



Making Music
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The Duchess of Kent *Patron*
Debbie Wiseman OBE *President*

**SUPPORTING AND
CHAMPIONING
LEISURE-TIME MUSIC**

Oliver Dowden MP
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport
Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
100 Parliament St, Westminster
London SW1A 2BQ

22 June 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing to you as Chair of Singing Network UK, a network of 27 organisations involved in singing in choirs. Between us, we represent most of the 40,000 choirs in the UK.

The demographics of choirs cover all kinds of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, all ages (mother and toddler groups, schoolchildren, adults up to their 90s) and include many with mental or physical health problems, and some of society's most vulnerable and marginalised.

We would like to impress on you that a clear plan of how to resume singing is now urgently needed to support the mental well-being of the 2.2 million people who sing regularly in choirs and that of the nation, including audiences, congregations and families.

There is also a significant economic impact on the livelihoods of musicians, venues, music publishers and other suppliers, which is currently jeopardised by the lack of group singing; and on the income of charities, for which choirs usually fundraise millions a year.

We wanted to let you know, from our combined vast experience with choirs and singers, what we believe is now needed, so that singing in groups can safely resume as soon as possible:

1. a UK-wide coordinated approach (working with devolved administrations)
2. clear guidance which can be practically implemented in a variety of circumstances (one-to-one/group teaching, church choirs, community choirs, choral societies, youth groups), in schools, professional, amateur and community settings
3. a differentiated approach to rehearsals, teaching and public performances
4. research to establish more conclusively the aerosol transmission risks (and therefore possible mitigations) for Covid-19 when groups sing in enclosed spaces
5. support for venues and spaces, from schools to community halls, churches to arts centres, so that they are able to open again
6. support (especially financial) for professional musicians (conductors, accompanists, music creators, teachers etc.) crucial to the return (and flourishing) of singing

An underpinning need has also become apparent: that of broadband and digital training for all, so there is no-one left behind in a world which will remain at least partially online for a while.

Of course we understand safety must come first, but we also know that the nation's mental health is fragile as a consequence of the pandemic, and that group singing can powerfully mitigate loneliness, anxiety and lack of social connection, for people of all ages.

We would therefore ask you to give this matter urgent consideration and help the nation regain a happy state of mind, as well as a healthy body and wallet.

/cont'd

/cont'd, Singing Network UK

Cc Caroline Dinenage MP, Minister of State for Digital and Culture
Cc Baroness Barran MBE, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Civil Society and DCMS)
Cc Fiona Hyslop MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Fair Work and Culture
Cc Dafydd Elis-Thomas MS, Deputy Minister for Culture, Sport and Tourism
Cc Carál Ní Chuilín MLA, Minister for Communities, Department for Communities

Yours faithfully,



Barbara Eifler,
Chair, **Singing Network UK**
Chief Executive, **Making Music**

Marie Benton, Chief Executive, **The Choir With No Name**
Caroline Bithell, Chair, **Natural Voice Network**
Leslie East OBE, Chair, **Association of British Choral Directors**
Manvinder Rattan, CEO, **Sing For Pleasure**
Ben Parry, Artistic Director, **National Youth Choirs of Great Britain**
Derrick Rowlands, Executive Member, **Welsh Association Male Voice Choirs**
Jennifer Coleman-Peers, Interim Chief Executive, **The Voices Foundation**
Clare Edwards, Director of Learning and Events, **Young Voices**
John Croft, Chairman, **National Association of Choirs**
Heidi Pegler, Chair, **Association of Teachers of Singing**
Phillip Tolley, **British Choirs on the Net**
Neil Chippington, Chair, **Choir Schools' Association**
Tessa Marchington, Managing Director, **Music in Offices**
Martin Baglow, Chairman, **British Association of Barbershop Singers**
Hugh Morris, Director, **Royal School of Church Music**
Nancy Philbin, Chair, **Ladies Association of British Barbershop Singers**
Margaret Oliver, Chair of Trustees, **British Kodály Academy**
Sir Andrew Parmley, Chief Executive, **Royal College of Organists**