

As you will see when you read this Songbirds Easter Newsletter, we are in for a busy time in the months ahead! There are recordings to be done, songs to be rehearsed in break out rooms and the possibility of a Winter Concert (!?!). The Committee has been looking at the future (without the aid of a crystal ball of course) and is feeling cautiously positive about resuming live rehearsals in the latter half of this year.

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What kind of music are balloons afraid of? Pop music!

Audio Recordings

Almost everyone, even accomplished soloists, tend to dislike hearing their own voices on a recording. You are definitely not alone! However, the skill of our "recording engineer" (Jane) and the technology she uses will successfully blend our individual recordings so that we make a pleasant 'whole' sound and individual voices will not be easily identifiable.

Many of you have already done such a recording when you rose to the occasion for Hattrick Productions to support Frankie on Mastermind, and that included videoing ourselves as well as recording our voices.

This time around there will be no video - only an audio recording of "*Lean On Me*" for Jane to work on over Easter.

You will need:

- Two 'devices', one for you to listen to the backing music, and one to record your voice onto. (These can be smart phones, iPads, tablets, laptops or PCs in any combination.)
- A set of headphones or earphones.
- Your section's backing track for "*Lean on Me*" (which you should already have).
- A space to set out your music. (A stand is useful but not essential.)
- Access to the internet.
- A quiet space.

Practise recording yourself to get used to the idea - this will show you how close you need to be to the microphone and whether the microphone picks up extraneous noise. Sometimes you can hear the turning of pages on a recording so try to keep the microphone away from the sheet music.

This is what to do:

- Plug your earphones or headphones into **Device 1** which you will be using to play the 'backing track'. You will be able to hear this track through the earphones and sing along to it but the backing track itself will not be audible on your recording.
- Practise keeping time with the backing track, as the accuracy of timing is important for a successful blend of voices.

- Set up **Device 2** to record yourself:
 1. If it is an Apple device then you can record yourself on the normal **Camera App** (by clicking on **VIDEO** from the tabs at the bottom and covering the camera lens when you record) or you can use the **Voice Memos** app. Alternatively you can download a specific App* from the App Store.
 2. If it is an Android device, again, the **Camera App** will work well for audio (click on the **VIDEO** tab) or you may have an app called **Voice Recording** or just **Recording**. Alternatively you can download a specific App* from the Google Play Store.

***Spire Music Recording Studio** is one such downloadable App available in both the App Store (Apple) and the Google Play Store (Android). This is the one that Jane has been using

You can record yourself as many times as you wish - and will probably find that you are not entirely happy with any of those recordings but try not to let that deter you - as the first paragraph of this guide says, *"Almost everyone, even accomplished soloists, tend to dislike hearing their own voices on a recording. You are definitely not alone! However, the skill of our "recording engineer" (Jane) and the technology she uses will successfully blend our individual recordings so that we make a pleasant 'whole' sound and individual voices will not be easily identifiable."*

The final step is to attach your recording of *"Lean on Me"* to an email and send it to Jane by March 22nd (or sooner if possible) so that she can work her magic!

Here is Jane's email address: jane.holyland@gmail.com

Why couldn't the string quartet find their composer? He was Haydn

Looking to the Future

Step 4 of Boris Johnson's Road Map (not before June 21st but could be later) removes all legal limits on social contacts and, by the end of July, the first doses of the Covid-19 vaccine will have been offered to every adult in the UK. This being the case, your committee very much hopes that we can begin rehearsing together by mid-August 2021 at the Methodist Church. The Methodist Church has already undertaken a comprehensive risk assessment, and the Committee has its own Songbirds Choir risk assessment in place (hard work carried out by Kay), in readiness for safely returning to rehearsals. There may be alterations to dates in the implementation of the Government's Road Map and we may have to manage and adapt our own way forward accordingly, but at least it now feels like we have a planned way out of Songbirds Lockdown!

Once we are back in live rehearsals in the autumn (fingers tightly crossed), we can develop our Winter Concert, building on the songs we will be rehearsing from April to June (see below) and begin to include some more Christmas-specific songs.

All of the above is predicated upon the success of the 4-step Road Map of course but the signs are favourable enough to begin planning. We won't know the specifics for some time but want to have everything in place so that we can get back to what we enjoy as soon as it is deemed safe to do so.

Zooming from April to June

Between **April and June**, therefore, Faye, Jane and the committee propose that we use our Zoom sessions in a more structured way to help us to get ready for the return to live rehearsals. The sessions will become a little less of a 'sing-along' and become more focussed on preparing, using our break-out rooms and practising at home to Jane's recordings, for a Christmas concert in December 2021.

