

## Recommendations for the resumption of rehearsals and concerts of Austrian choirs in the present exceptional situation

### I) Preamble

Austria's choir landscape is large and diverse and is anchored in all artistic and social areas making indispensable contribution to the cultural, social and economic life in Austria.

This paper proposes temporary measures for a responsible resumption of rehearsals and concerts of Austrian choirs in the current situation of the corona virus pandemic so that rehearsals and concerts can be resumed as soon as possible.

Within this context, it is a challenge to implement current government recommendations for action for the current ways of conduct for specific professional groups and situations- especially in relation to professional, semi-professional and amateur choirs. In order to minimize the risk of infection during the resumption of concert activity, experts of the Austrian choral scene have worked the following suggestions and possible measures for indoor rehearsals and concerts. The experts explicitly invite medical science to examine these proposals for their effectiveness. The individual measures must be adapted accordingly in the light of new findings and experience.

It is important for the panel of experts to note that all listed measures serve only as an emergency solution for implementing , as a way of temporarily bridging this exceptional situation. A gradual return to the normal situation is indispensable for artistic life just like for many other aspects of human life.

### II) Choirs in Austria

Choirs in Austria are distinguished into:

- Professional choirs, whose singers earn their living by singing (in Austria that is mainly choirs of operas and theatres)
- Semi-professional choirs, whose singers do not for the most part earn their living by singing but who act professionally along with professionals in music productions (in choirs and orchestras)
- Amateur choirs, whose singers do not earn their living by singing. They are often conducted by professional artists.

The Austrian government has announced separate regulations and simplified measures for the professional area. As has been confirmed to the authors of this paper, these regulations are to be applied identically in semi-professional areas. The following proposals apply to all three groups.

### III) The fundamental principle of personal responsibility

It is the personal responsibility of the singer to decide whether they participate in rehearsals and concerts. As far as children's and youth choirs are concerned, their legal representatives have to be informed that their children should not be allowed to attend choir rehearsals in the event of their suffering from colds or infectious diseases. Singers disregarding the current regulations can be excluded temporarily from rehearsals and concerts when in order to curb the risk of infection.

### IV) Measures taken by those responsible

#### *Information and communication*

- Informing the choir members about Covid 19 and possible symptoms
- Issuing a rehearsal charter and communicating it to the choir members

#### *Choir management and organisation*

- Digitalization of all administrative work as far as possible, including the communication with the singers
- Reduction of personal contacts between singers and members of the artistic team to an absolute minimum
- Issue of stage plans regarding positions of singers during rehearsals and concerts in accordance with the possibilities there

#### *Possible rehearsal forms to minimize risks*

- Increased digital transmission of rehearsal content by choral conductors
- Intensified self- study on the part of singers
- Adaption of selection of works
- Rehearsals in small groups and simultaneous rehearsals (reduction of group size)
- Exclusion of listeners during rehearsals
- Moving rehearsals to more spacious rooms or outdoors
- Increasing the distance beyond the lower limit, if the room allows it

#### *Possible risk-minimizing hygiene measures*

- Wearing surgical masks on entering and leaving the site of rehearsal
- Provision of disinfectant or anti-bacterial soap and disposable towels at the entrance to the rehearsal rooms
- Disinfection of all surfaces likely to be touched before and after rehearsals as well as between rehearsal units of the various choir groups
- Disinfection of all equipment used during rehearsals (pencils, music sheets)
- Best possible airing of the site of rehearsal before, during, between and after rehearsal (minimum of ten minutes per hour)

- Use of room ventilation if available
- Appointment of a team to check that hygiene regulations are observed and is available to answer questions in this regard

*Possibilities of risk-minimizing execution of rehearsals*

- Regular monitoring of compliance with the legally prescribed minimum distance
- Application of floor markings to visually indicate the minimum distance
- Positioning of seats with the minimum distance to the left and right as required by law with a minimum distance to the front in the direction of speaking/singing

See for instance the following table published by the Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences:

Number of people	3m2/ Singer	buffer	= total m2
<5	15m2	10m2	25m2
<15	45m2	20m2	65m2
<30	90m2	30m2	120m2
<50	150m2	30m2	180m2
>51	Number x 3m2	30m2	...

