

Dear choir members

I hope you're all keeping safe and well. It seems strange to think we would have done two concerts – and be well on the way to a third – since we last met. People's experiences of the lockdown vary so widely that it's difficult to find a way forward that will suit everyone, but while our normal activities are suspended, we still have to look ahead and plan, even while we recognise that plans we make may not come to reality.

I've been meeting with a group of music directors of symphonic choirs – that is, choirs who do large concerts with professional orchestras, such as the Halle, BBC orchestras, LSO, etc. This has been to support each other and to exchange ideas and information about our current activities. Some choirs have suspended activity altogether, sometimes because the orchestras to which they belong have furloughed all their staff. But most have continued some kind of online activity. It's become clear that, in music as in many other things, online activities have been a lifeline and given us extraordinary ways of making music that we might not have considered before. But paradoxically it has also underlined how irreplaceable and unique live, face-to-face interaction and music-making is.

Online rehearsals can never replace the live experience and are in some ways quite limited. But most choirs that have tried them have found them highly enjoyable and worthwhile. The Bournemouth Symphony Chorus, which is several weeks into doing these, still get weekly attendances of over 130. The Bach Choir (not the Sheffield one) have run 'come and sing' events which have attracted 400-500 participants from across the world. They are an excellent way of keeping in touch with the music we're doing, keeping on top of vocal condition, and perhaps most of all, maintaining the sense of ourselves as a musical community that's such an important part of singing in a choir.

We are hoping to do our first rehearsal with the full choir on June 30, as a 'taster' for when we start rehearsing again in September. Before that a small group of us will have a trial run to iron out any teething problems. As the lockdown relaxes gradually, it may be that 'live' rehearsals for small sections become possible which can be integrated with other choir members participating online. I'm also hoping to put together an online performance of the new arrangement I've done for the choir with the Black Dyke Band, for each of you to record individually. We'll make sure that any online rehearsals are as technically straightforward as possible, and send out clear instructions to enable even the least technologically confident to participate easily. I hope as many as possible will join us – it will be great to see you all again and feel we're making music together. If you have any questions please drop an email to me or to Anne or Marianne.

With very best wishes

Darius