

Message from Fran Andre from the NVN Voice Leaders' Forum - posted 18th March 2020

Hello friends 😊 I did a Zoom call with my choir last night, and just wanted to share how it went in case it's useful for anyone.

PRACTICALS: I had around 30 of my choir show up for the Zoom call. I thought that people might have issues getting on to Zoom for the first time if they haven't used it before, so I set 20 minute time slots for each section, and then had a half an hour session at the end when everyone came back and connected as a whole group. It was a real success, and I've been touched this morning on our shared Facebook page to feel how much it meant to everyone to connect in this way.

SUPPORT: Luckily one member of my choir had a paid Zoom membership and has had a lot of experience with it, so she was my tech person (hallelujah for her!), and when people came on the call who were having technical issues, she muted herself and tried to speak to them either using the chat function in Zoom, but also using our group Facebook page (messenger) or mobile if people were having problems with sound. I could then carry on leading the session. We managed to get everyone on in the end which was great!

SOCIALLY WHAT WE DID: Firstly, I showed everyone how to use the functions - mute, stop video, chat, gallery / screen view, and reactions. We used the applause button to celebrate our doctors and NHS workers (we have three doctors in the choir, so it was lovely to big them up). We played a couple of fun games to help everyone learn the chat functions. 1. I asked everyone to write creative ways people would be spending their time during physical distancing. It was lovely for the choir to see each others ideas for things they could do at home to keep them going. 2. I invited everyone to use the 'send message privately' function to send messages to three people in the choir to cheer them up. It could be things like 'I love your smile', 'I like your new haircut', 'I love your funky red jumper'. Anything really just for a bit of fun. They also loved this as it was a fun way to learn Zoom.

I also had a sharing round in the smaller sectional groups where everyone got to share how they were feeling - 1 minute or so each. This was invaluable for them I think to all feel heard and received in their difficulties around the impacts of what's happening right now. Lots of empathy shared

Lastly, one of the most lovely things we did when the whole choir was together at the end was for everyone to share a bit of 'interpretive dance' or a 'movement'. So I called everyone's name out and each person did their movement, so sweet 😊 Then we did a three word check in going round the whole choir as well.

MUSICALLY WHAT WE DID: We sang two songs. Now of course they don't get to hear each other, but what I did to make it as satisfying as possible was to have my mini rig (music player) amplifying a backing track which our pianist recorded (we are a gospel choir so I do work each week with a pianist), which I'd also added all the vocal parts onto (so it sounds like a full choir). I then played this over Zoom and sang the lead part as well. They all sang along at home (on mute, as with the time lag singing together doesn't work). We had one heartfelt song which I encouraged people to sing from their hearts looking directly at the camera, so it looked like everyone was looking directly at you when you saw them on screen which was lovely. We then also had one upbeat song with dance moves and I encouraged everyone to dance and move - it was lovely to see everyone on screen smiling and bopping away even if it was out of sync! You don't get the musical satisfaction of harmony singing with others, but doing it this way with all the parts coming back at them over Zoom did I think make it as satisfying as it could be.

An essential tip if you are the host broadcasting music over Zoom is to use the original sound feature. This means the sounds quality is really good with no cutting in and out <https://www.youtube.com/watch...>

LAST TIPS: It is really important I think for it to be tightly held so it's a satisfying experience. So it worked well for me as the leader to be really master of services and lead all the activities. There were a few points where everyone was speaking at the same time and it got a bit hectic. It's good for everyone to mute their microphone if they are not speaking as then it cuts down on any unnecessary hiss.

It was a great success and people got a lot out of it! I will be doing it again next week, and am going to try and do more actual song teaching, so if anyone's interested I will let you know how that goes too.

Hope this helps anyone wondering how a Zoom choir session might work. Happy to answer any questions anyone has. Big love everyone, hope you are navigating this time with gentleness xxxx