Source (called up on 05.05.2020):

<https://www.musikk.no/nmr/om-oss/medlemsorganisasjoner/ressurser-for-medlemmer/veileder-smittevern-for-musikkovelser>

- Off-centre positioning of rows in order to increase distance to the nearest person in the direction of speaking/ singing
- If needed, provision of individual protection devices ( face shields, surgical masks, walls of acrylic glass) for the artistic team
- Clearly visible signs indicating the protective measures to be followed
- Avoidance of gathering of people on entering and leaving the site of rehearsal as well as potential hotspots by progressive entering and leaving the rehearsal (one-way system if possible)
- Provision of cloakroom facilities so that the site of rehearsal is only entered with objects that are relevant for rehearsing
- Handing over music sheets at the beginning of a project observing all measures of protection. The keepers of the archives wear gloves and surgical masks.
- Supplying spare face shields and surgical masks
- Abstaining from sweat inducing warming –up exercises
- Progressive breaks during rehearsal
- Use of sanitary rooms keeping the minimum distance- if need be, only individually

*Voluntary use of contact tracing*

- The use of the STOPP CORONA App of the Red Cross or other apps is recommended on a voluntary basis.

## V) Measures on the part of the singers

### *Hygiene measures*

- Entering the site of rehearsal wearing surgical masks
- Washing hands/ disinfection immediately before entering the site of rehearsal
- Disinfection of personal equipment (pencils, music, stand, laminated music sheets/folders, face shield and water bottle)

### *Possibilities of risk-minimizing rehearsals*

- Entering the site of rehearsal only with objects that are relevant for rehearsing
- Exclusively personal use of personal equipment (pencil, music stand, laminated music sheets/folders, face shield, surgical mask, water bottle)
- Singing with surgical mask and/or face shield if required by the government (artistically meaningful only to a limited extent!)
- Regular change of surgical masks as soon as they are moist (singers must bring their own exchange masks)
- Individual catering during breaks
- Staying outdoors during breaks (with surgical masks if required) if possible
- Use of sanitary facilities in compliance with the minimum distance/if necessary only individually

### *Voluntary use of contact tracing*

- The use of the STOPP CORONA App of the Red Cross or similar apps on a voluntary basis

## VI) Staging of concerts

Beyond rehearsal activities, the aim is to make concert activities possible for choirs and promoters.

### *Choirs as promoters*

- In order to enable choirs to put on concerts clear guidelines concerning regulations of distance, concepts of hygiene, management of admission and exit both on and behind the stage, in the auditorium and foyer are required.
- In order to minimize the risk of infection at concerts it is recommended that the above measures be applied so that the risk is reduced to a minimum.
- For the audience the governmental decrees for events apply
- Organisation of open air concerts
- Live broadcast (sound) of the choir or parts of the choir from separate rooms (e.g. choir/orchestral works or larger choir formations)

### *Choirs engaged by promoters*

- In order to minimize the risk of infection at concerts, the measures for the reduction of risks listed above can be applied.
- The governmental decrees for events apply.

### VII) Advanced training and courses

The Austrian choral scene offers a big variety of courses and advanced training, its promoters advocate further continuous training for choirs. These are mostly non-profit associations with the aim of improving the training of committed singers and to enable them to work with professional musicians and renowned personalities of the national and international choral scene.

These events are of great importance for the further development of Austrian choirs in terms of quality. Activities and programs offered are developed with experienced musicians and pedagogues according to demands. Numerous events of various content are carried out per year (vocal choir weeks, seminars for soloists, technical lectures for choir singers and choir leaders, musical promotion for children and youth etc.) In order to minimize the risk of infection when resuming courses and advanced training, the measures listed above can be applied as follows:

#### *Basic principle of personal responsibility*

See III)

Measures taken by those responsible

- See IV)
- Forgoing of final presentations if necessary

#### *Measures on behalf of the singers*

See V)

#### *Further measures*

- In the case of courses and advanced training with overnight accommodation and catering, the regulations for tourism and hospitality as issued by the government have to be observed.
- For the resumption of courses (just like for choir practice) the above measures serve as a bridge to a gradual return to normality. Should it already be possible for courses to take place in the summer months, a mandatory PCR test not older than two days may be required.

## VIII) Conclusion and final statements

Singing has a special status in the wide field of music. It rates among the fundamental cultural techniques of humans and shapes society as a socio-cultural action independent of artistic goals.

This scientifically proved fact explains how many a headline in the past weeks distorts facts and threatens to stigmatize parts of our society. The act of singing as such does not jeopardize health just as little as the food service industry, sport or commerce as such are harmful to health. What is hazardous to health is the disregard of those measures that minimize the risk of infection. Personal responsibility and the respect for fellow humans are the key to success in all areas of society.

The panel of experts asks the policy makers of the Republic of Austria to enact regulations for a near-term extemporary restart of rehearsals and concerts of the Austrian choirs with proportionality and towards the goal of maintaining the socio-cultural life in our country. They also request further steps towards the normalization of rehearsal and concert activities as soon as possible.

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