



TAFELMUSIK

February 17, 2021

Dear Minister Elliott,

The choral music sector is a vital and vibrant part of the performing arts ecosystem in the province of Ontario, and the COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating to its ability to function. A 2017 national study initiated by our national arts service organization, Choral Canada, and researched by Hill Strategies found that:

- there are approximately 28,000 choirs in Canada;
- there are more than 3.5 million people across Canada who sing in choirs;
- 7.8 million Canadian adults attended a performance involving a choir in 2016 (nearly half were in Ontario);
- three times more children under 18 sing in a choir than play hockey;
- and there are about 50% more adult choral singers than adult hockey players.

While these statistics are representative of the country as a whole, a substantial percentage (nearly 11,000 choirs representing 1.6 million choristers) of those choirs and choristers, live, work, and sing in the province of Ontario. Choirs provide a sense of community and belonging to those who sing and to those who attend performances (the benefits of choral singing for social, mental and emotional wellness are well documented). They are part of the social fabric of their communities with 65% of Ontario choirs engaging in community outreach, 68% performing at charity events, and 59% giving free concerts or singing engagements.

From an economic perspective, the professional choral arts sector has a multi-million-dollar impact on the economy every year. Thousands of choral artists and art workers earn part or all of their income from their work with choral ensembles, including conductors, singers, accompanists, administrators, production and stage crews, sound technicians, box office staff, concert halls and venues, talent agents, managers, unions, concert promoters, and more. For choristers who work professionally, singing constitutes a portion, and in some cases, all, of their income. This income has been upended as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The revenue of choirs across Ontario has been decimated during the pandemic. Ontario's professional choirs have worked hard to reinvent themselves and to find ways, in the midst of ever-changing circumstances, to continue to create and bring music experiences to audiences in this most difficult time. **As the pandemic continues to upend the livelihood of these musicians, we seek the development of specific protocols to keep these professional musicians, staff and crew both safe and employed.**

To date, all of the professional choirs across the nation have developed detailed preventive measures and procedures based on provincial guidelines to keep our various ensembles safe, which were implemented last Fall in all rehearsals and concert recordings, including:

- Screening, including filling out of public health forms for illness
- Temperature checks
- Wearing of masks
- Large well-ventilated venues
- Social distancing of 2m or more
- Extra ventilation, including portable air purifiers with HEPA 13 filters
- Hand sanitization
- Equipment sanitization with disinfectant

- Shorter overall rehearsals (2 hours)
- Shorter rehearsal segments (30-45 minutes)
- Longer breaks for air exchange and ventilation
- Safety plans
- Contact tracing
- Usage of plexiglass barriers, where required

It is important to note that all of our live performances recorded for online broadcast in the Fall followed these health and safety guidelines and resulted in no incidence of illness two weeks after each session.

The professional choirs have also—at each organization’s expense—developed and adapted new modes of artistic dissemination by purchasing new digital platforms, recording equipment, production equipment, impermeable barriers, and more, which has allowed for the safe continuation of choral recordings and livestreamed performances that have had an immense impact on the economy, as well as on the social and personal mental health and well-being of millions of Canadians. We have gathered and followed cutting-edge scientific evidence from researchers around the world in implementing these measures, in order to keep our singers, production crews, and staff safe, and have shared, on a regular basis, this ongoing research with public health ministries and officials across the country (see updates in Appendix).

While plexiglass barriers’ efficiency in our sector has been in dispute in several studies, in keeping with our standards of protocol excellence, we are prepared to implement even more effective measures, to further reinforce our commitment to keeping everyone safe.

- *“Ontario appears to be the only province that requires a barrier to separate singers and players of brass or wind instruments from spectators, and from each other. In other jurisdictions, this is usually only required when physical distancing cannot be maintained.”* Janet Sellery, Canadian Health and Safety Consultant (CHSC), [Barriers for the Performing Arts Summary](#)
- *“I think it difficult to see how such barriers can do much if anything to further protect masked, socially distanced people,”* Professor Howard Stone, Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering, Princeton University, quoted from correspondence related to the article [International Arts Manager](#)
- *“Plexiglass partitions or barriers between musicians are not recommended due to room HVAC system design limitations. ‘Dead zones’ or areas where aerosol can build-up are a concern of plexiglass partitions,”* Dr. Shelly Miller, University of Colorado Boulder, [International Coalition of Performing Arts Aerosol Study](#)

Professional choral organizations therefore request that the requirement for plexiglass barriers be lifted, and we also request that rapid tests for artists and production crews be made available from the province as soon as possible, as per Premier Ford’s remarks on February 12, 2021.

It is essential that the professional choral music sector across Ontario, which impacts Canada’s culture, history, economy, tourism, education and mental health, be able to return to our vital work in the coming months. We are committed to working together to implement protocol, policy and procedures for the recovery and reopening of our sector, and rebuilding Ontario.

Sincerely,

Lydia Adams, Conductor and Artistic Director, Elmer Iseler Singers (*Toronto*)

Jessie Iseler, Co-Founder and General Manager, Elmer Iseler Singers (*Toronto*)

Dr. Lisette Canton, Founder and Artistic Director, Ottawa Bach Choir (*Ottawa*)

Ivars Taurins, Director, Tafelmusik Chamber Choir (*Toronto*)

Carol Kehoe, Executive Director, Tafelmusik Baroque Orchestra and Chamber Choir (*Toronto*)

Dr. Mark Vuorinen, Artistic Director, The Elora Singers (*Elora*); President, Choirs Ontario

Laura Adlers, Executive Director, The Elora Singers (*Elora*)

cc: The Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
The Honourable Lisa MacLeod, Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries
The Honourable Steven Guilbeault, Minister of Canadian Heritage
Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario
Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health for Toronto
Dr. David Mowat, Former Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario; Office of Recovery and Rebuild
Dr. Vera Etches, Medical Officer of Health for Ottawa
Dr. Nicola Mercer, Medical Officer of Health for Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph
Dr. Peter Jüni, Scientific Director, Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table
Carolyn Vesely, Chief Executive Officer, Ontario Arts Council
Claire Hopkinson, Director and Chief Executive Officer, Toronto Arts Council
Simon Brault, Director and Chief Executive Officer, Canada Council for the Arts

Appendix

Study on Air Flows in Opera

<https://gfm.aps.org/meetings/dfd-2020/5f5fc002199e4c091e67bf49> (November 22, 2020)

<http://www.internationalartsmanager.com/news/music/plexiglass-may-not-protect-musicians.html> (December 15, 2020)

Professors Howard Stone, Philippe Bourriane and Paul Kaneelil, Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering, Princeton University; Manouk Abkarian, CNRS, Université de Montpellier.

Performing Arts Aerosol Study/Plexiglas Barriers/Ventilation

International Coalition of Performing Arts Aerosol Study – Report 3

<http://bit.ly/3pxxsOk> (November 13, 2020)

Dr. Shelly Miller, Department of Mechanical Engineering, University of Colorado Boulder; Dr. Jelena Srebric, Department of Mechanical Engineering, University of Maryland.

Ventilation

Can mobile indoor air cleaners effectively reduce an indirect risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection by aerosols?

<http://bit.ly/3baj4Gy> (August 7, 2020)

C. Kähler, T. Fuchs, R. Hain, Institute of Fluid Mechanics and Aerodynamics, Military University of Munich.

National Choral Census

<https://www.choralcanada.org/national-choral-census.html>

Choral participation and activity in Ontario

https://choirsontario.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Choral_participation_activity_Ontario2017.pdf