

The “Choir Spotlight” is shining on a rather empty set of risers at present. We asked members to tell us how they’re coping with the unexpected interruption to our season. We were overwhelmed with messages of love: for Greg, for each other, and for the pleasure of singing for you!

For everyone, the feeling of loss was inescapable. Many shared that feeling of community – and the loss of fellowship. People missed “the energy,” “the labor of love,” and the “privilege of singing with this group.” We’ve gathered responses from members of our Bach Choir community here, and present them in their entirety. (An edited version of this story appears in the Spring 2020 edition of Bach Choir News.)

We asked everyone a few questions, including,

How are you coping with this unexpected hiatus? Have you learned anything new about your relationship to the Choir during this downtime?

Choir member, Mary Paini:

Who would have thought that I would be missing my forty-fourth Bach Festival?! The Bach Choir has been a huge part of my life for almost half a century! My children grew up knowing that Monday rehearsal nights and Bach Festival time were untouchable! I miss our inspirational director and conductor, Greg Funfgeld, my fellow choir members and rehearsals greatly.”

First-year choir member, Steve Rivera:

As one of the new members this season, I'm very disappointed at missing out on what would have been my very first Bach Festival. But more than that, I miss the rehearsals - those weekly opportunities to cooperatively meet with my fellow choir members and have a great time making beautiful music!

Being in the choir has been both a musical and a spiritual blessing for me because of Greg's wonderful directing AND the illuminating and inspiring focus that he brings to the deep relationship between Bach's theology and his composing. It's like hearing a great sermon every week!

Can't wait until we meet again!

Choir member, Dodd Lamberton:

The lyrics of a Joni Mitchell classic come to mind, "You don't know what you've got. Till it's gone." I find myself missing every aspect of the Bach Choir experience: the extra concerts (Bach at Noon, Bach to School), the biggies (spring concert; the two-weekend Festival -- a LOT -- and perhaps surprisingly, our rehearsals.)

From the moment I walk into the First Prez fellowship hall and see Greg sitting near the piano, welcoming, chatting, catching up with our joys and struggles, to our final chord before dismissal, I realize what a privilege it is to sing with this group, this orchestra, this conductor, this major league organization. May this necessary health hiatus end soon!

Choir member, Tony Villani:

As a choir member for the past 38 years, I find myself feeling a tremendous void without Bach, both with our concerts and our rehearsals. The time we spend together as a choir with Greg is usually one of the highlights of my week! His skillful and supportive conducting and the music making is so comforting to the soul! I'm finding that I am really missing our time together! The concerts are always such an exhilarating experience as well, with the audience always showing such great support!

Choir member, Lynn Long:

On the Meyers Briggs scale I'm an ENFJ, but the truth is I barely make it into the Extrovert side. I'm pretty evenly balanced, so half of me really loves alone time and the other half loves to be around others. Since I am newly divorced and living by myself for the first time in my life, I have realized how much energy I got from being with a large group of people at least once a week when I was at rehearsal. I never appreciated how this balanced the part of me that lives alone. The pandemic has really brought this point home to me in a way I would not have been able to appreciate before. I have watched all the FaceBook videos from Leipzig with the choirs singing together virtually and although that is wonderful, it can never replace being with everyone on a Monday night. The other issue for me is that although I feel my voice is hanging in there because of the last 15 years of voice lessons, the reality is that at age 66 I will soon age out of the choir. Maybe I have another 5 years of singing and losing one of those years is especially sad for me.

Choir member, Patty Alercia:

I'm coping with this ok right now, but I wasn't at first. OK, well, the first week we were off I thought, ok I don't have to go out tonight...I can do this. Then the next week, it felt empty. My weekly 2 hours of singing challenging music, under a wonderful conductor, with talented people with whom I share such a love of music is a big part of my life. I miss the music, the challenge of it, the spine tingling emotion of it. But on top of that, I miss the people. I miss Deb Ihling calling me "mom". I miss talking to my friends about their week...what happened at work, school, home? How was your date with that new guy? How's your husband feeling? I miss sharing stories about my grandchildren. I miss the laughter and the love I feel at those rehearsals. (OK so I thought I was doing fine, but now I'm in tears just thinking about it). As far as learning anything new...well, I always knew I loved the choir, but I don't think I knew how very much. I don't think I ever thought about the void in my life without it. I guess I really am

grieving...because it feels like someone died. Then I remind myself that it's more like someone going away for a long time. But they'll come back....and what a joyous day that will be!

