Choir Practices That I Plan to Use After the Pandemic

Adan Fernandez
California Lutheran University, Chaffee College
Glendale, California
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This past year has been extremely difficult for the choral community since many of us, both directors and choristers, have been let go or have dropped out, reduced in hours, or simply reduced to just getting by. We have had to redefine our jobs in order to stay relevant to our churches, schools, and communities.

It should be no surprise that adapting to new technology was absolutely critical to not only keeping our programs going but also for maintaining our employment status. We have learned about virtual choirs, editing, plug-ins, community, prayers, practice tracks, and about connecting with our choirs outside of the rehearsal. There is nothing good about Covid but, for me, adapting my choirs to the social distancing strategies has introduced methods of working that I will keep throughout my career after the pandemic.

Virtual Choirs

Thousands of virtual choirs were created during Covid. My choirs recorded about fourteen virtual recordings; my university recorded about twelve. Virtual recordings are time consuming and frustrating but offer many possibilities for growth of the choir members. For example, many in my choir were forced to actually learn their parts as opposed to relying on their section leaders or persons they usually sang next to.

Our choirs learned how to perform the music. With everyone's face looking into a camera, it became impossible to hide insecurities and distracting quirks as we sang. I commend all singers who were able to take part in virtual choirs for this reason. It takes courage to put one's self out there in this way and then to judge one's own video. The choir videos forced us to connect with our music as communicative partners. Our videos connected with people around the world and will continue to do so, something of a surprise for some of the singers.

Editing future videos will also provide directors a deeper understanding of how they need to shape their rehearsals. When I edit my singers in Logic, I see exactly how their breath is functioning, where the tone is not supported and on pitch, etc. These factors teach us, as directors, how to be clearer in our instructions regarding consonants, releases, and breath. Every single note lets us learn more about our singers in a way that hearing an entire ensemble regularly does not.

Rehearsal Tracks

I will continue to use rehearsal tracks. During Covid, I had to make several rehearsal tracks on my MIDI keyboard and Logic Pro software. I started very plainly but then used more plugins like Spitfire Audio for orchestral instruments

and changed tempos. I would also conduct in-rehearsal videos for singers who needed more clarity for cutoffs, tempi, and breath support. I noticed something else happening when I made all of these items available. My choirs no longer relied on a normal rehearsal to learn their music.

Many choirs practice hard to learn their music throughout the week, but for those students who do not read music or have little music training, having these custom rehearsal tracks created an equitable approach to choir singing that felt more inclusive since it met people where they were. My choirs practiced more because they had an obstacle removed, and the music became, once again, central to their practice.

Virtual Rehearsals

My choirs will be rehearsing in person once it is safe again, but that does not mean that I am finished with virtual rehearsals forever. Rather, I will include virtual sessions in my schedule of rehearsals. One reason is because it is accessible to our older choir members who cannot drive here at night or if they are sick and cannot come to rehearsals. My in-person rehearsals will also have an online component since it allows the sick to feel like a part of our choral group. Other reasons to include virtual rehearsals from time to time is to address problems that the director can demonstrate for the choir to imitate. These need not be long rehearsals but should have a specific focus.

Community

During Covid, our sense of community was lost or severely affected. Our choir members scattered. Many of us at schools and churches have to rebuild. Support for one another is going to be key in creating a self-sustaining network of singers and directors. I noticed that many of our newest singers were the ones who were always on the edge of the choral community. These are the people we need to reach out to and make sure they feel included and are vital members of the choir program. Our choirs need constant encouragement.

The choral community/our choirs have never been tested like Covid has challenged us. Conductors rely on the weekly services at our churches or rehearsals; efforts to connect with our singers was at the center of our programs, and every prayer, follow up, phone call, or zoom call was

important. The same effort needs to be made in the years following the pandemic.

Including online virtual rehearsals, choir tracks, and virtual choir projects in our music programs after Covid will be a huge help in revitalizing our choirs as we rebuild. This hybrid format may be difficult for many to adapt to. Given the fact that Covid has put many of our choral projects on hold, I hope to come away from this pandemic with more resources to better equip me to work successfully with our choirs. CT