

Press Release - Statement on Covid-19 and Collective Singing, December 2020

Collective Singing is an important part of culture and the economic ecosystem, and an essential part of many people's lives

The second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic has hit the cultural sector hard again

After some months of hope, the voices of choirs and vocal ensembles in most European countries have been silenced or limited again. With rehearsals and concerts having taken place outside or inside following strict hygiene and distancing rules and protocols, choirs and vocal ensembles across much of Europe are now restricted to unilateral virtual rehearsals at best. While some countries have simply forbidden all group activities or any activities outside peoples' homes, others have been allowing group activities in sports and other fields of culture, especially for young people, but banning collective singing totally. At the same time many freelancing professionals in the field have lost their income during a period which usually represents a peak in concert activities.

We are deeply concerned and strongly request a careful review of all global bans of collective singing

While a few cases of mass infections in choirs were reported in September and October 2020 (without certainty that infections happened during rehearsals or that the rules were followed by everybody), the vast majority of choirs which met during these months did not have any incidents. There are also examples where one singer tested positive, and others were not infected. These examples prove that it is possible to have physical rehearsals and concerts with professionals and amateurs alike, that do not have a higher risk than any other group activity. This is a risk that can be minimised through the respect of appropriate distances between singers and good ventilation, and the wearing of face masks. Singing is an essential part of human nature, and has many benefits for the individual and society. For around 37 million singers in Europe (see www.SingingEurope.org) a prolonged ban can have serious consequences including emotional and psychological distress. It is not singing that is dangerous, Covid-19 is.

Numerous freelancing professionals who are currently losing the basis of their working existence need government support to survive

While collective singing is a freetime activity for the majority of these 37 million singers, there are millions of professionals in the sector, contributing to the economic ecosystem. Wherever collective singing is not possible or banned, freelancing professionals are losing substantial parts of their income. With fewer and fewer singers prepared to pay for online rehearsals, and concerts being cancelled over the course of so many months, there are choirs and ensembles who can no longer survive, or are unable to prolong the contracts with their conductors. Furthermore, voice-trainers, solo-singers, pianists and other instrumentalists, who would usually be paid for their work in rehearsals and concerts, are left without any income. This is especially troubling during the Advent and Christmas period, which often represents the period of highest income for musicians and music professionals. If they are unable to benefit from government support for freelancers, the collective singing sector is in serious danger of suffering long-term damage that will take many years to repair. In addition, there is an indirect impact on travel agencies which can no longer organise choir trips, costume designers and publishers who cannot sell their goods and services, etc.

We therefore call on governments to:

1. **monitor the general spread and containment of the virus and on this basis allow rehearsals of choirs and vocal ensembles where other group activities are permitted, on the condition that all necessary measures for safety and hygiene are respected.**
2. **offer sufficient financial support, whether from the EU Recovery Fund or national/regional resources, to professionals in need within the choral sector, in order to ensure collective singing activities survive the pandemic.**

For more information on the situation of collective singing in Europe please contact the General Secretariat of the European Choral Association - Europa Cantat. You can find more information on our website, accessing www.EuropeanChoralAssociation.org/Covid-19. For any additional question, please write to info@EuropeanChoralAssociation.org