Choir member, Christina Lamonica:

Coping with the virus has been unsettling. I miss our rehearsals, our BACH Choir family and the beautiful music we make. I keep music in my life daily. I am grateful, however, to know that BACH'S Music is eternal and soon we will be together again.

For some, the loss of this time together has been more poignant than ever.

From Choir member, Peter Young:

This has been an especially hard times for me, with the recent loss of my mother Ruth Young. We had to cancel our Memorial Service for Mom, due to COVID-19. She so loved the Bach Choir and secular music, several Bach Choir members who know my Mom were going to participate and sing at my Moms service. Hopefully when this passes we will be able to celebrate my mom's life and the music she so loved. I miss seeing and singing with my friends and colleagues at our Monday rehearsals.

I was so looking forward to Singing at this May's Festival, it would have been great to sing in my Moms honor and for Healing and wholeness for me.

Choir member, David Mentzer:

This is rather personal, but here goes.

The B Minor Mass is a labor of love. It is grueling and sometimes you lose to its demands. Ironically one of my few country music recordings, when I was a 4th horn player in the Nashville Symphony, was with Roy Clark, called 'Labor of Love'. It had a high note that I just could not get in tune as a 4th horn player, and it just got scratched, but it was Roy Clark. Besides, I had just nailed the 4th horn solo in The Rite of Spring.

How are you spending your musical downtime?

Tony Villani: I really appreciate the posting of music to the Bach web site, especially the replaying of the January Bach at Noon. I have been listening to all kinds of music during the pandemic and really look forward to returning to rehearsals and being able to perform in the near future!

Lynn Long: I love to play piano so I have been spending more time at the piano. I'm expecting my brother Eric to come this weekend for a visit. I know this might not be really safe. Eric lives in Philadelphia. We love to play duets together. He's the better pianist. We'll play duets together. I am also continuing to take a weekly voice lesson now via FaceTime which has been working surprisingly well. I also have been trying to sing along with a few Bach cantatas each week that I play via Alexa using my Prime Music membership. I queue up a cantata and sing all

the choruses, the solos and the chorales. It's helping to keep the stamina that one needs to sing these big works in a way that just working on my voice lesson music doesn't do.

Choir member, Dorothy Cockrell:

How am I filling my musical life? I take lessons once a week with Yvonne Robinson. She has increased the amount of practice time to twice a day, 20 minutes each. When I am able, I will offer my Gershwin program to nursing homes for free. I have done Christmas programs every year, so I will add another program, hopefully long before Christmas.

Patty Alercia:

I am practicing a lot! I practice piano and voice each for about an hour or more every day, and I practice french horn most days for about 30 minutes. Last week I spoke with Lynn Long who told me she's singing the choruses of one cantata per day. I thought this was a great idea, so I'm doing it too. I'm going in order...grab a score out of my numerically sorted pile, find a You Tube video, and sing along! I've learned that I need to run through it alone once before singing along because some of the tempos are not conducive to sight reading! This has been really good for helping me to maintain some sense of endurance.

I'm also starting to take some lessons with Rosa via Zoom. I've traveled to DC several times to study with her so I'm on her student list now. She offered this to all her students a while ago, but I needed to get a laptop first because zoom was cumbersome on my phone and we don't have a camera on our PC. I have my first Zoom lesson with her tomorrow and I can't wait!!

I'm also sharing performance videos with my church family on the church FB page. I play piano or sing, record it, and post it. People are loving it and asking for more. I have a weekly meeting with my brass group via zoom as well. We can't do music because of the lag, but we enjoy getting together online for about an hour every Sunday afternoon at our typical rehearsal time. I'm also keeping in touch with several choir members via FB, texting, and phone calls.

What do you wish to tell our audience members about having to miss the Festival or the Spring concerts this Season?

Christina Lamonica:

As for the audience, I would like to share that we miss sharing our music with them. I look towards the light ray of hope when, once again, we can share the love of the BACH Choir.

David Mentzer:

I am looking forward to the next B Minor Mass & all of his difficult music, as I am sure our dedicated listeners are.

Lynn Long:

Is it possible that we miss the festival in equal measure? It takes an audience and musicians in equal partnership to make the festival come together. It's incredibly sad to me and I think it must be incredibly sad to our Guarantors and audiences. It's like missing Christmas. Festival and Christmas are my two favorite times of the year.

Patty Alercia:

I want them to know that we miss singing for them at least as much as they miss hearing us, most likely more. I want them to know that as soon as we possibly can do so safely, we will be back. We can't wait to see them, to watch their faces, to see them close their eyes while they listen, to hear them cheer for us. We love them...just like we love what we do.