

SOCIETY FOR MUSIC EDUCATION IN IRELAND (SMEI) WEBINAR

24 AUGUST 2020 (1.0)

TRANSCRIPT

Good evening everyone.

For the past six weeks, I have been working with a project choir on Zoom to find out best practice in online choral environments. The choir itself is part of a larger initiative entitled Creative Arts Practice Online – or CAPO for short – which looks to examine the ways in which digital tools and resources can be used to enhance our current practice. This project is supported by the Department of Musicianship and Academic Studies at [CIT Cork School of Music](#) with the [Teaching and Learning Unit](#). This evening, I would like to share some of the insights, thoughts and ideas we have gathered along the way with the hope that they might prove useful to those who are considering – or being made to consider – digital alternatives during the weeks and months ahead.

Firstly, keep in mind that choral singing is just as much a social activity as it is a musical activity. If possible, ask that members keep their cameras on – no matter what sort of hair day it may be! For conductors, it also means that you can continue to “read the room” in much the same way you would at a normal, in-person rehearsal.

As regards microphones and audio options, enlist the help of a number of close – and trustworthy! – friends to experiment and find the right choice for you. Clicking the “Original Sound” button on Zoom is not – as I found out – a simple fix; indeed, when using the mic on my laptop, it actually made the sound worse.

Take comfort in knowing that rehearsal time and pace appear to be unchanged when in digital environments. We found that 60 – 75 minutes seemed to be the ideal rehearsal length for an adult choir; it probably will be shorter in primary and secondary school environments.

Do set aside time to forward on music in advance of the rehearsal rather than providing it on the day or the night before as I did! Some choir members, strangely, do like to prepare!

Even though it was an online experience, we did attempt one of our rehearsals in masks. Yes, it was uncomfortable; yes, it did fog up our glasses; yes, it did look strange; but, for most of the people on the call, it was just about possible. And actually, the experiment threw up a more practical issue: how do you manage taking a sip of water during masked rehearsals?

Be aware that local environments are directly and indirectly affecting tonal production. Two-thirds of our choir admitted to either singing louder or quieter than normal; both have the potential to

create dangerous habits so it's important that choir members are encouraged to sing as naturally as possible. Of course, this is easier said than done. It depends how accommodating your family are to hearing you sing away while they are trying to catch up on the latest episode of Corrie or Geordie Shore.

Before I finish, one possible add-on for your Zoom rehearsal. When rehearsing a piece that has a strong geographical connection (in our case, it was the "Gartan Mother's Lullaby", a traditional tune from Co. Donegal), consider using Google Maps, not only to identify where in the world the music comes from, but to drop the little gingerbread man on a nearby road to establish a real-life, visual connection with the landscape, its features, its colour scheme, and so on.

A huge thank you to the committee of the SMEI for organising tonight's webinar. If you wish to find out more about the CAPO project, please visit csm.cit.ie/capo or feel free to email me directly at Thomas.Doyle@cit.ie.

Thank you!