

Cohesion

Overall, whilst we are a friendly choir, there was a desire for more social gatherings and for the pub visit after the rehearsal to be better known. Social events could include other sections and after concert drinks. A WhatsApp group for each section was raised numerous times. Your photo being sent to your section or put on the website so that you can be recognised was also suggested. The email group Social Animals can be rejuvenated to include coffee mornings and wine tastings, walks etc. Interacting with other choirs such as learning days was proposed as well as choir away days and team building days.

During rehearsals, the limitation on space makes it difficult to interact with other members – this might be addressed by mixing up the sections and:

- Introducing ourselves to the people sitting either side of us
- Getting existing members to sit next to new members and avoiding sitting with the same people every week
- Sitting in a different place every week
- Sitting in a different place before and after break
- Name badges for the first two rehearsals of each term, showing how long you have been in the choir
- Sharing food as a section on concert days
- Finishing rehearsals early to have drinks occasionally
- our Music team creating a topic/question on which you need to engage with perhaps 3/4 people around you for their views for just 5/10 minutes each week
- Mix up both 1 and 2 sections when we sing as one section
- have some smaller singing groups which could encourage social intercourse
- Making the basses sit closer together
- Have a longer interval and an earlier finish

Other suggestions for increasing social cohesion during rehearsals included:

- Asking people to put away their mobile phones
- Having “families” across the voice parts
- Electing a “social coordinator”

Voice tests

In short, the majority found the voice test daunting but necessary. Overall most people found Neil and Michael put them at ease.

Suggestions included:

- having a room to warm up
- a less formal space to hold the voice test
- having a selection of music that you could choose from
- vocal exercises be used instead of a piece of music
- a small group vocal test instead of an individual test
- sing to a small group to gain confidence first

- sight reading test instead of a piece of music
- warming up with arpeggios etc before singing the piece
- being more punctual

Onboarding

Do you have any tips for newcomers, either joining your section or another?

The overall response from all sections was to be open, friendly, talk to your neighbour, make it clear you're new and don't be afraid to ask questions. A lot of people said that it can be daunting because we're a big choir but that on the whole we're very friendly and welcoming.

There was quite a strong emphasis on new members having to be proactive, suggestions like:

'embrace all the choir has to offer'

'get stuck in – volunteer to do things'

'find your voice rep and keep reminding him/her of who you are'

'introduce yourself to people'

'come to the pub if you can'

And a few suggestions (mainly from the tenors and basses) about getting on top of the music and 'doing your homework' as well as reassurances that we get a lot of help with things like pronunciation so don't be put off by works being in a foreign language.

Interestingly, a lot of people suggested that new members try and ensure that they sit next to someone new at each rehearsal to help with the social mix but a few people thought it would be helpful to sit next to the same person for the first few weeks, presumably as a means of 'shadowing' (this term was mentioned a few times, as was 'buddying' – but that applies more to the second part of this question).

It was also suggested that new members wear name badges for the first few rehearsals.

And inversely, do you have any ideas for how existing members can welcome and engage new members?

There was a more varied response and more specific suggestions for this part of the question.

The idea of 'buddying' came up quite a bit. Some suggested that it could be on an informal level such as just being there to answer questions and to point out who various committee members are. But there were also suggestions for there being nominated buddies (or mentors, greeters, guardians) to look after new members.

Also, quite a few suggestions about wearing name badges – but it wasn't always clear who should wear them and for how long. The committee members perhaps?

There was support from all voice parts for moving around and changing where you sit each week so that new members don't get the feeling that there are reserved seats. A lot of people felt that there was a risk of 'cliqueyness' and this was mentioned specifically by one member as a problem in the 1st Altos (reserving seats apparently). But as one new member pointed out, what is seen as being cliquey by some, can be seen by others as friends chatting and catching up.

Some specific views and suggestions:

- No phones and change seating to avoid cliques
- A general or sectional social a couple of times a term
- Accompany a new member next to you to the refreshment queue and buy them a coffee
- We're usually quite good with the initial welcome – remember to carry it through the following rehearsals
- When new members arrive, they usually gravitate to the table where the scores are being distributed. To avoid this, have the membership secretary and some voice reps in the entrance as a welcoming party
- Small photos of members in each voice part

Some people felt that the rehearsals are so busy that we don't have time to acknowledge the new members..... there were a few suggestions to allocate 5 minutes in the first two rehearsals for the new members to be more formally introduced, especially to their voice rep, and then to have the opportunity to chat with the people around them. This would give everyone a chance to register who the new members are. Some people acknowledged that they had asked if someone was new, only to discover that they had been a member for a while!

Again, the overall response was to be friendly and welcoming, make a point of spending some time with someone you know is new. Be prepared to answer their questions and to be as helpful as you can. The feeling was that both new and existing members have to make an effort.

Musicianship

What other activities would you like to see in WCS?

74 written responses: 35 Sopranos, 21 Altos, 8 Tenors, 10 Basses

Summary: There's a clear appreciation, and demand, for workshops, with a focus on vocal coaching, and several suggestions that we could have more social gatherings throughout the season – or make more of the pub after rehearsals.

About 10 of the written responses were people saying either they were happy with the level of activity in this area, or that they didn't have time with their other commitments to do any more.