The committee would like to suggest that we spend a little longer in break-out rooms each session, learning and revisiting the songs we were working on before lockdown and one or two others we have sung in the recent past so that the transition to live rehearsals will be the next natural step.

In the Zoom sessions between April and June we will still have our warm up together and come back together for the last 15 minutes to go over what we have been learning, but in between we will spend our time (around 35 minutes) in break-out rooms practising our parts.

These are the songs the committee would like to concentrate on:

1. Mary Poppins (selection)
2. "Here Comes the Sun"
3. "Can You Feel the Love Tonight"
4. "The Colours Of My Life" (in unison)
5. Carole King (selection)
6. Leading Ladies ("The Sound of Music" and "Popular")
7. "The Rose"
8. "Bridge Over Troubled Water"
9. "Lean On Me"

There are some other songs too that we have looked at during Zoom sessions that may come into play at some point ("Another Op'nin', Another Show" for example) but the 9 listed above are ones that we feel most choir members (thinking especially of those who aren't currently 'Zoom-ing') have practised and, in many cases, performed in the past. This could make the job of getting 'concert-ready' by Christmas a little easier.

Proposed Programme from April to June using Zoom.

Dates: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thu 15th April• Thu 29th April• Thu 13th May• Thu 27th May• Thu 10th June• Thu 24th June	We may add the alternate Thursdays in the final month or so, once we know whether lockdown will definitely end in June and, therefore, we will be preparing for a winter concert.	Timing: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 6:45 - 7:10 Meet Up and Warm up• 7:10 - 7:45 Break-out Rooms: Sectional rehearsal of some of the 9 listed songs• 7:45 - 8:00 All singing together
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Financial Update

Our last financial update was reported in August 2020's Newsletter, at which point the committee asked for voluntary contributions of £30 from Songbirds members so that we could continue to cover certain essential overheads like the ongoing costs of music storage, the retention of our rehearsal space and of our conductor and accompanist. Members' responses were wonderfully supportive, we banked £840 from 28 members and our choir has remained not just viable but also active throughout this period of lockdown so far. In the last eight months to March 2021 we will have incurred the following expenditure:-

Musical Director and Accompanist retainers and remuneration:	£ 1,100.00
Music:	£ 100.39
Membership of National Association of Choirs:	£ 25.00
Insurance:	£ 137.00
Raffle:	£ 38.38
Room hire for storage purposes:	£ 130.00
A further invoice for storage is due soon:	£ 130.00
March retainer and remunerations pending:	£ 150.00

This makes a total expenditure from **August 2020 - March 2021** of **£1,810.77** and leaves a balance of **£446.21** with which to start our summer term on April 15th.

As a Committee we have done our best to keep the choir 'alive and kicking' for the last twelve months but our financial reserves are now severely depleted. If we are to keep the choir going until we can meet up for rehearsals once again, we now need to ask members to consider giving a voluntary contribution of £30 to keep our choir financially viable.

If you can make your contribution by bank transfer by no later than the end of March, this would be really helpful. Here are the details:

Account name: **Songbirds Ladies Choir**

Sort code: **30-95-47**

Account number: **15686668**

The committee believes that, if normal rehearsals are allowed by August 2021 (at which point weekly fees will be resumed), your contributions will carry us safely through the next four months.

What was Beethoven's favourite fruit? BA-NA-NA-NAAA

Wendy Astill - Part of the backbone of our choir and committee.

Having been on the Songbird's Committee since 2014, Wendy has decided it's time to stand down although she will still be a member of the choir. Members of the Committee clubbed together and recently presented her with a gift as a token of our thanks.

Wendy has worked very hard over the years and the following poem, by our poet in residence, Martine, sums up her contribution.



After 7 years on Songbirds Committee,
Lovely Wendy is having a rest.
We've been so lucky to have her
As she really is the best!

To new members she gives a great welcome
In her warm and so friendly style.
Oozing fun and positive thinking,
Wrapped up in a beautiful smile!

She's raised lots of cash for our charities
With her many wonderful makes:
Blankets, hats and knitted goods,
Garden fetes with brilliant bakes!

Wendy you're a 'Leading Lady'
Huge thanks for everything.
It won't be too long 'til we see you again
When we all get together to sing!

