for communication, file sharing and community building.

Literacy and Pedagogy:

- Sight Singing School <https://www.sightsingingschool.com/>
- Ear Master <https://www.earmaster.com/>
- Breezing Through Theory <https://breezinthrutheory.com/>
- The Full Voice - www.thefullvoice.com (Freebie Friday emails are lovely!)
- The Rhythm Randomizer <https://www.rhythmrandomizer.com/>
- Sight Reading Factory <https://www.sightreadingfactory.com/>

Rehearsal Aids:

- Choir Tracks – <https://choraltracks.com/> outsource recordings of practice tracks
- EpocCam - <https://www.elgato.com/en/epoccam> - iPhone app that you can easily set up to show everyone who is rehearsing in person. Makes it more fun for the people at home. It's not the source of the sound for the online singers - just a visual add-on.
- Use a Document Camera - to project instead of having to scan documents and screen share ((Epson ELPDC21 for example)
- Google Jam Board - Simple bulletin board where students can add writing, stickers, drawings etc. Great tool for class discussions as it allows students to instantly share idea
- MyChoralCoach - <https://acda.org/my-choral-coach/> <https://matchmysound.com/my-choral-coach/>

Audio/Multitrack:

- Jamulus <https://jamulus.io/> is free and does not require any additional equipment. However, it does require high speed internet and the setup requires some technical expertise. With a relatively low latency for audio, it can be paired with Zoom for audio.
- Soundtrap <https://www.soundtrap.com/> and Bandlab www.bandlab.com - Both free web-based programs, which means they are accessible to as many students as possible
- Presonus - for audio interfacing – two inputs (Keyboard and condenser mic)
- Premier pro – multitrack video editing; Adobe Premier Pro; DaVinci
- LoopBack - to run multiple audio inputs through one channel - www.loopback.com - saves time instead of sharing sound manually from each application. (you can share sound and speak in microphone over music at the same time).

Video:

- Final Cut Pro - Video editing
- Handbrake - <https://handbrake.fr/> - video converter
- Chor Amor – great training videos on how to put together a virtual choir – needs someone tech-savvy and a Mac computer
- FlipGrid - www.flipgrid.com - This platform allows students to make quick videos (similar to the process of filming a story on social media). Works great for assessment of things such as solfège exercises
- OBS (open broadcasting system or service) - When using video conferencing software, setting the webcam as OBS allows to seamlessly go from face to screen share. (This, along with loopback above helps to minimize dead time or awkward silence)

HYBRID SET-UPS:

- Some choirs use two omnidirectional mics connected to a PA system.
- Some use 4 microphones (conductor, piano, 2 for singers). Zoom can only handle one audio input - You need a mixer to combine the microphones
- Have a back-up wifi setup (mobile phone hotspot or an app)
- Although not everyone experiences the hybrid set-up the same way, for some singers it is an opportunity to become independent learners and increase their self-confidence. It can be an opportunity to hear yourself in the context of the full choir. Even with 10 people socially distanced with the rest of the choir is online - at least they can sing along with real people.
- Get of the choristers to manage the online component.
- Laurier Fagnan shared his hybrid tech approach. <https://www.choralcanada.org/blog/potential-set-up-for-a-hybrid-choral-rehearsal.html>
- Attach a Zoom H5 recorder directly to laptop for the zoom. The piano and I are near enough to be captured by the H5. The H5 is on a tripod and connects to my laptop with a double ended (male-male) 3.5 mm mini headphone jack. So simple and good sound and video feeds to those at home. I can also monitor the zoom for questions.

THEME #3 - POST PANDEMIC - WHAT WILL YOU KEEP?

- Small group check ins, sectionals, meetings online - time saver without travel
- Submitting theory work online
- Singers won't have to miss rehearsals for sickness or weather
- The connections made in the community, for example outdoor rehearsals, will continue
- Guest artists
- More contextualizing of the music going forward.
- Possibly moving away from long programs of only music and instead finding new ways to connect with the audience by sharing stories in appropriate and meaningful ways.

Thank you to everyone who participated in these roundtable discussions and especially to those who helped make them happen.

Heather Fraser
Vice President of Advocacy