

## **AN UPDATE FROM THE OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHORAL ACTIVITIES IN REGARD TO COVID-19 AND PROCEDURES FOR FALL 2020**

**DR. Don Trott and Dr. Elizabeth Hearn**

Greetings from the Office of Choral Activities at the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss). I write to each of you today to update you on plans for students participating in Ole Miss Choirs this fall. During these very uncertain times, it has been quite a challenge to deviate from our traditional choral offerings and teaching methods to a totally new approach. But, we have quickly grasped the necessity and need for creating safe and new methods for presenting a meaningful choral experience. While Dr. Elizabeth Hearn and I are not scientists, we have participated regularly in information sharing, reading of articles and attending zoom sessions to obtain the latest information on the best and safest ways to operate choir this fall.

### **A note to parents and guardians of students enrolled in Choirs at Ole Miss.**

We want to assure all parents and guardians of students enrolled in choir at Ole Miss that we want you to feel comfortable with your decision as to the level of participation your daughter/son will be involved in this fall. The following information will give you specifics on our planned “hybrid” approach to how we will deliver choir.

### **Is it safe to hold choral ensemble rehearsals during this Global Pandemic?**

If schools reopen before there is an effective vaccination for COVID-19, then it will be impossible for schools to eliminate all risks of infection. We will do everything within our knowledge, understanding, and capability to mitigate the risks associated with infection from COVID-19.

### **What will choir look like during the fall at Ole Miss?**

We have chosen a “hybrid” approach for instructing choir this fall. All of the note-learning will be individualized online learning, utilizing a tutorial program called *MyChoralCoach*. Zoom sessions will be used for meetings and information sharing. Small in-person “face to face” sessions with groups of 8 and up to 20 will take place in the Music Building and outside in the immediate green space surrounding the Music Building, including the band field.

### **How will the “face to face” singing work?**

#### **PPE**

All students will be required to wear a face covering and a face shield when in face-to-face rehearsals. In addition, all students will hand sanitize and have their temperature checked prior to the beginning of the rehearsal.

#### **INDOORS**

Utilizing the most current research available, we have determined that we can have 8 singers maximum in the Choir room utilizing a distance of 12 feet circumference. We also plan to utilize Nutt Auditorium (400 seats) for a group of 20 singers which allows us to space students at approximately 180 square feet per person.

#### **OUTDOORS**

We will also use outdoor space near the Music building weather-permitting.

## **NUMBER OF FACE-TO-FACE REHEARSALS**

Each student singer in University Chorus can anticipate having 3-4 face-to-face rehearsals during the semester. Students in Concert Singers can anticipate an additional 3-4 face-to-face rehearsals.

A protocol for the rehearsal session will include the following steps:

- A. All students will be required to wear a mask inside the building at all times.
- B. Upon entering the room, the door will be propped open so there is no need to touch the door.
- C. Each student will have their temperature checked and asked to utilize hand sanitizer.
- D. No physical music or folders will be used; all music will be on their personal electronic device.
- E. When singing, students will wear a mask and a face shield.
- F. Students will be seated behind a plexiglass barrier for a third layer of containment. These “stations” will be spaced at a minimum of 12 feet apart.
- G. When the rehearsal is completed, the singers will be asked to leave in a staggered departure to allow for distancing.
- H. Studies show that the virus can live up to 3 days on plastic. All surfaces will be cleaned before and after all rehearsals to eliminate any possible virus.
- I. Rehearsals will only last 20-30 minutes.
- J. Questions and methods to enhance the HVAC system are currently being investigated and implemented with the addition of air purifiers using HEPA filters.

### **Are students enrolled in Ole Miss Choirs required to attend “face-to-face” rehearsals?**

**No!** Students will have the choice to attend or not attend any or all “face-to-face” rehearsals. This will allow each singer to adjust to their own personal level of safety during the fall semester.

### **Will students who elect not to participate in “face-to-face” rehearsals still be able to participate in choir and how?**

**Yes!** We are using a hybrid approach to teaching choir this fall. Much of the learning process will be done online with independent learning and group zoom sessions, and including two virtual choir opportunities.

### **Will students on choral scholarships be allowed to retain them if they do not participate in the “face-to-face” rehearsals?**

**Yes!** All choral scholarships will be awarded as stipulated in the signed contract agreement letter. Students will be given their scholarship as long as they participate online.

### **Will there be any concerts this fall?**

Hopefully is the best answer as of August 18, 2020. We are hoping to produce a recorded concert (with no audience) that we can air at some point in the semester. We are investigating utilizing a large venue to allow for adequate spacing and ventilation for some of the recording.

### **What happens if a singer tests positive for COVID-19 during the semester in relation to choir rehearsals?**

Once it becomes known that a student participating in choir has tested positive for COVID-19, we will follow the University of Mississippi guidelines. At a minimum, all “face to face” rehearsals will cease for a minimum of 14 days. We will work online only during this time.

### **What are the concerns specific with singing related to the spread of COVID-19?**

Studies show that when singing, there is much greater projection of droplets and aerosols; both of which can carry the COVID-19 virus from an infected person. This is why all singing in churches and elsewhere has ceased or has been reduced to a very small group for live-streamed services. Micro droplets carry many viruses. We produce them when we speak loudly or breath heavily. The risk of micro droplet spread is greatly increased when people are in close proximity with poor ventilation. The use of a mask/face shield greatly reduces how far micro droplets can spread. This research study below shows micro droplets staying airborne in the immediate area for more than 20 minutes.

The following link is one experiment showing singers and how the mask can be quite helpful.

[https://vimeo.com/402577241?ref=fb-share&fbclid=IwAR0KIUc6x8Lt6Z1YvzNhYfa147izk\\_i9FVSg1EURoFFG-ZjtDGsgwTTLX2A](https://vimeo.com/402577241?ref=fb-share&fbclid=IwAR0KIUc6x8Lt6Z1YvzNhYfa147izk_i9FVSg1EURoFFG-ZjtDGsgwTTLX2A)

### **Conclusion**

This letter was written on August 18, 2020. We are in a constant state of learning as the weeks go by and we are in ongoing conversations with Facilities Management in regards to the safest operations that allow for mitigation. It is certain and obvious that the fall will bring unprecedented procedures and activity for the singers and directors. We will continue to review our plan looking at the safety aspects as priority one. I encourage you to visit our web site at <https://choral.olemiss.edu/> for updated information. We will also continue to strive to create choral opportunities that will be engaging, meaningful and uplifting.

Sincerely,

*Dr. Don Trott*

Dr. Donald Trott



Dr. Elizabeth Hearn