Our Charity Update - Spectrum

Thanks to the strong support and generosity of Songbirds in lockdown, our Christmas Raffle was a great success and we were able to make a bank transfer in January to Spectrum for £330. As you all know, Wendy's crocheted blanket was one of the star prizes (just another example of her contribution to our choir and to charity) and, later in the year, we have another one to raffle so watch this space!

Our website: www.harboroughsongbirds.weebly.com has a new page for Spectrum with information about its work and contact details.

What's the name of the rock group that has four members and none of them sing?

Mount Rushmore! Oh yes - they carved out a place in rock history!!

Julia has sent us a delicious recipe:

ROASTED SWEET POTATO WITH FETA, SPRING ONIONS AND PEANUTS

Serves 2 with a green salad (4 if eating with sausages!). Can be prepped earlier in the day, ready to be roasted later.

- 2 large sweet potatoes, cut into 2 cm wedges (you can peel them or leave in the skin)
- 1 red onion, quartered
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tsp smoked paprika
- 1 tsp sea salt flakes
- 100g feta cheese, crumbled

For the dressing

- 2 tbsp virgin olive oil
- Zest and juice of 1 lime
- Half tsp sea salt flakes, or to taste
- 3 spring onions, finely sliced
- A big handful of unsalted peanuts

To serve

- Soured cream or natural yoghurt



Preheat the oven to 220°C / Fan 200°C / Gas 7. Tip the sweet potatoes, onion, oil, smoked paprika and sea salt into a roasting tin large enough to hold everything in one layer, mix thoroughly, then transfer to the oven and roast for 35-45 minutes.

Meanwhile, mix together the extra virgin olive oil, lime zest and juice, sea salt, spring onions and peanuts and set aside.

Once the sweet potatoes are cooked through, tip into a warmed serving dish, scatter over the spring onion dressing and the crumbled feta cheese and serve hot, with soured cream or yoghurt alongside.

Easter quiz - Name these sweets and chocolates?

1. Wobbly Infants.
2. Where refined people live.
3. 100% precious.
4. ...9, 10, 11.
5. Fallen fruits.
6. Carrier for dairy produce.
7. Mother's local.
8. All sorts of girls.
9. Royal herb.
10. Belly dancers perhaps.
11. Sport of princes.
12. Home for alcoholic teeth.
13. Speak quietly.
14. Edible fasteners.
15. Inhabitants of a Mediterranean island.
16. Occult perhaps.
17. Corks for mouths.
18. A galaxy.
19. Punishment for nuts.
20. Aromatic spheres.
21. A type of dog.
22. London has big red ones.
23. Little Richard's favourite.
24. Ten pin bowling.
25. Found in electric plug.
26. Pirate's loot.
27. Clever chocolate.
28. Petals and prickles.
29. Feline gear.
30. Playing in the gallery.

To be in with a chance to win an 'amazing' Easter prize send your answers to mandystott@aol.com by Friday 2nd April. (In the event of a tie the winner will be produced from a hat!)

(Answers in the next edition.)

Interesting Links:

Choir! Choir! Choir!

If you haven't come across it before this is a Canadian organisation launched in 2016 by Daveed Goldman and Nobu Adilman (Dabu). They arrange drop-in singing events around the world. Each event focuses upon a particular song and attracts as many as 1500 people on a given evening. Lyric sheets are handed out at the door and Dabu teaches everyone a vocal arrangement which is then recorded. "Everyone has a ball and goes home feeling great."

Watch them on YouTube if you can - they sing some wonderful songs and are supported by some famous singers. It is very uplifting to watch and it must be marvellous to be part of.

There is a website with more information: www.choirchoirchoir.com

Here is a link to a performance of "*Hallelujah*" with Rufus Wainwright:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGRfJ6-qkr4>

This is just one example and, if you visit YouTube and search for 'choir choir choir' there are lots more delights.

Pentatonix

You may have heard of this *a cappella* group which won an American 'Sing-Off' competition in 2011 and has been successfully performing ever since. They have recorded many well known songs with their own arrangements of vocal harmonies and improvisation, riffing, percussion and beatboxing (vocal percussion). Many of their songs can be found on YouTube and the videos which accompany the songs can be quite interesting and atmospheric. Like Choir! Choir! Choir! this group has also made a recording of "*Hallelujah*" as well as "*Bohemian Rhapsody*" (very entertaining) and "*Can You Feel the Love Tonight?*" - for which there is a link here:-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cT1Kzk7akjQ>

Rather a long Newsletter but one with an eye to the future.

We hope you've enjoyed it,

Songbirds Committee