

In-Person Group Singing... An Irreplaceable Experience!

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic came a flurry of virtual choirs, singing together - yet apart. Choral directors across Canada recognized the need for community and connection, despite the inability to sing together in person. While this provided students with a temporary connection to their singing and choir communities, we know virtual group singing is not a replacement for in-person singing experiences.

Even Eric Whitacre, internationally renowned choral conductor and composer, whose Virtual Choir is a true global phenomenon connecting singers from across the world, recognizes the limitations of virtual group singing:

"I'm humbled that this process has been embraced so widely during the current pandemic which has wreaked havoc, not least in the art of choral singing. I must say that however fascinating this journey has been, virtual choir singing cannot and should not take the place of actual ensemble singing. The very significance of that word ensemble (together) goes to the very essence of what choral singing must be, the bringing together of the many to form the voice of the one, together and in real time... What can be learned and achieved when singing together is simply irreplaceable and I, for one, cannot wait to return to being together in song once again."

- Eric Whitacre, 2021

This year, live music performance came to a screeching halt across Canada for student musicians, and professional musicians alike. Students could no longer learn and rehearse together during school closures and/or restricted in-person school learning environments. As a result, **almost all survey respondents (93%) reported that they were not able to undertake live performances with their music students during this year of the COVID-19 pandemic¹.**

Music educators hold that performance is an important component of their students' music learning journeys. Virtual ensembles do not reflect the authenticity of music-making in the classroom, nor offer the many benefits of in-person rehearsal and performance. Creating virtual performances requires an enormous investment of time for audio and video editing. Teachers should not feel any obligation to produce such materials. The focus, as always, should be on creating engaging and collaborative music-making learning experiences. This goal can be achieved by prioritizing a return to safe in-person singing.

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

The *Singing in Canadian Schools: COVID-19 Impact Survey* paints an authentic picture of our experiences as Canadian music educators. The survey sample pool was substantial and representative, with almost 1000 respondents from across the country. Comprehensive survey results hold the potential to guide policy and practice related to singing in schools in the upcoming year, keeping students engaged AND safe. Final report publication to follow.

¹ Morin, F., & Mahmud, M. N. (2021). Singing in Canadian schools: COVID 19 impact survey. Unpublished preliminary findings. Choral Canada.