

COVID guidance hits wrong note for singers

Musicians object to guidance on indoor singing that is more restrictive than before the last national lockdown.

A number of leading music organisations have written to the Government objecting to updated guidance that allows only 6 people to sing together indoors. This is because indoor singing activity should be treated the same as other non-professional music activity and indoor organised sports activity, as was the case between August and December 2020. This campaign has been supported by The Incorporated Society of Musicians, Making Music, the Association of British Choral Directors, the Association of British Orchestras and the member organisations of Singing Network UK.

While the public health situation remains a concerning one, [research](#) shows that singing is no more dangerous in terms of COVID-19 transmission than shouting, speaking loudly or physical exercise. It appears that choirs are being treated as simply a social pastime, rather than an organised activity overseen by a recognised body (usually a charity or business) which is able to put effective safety protocols in place.

Unless this situation is addressed, there will be a significant negative impact on the wellbeing of over 2 million participants in singing groups across the country and will also have a financial impact, as ticket sales have to be reimbursed for upcoming performances. In addition, many of the UK's 40,000 choirs are led by professionals who remain dependent on Government support until they can restart their professional life.

Making Music Chief Executive Barbara Eifler said:

'2.2 million singers and 40,000 choirs across the UK have been preparing to return to rehearsals this week, writing extensive risk assessments, putting a host of mitigations in place and buying singing facemasks in vast quantities, only to find themselves stopped in their tracks a day after Step 3 had happened, and without warning. The government's own research concluded last year that singing is no more dangerous than shouting. We urge the government to bring singing in terms of guidance in line with other organised activity by recognised bodies, such as non-professional music activity and indoor sports.'

ISM Chief Executive Deborah Annetts said:

'It is clearly a mistake from the Government to make the guidance on indoor singing more restrictive than before the last national lockdown. While research shows that choirs offer many benefits for mental and physical well-being, it is not simply a casual social pastime. The Government should recognise that it is an organised activity overseen by an official body that is able to implement effective safety protocols and led by professionals that want to return to work. Public health guidance should be helping the safe return of millions of singers and thousands of choirs across the country, rather than forcing the cancellation of upcoming performances.'

Association of British Orchestras Director Mark Pemberton said:

'The furore over these unexpected restrictions on singing is not confined to the amateur sector alone. The UK's world-leading professional orchestras rely on amateur choruses, and as a result of these restrictions, concerts that have already been on the market, and sold out, will need to be cancelled and re-

programmed. It makes no sense for 'non-professionals' to be treated differently to 'professionals' when taking part in a performance run by a professional organisation working to Covid secure protocols. If the Government's own research shows that singing is safe, why change the rules now?'

About the ISM

The [Incorporated Society of Musicians](#) (ISM) is the UK's professional body for musicians and a nationally-recognised subject association for music. Since 1882, we have been dedicated to promoting the importance of music and protecting the rights of those working in the music profession.

We support nearly 11,000 music professionals across the UK and Ireland with our unrivalled legal advice and representation, comprehensive insurance and specialist services. Our members come from all areas of the music profession and from a wide variety of genres and musical backgrounds.

We campaign tirelessly in support of musicians' rights, music education and the profession as a whole. We are a financially independent not-for-profit organisation with no political affiliation. This independence allows us the freedom to campaign on any issue affecting musicians.

For more information, please contact bruce.rothberg@ism.org

About Making Music

Making Music has championed leisure-time music groups since 1935 across the UK with practical services, artistic development opportunities and by providing a collective voice for its members. We represent over 3,500 groups made up of around 190,000 musicians of all types, genres and abilities. We help them run their groups so they can get on with making music: www.makingmusic.org.uk

About the Association of British Orchestras

The ABO is the national body representing the collective interests of professional orchestras, youth ensembles and the wider classical music industry throughout the UK. The ABO's mission is to enable and support an innovative, collaborative and sustainable orchestral sector by providing advice, support, intelligence and information to the people who make British orchestras a global success.

www.abo.org.uk
@aborchestras

About the Association of British Choral Directors

abcd is the only UK organisation devoted entirely to supporting those leading choral music, amateur and professional. It is committed to promoting opportunities for the professional development of everyone leading singing, in the classroom or the community, and runs an extensive programme of courses, as well as providing advice and support for all choral leaders.

www.abcd.org.uk