Of the rest:

40% of the responses were related to workshops:

- vocal coaching workshops
- working on a piece with a composer, such as our sessions with Cecilia McDowall and Will Todd
- Come and Sing days
- events like the Sonoro workshops
- more true sectionals, e.g. Altos with an alto professional

18% suggested social gatherings to foster cohesion across the choir:

- post-rehearsal pub visits
- More social mixing between voice parts
- Bring and share dos etc.
- Christmas Party
- group outings such as to professional choral concerts

7% made suggestions for performances to raise our game/profile:

- upmarket venues
- tours – international and UK
- joint performances with other choirs
- take part in big events,
- concerts outside London

7% would like small group singing

5% suggested we should be encouraged to do more homework between rehearsals and to use aids such as Choraline

Single responses:

- Sing more well-known works
- More note bashing
- Less note bashing
- The seminar on Mozart Neil gave on Zoom during Lockdown was interesting
- Love Neil's vocal coaching in rehearsals
- Offer a bursary to 6th formers at Wimbledon schools.
- Keep sending through news of other events/choir concerts
- Coaching sessions prior to rehearsals (paid for separately)
- Sectionals
- Mix up the repertoire – incl gospel, folk etc.
- Scrambling
- Choir could sing through works written by our budding composers – fun and helpful?
- Singing other parts to develop an understanding of the music
- Guest speaker at rehearsal from a professional choir, with a Q&A to inspire (not a sales pitch)
- Occasionally spend a rehearsal sight-reading fun stuff
- Special interest groups (not necessarily organised by choir) for members who enjoy e.g. madrigals, barbershop etc.
- Sitting in concert formation in rehearsals
- Less cake

Repertoire

This will be addressed by Neil Ferris in the AGM.

Performances

The venues preferred were the Royal Festival Hall and Cadogan Hall. After that it was St John's Waterloo and Southwark Cathedral.

The soloists that were noted mostly were Roddy Williams and Helena Dix. Also, Martin James Bartlett and the soloist for the Duke Ellington.

The orchestras that people enjoyed were Roland Perrin, Florigelium, the Blue Planet Orchestra, Charivari ensembles and the Philharmonia.

The repertoire that attracted most comment was the Da Vinci Requiem, Bach B minor Mass and Carmina Burana. Also noted were Monteverdi Vespers, Duke Ellington, Brahms German Requiem, American Choral music and Rossini Petite Messe Solennelle.

Success

The majority of respondents had a view of success for themselves as individuals and separately for the choir as a whole.

For individuals, the most common indication of success was technical singing and sightreading improvement. The second was confidence and preparedness – feeling confident and prepared for performances. Third was enjoyment.

For the choir as a whole, the greatest number saw success as choral unity, quality of sound and stunning performances – and this is closely allied with ensuring audience enjoyment and engagement. The next most popular response was recognition for the choir at home and abroad – as we had for the Da Vinci Requiem. Next is singing challenging music of a wide variety. This was closely followed by professionalism and hard work.

Completing the Da Vinci Recording is at the same level of mention – and others responded that success would include further commissions and premieres and recordings.

Performing at great venues in and around London was next on the list and just behind that, performing at the Proms.

A few saw success as having no difficulty in filling venues.

Profile

No of respondents: 122

This was an open-ended question that initiated a whole variety of answers, which are grouped together to produce a more transparent summary.

Answer	% of all answers
Tie up with local events, such as Wimbledon Book Fest, Wimbledon International Music Festival, Wimbledon Tennis – perform at the WIMF and become the official choir for Wimbledon Tennis	12.2
Commission new works that give us similar exposure to that of the Da Vinci Requiem	12.2
Sing in the Proms	10.6
Exposure in local and national media, such as newspapers, magazines, radio and television	10.6
Increased advertising through social media	10.1
Participate in national and international choir competitions and music festivals	8.3
Make recordings to play in radio and YouTube	7.3
Get back to the Festival of Remembrance or to similar events	6.5
We are already doing all the right things; carry on as we do	6.5
Go on national tours	5.7
Exposure through choral experts	4.0
Regularly obtain formal audience feed-back	4.0
Develop a relationship with a well-known orchestra and participate in their concerts	4.0
Increase exposure through choral experts	4.0
Joint performances with other choirs	3.2
Organise “Come and Sing” events	3.2
Community outreach	3.2
Change name officially to Wimbledon Choral	2.4
Advertising in local schools	2.4
Obtain corporate sponsorship	1.6

Lockdown

Written responses were received as follows:

Sopranos	53
Altos	46
Tenors	11
Basses	18

Total	128

The responses were universally supportive and thankful for what we are currently doing.

In terms of what members said they would like to happen:

1. Weekly Zoom meetings came top of the list (39)
2. Online Video/Zoom vocal exercises / warm up exercises (27)
3. Virtual choir recordings (22) (Members might need to be made aware of the financial implications of doing these)
4. Talks such as Neil's on the Mozart Mass – perhaps using different (guest) presenters (16)
5. Sectional Zoom meetings (8)
6. Socially distanced meetings/rehearsals either by voice part or with voices from each part (7)
7. Online rehearsals (6)
8. Online training sessions (5)
9. Singing outdoors – where permitted (3)
10. 'Sing-alongs' (2)
11. Organising 'help' for the community either practically or financially (2)
12. Online games and quizzes (2)
13. One to one online singing lessons (2)
14. Being given a new piece to learn – e.g. the Panufnik (2)

Single mention ideas:

- I. Regular voice rep contact
- II. 'Breakout' chat
- III. Being provided something to learn from memory
- IV. Our zoom meetings being recorded and made available for those not able to attend
- V. Being provided a program for personal practice

It was mentioned that even when the choir is able to return, this may not include those of our membership classed as 'vulnerable'. Do we have a record of which members fall into that category and how will we ensure that they are still catered for?