

BRENT SINGERS: NEW GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE FOR AMATEUR CHOIRS

This summary of recent government guidelines sets out the conditions on which Brent Singers can rehearse and the responsibilities of the trustees for the safety of members and employees (currently only the Director of Music).

Italicised text is quoted from the guidance.

There are no paragraph numbers in the guidance so precise referencing is not possible.

1. Where can I find the guidance?

The guidance is to be found in two documents:

1.1. [Doc 1]

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/performing-arts> is a small part of extensive guidance on work and financial support during the pandemic. It includes a section for those who work in the performing arts, their employers and the venues where they work. It was updated on 14.08.20 **and now applies to amateurs as well as professionals**. Most of what applies to Brent Singers may be found in the introduction, which refers readers to other guidance [Doc 2].

1.2. [Doc 2]

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/meeting-people-from-outside-your-household-from-4-july> is part of the huge gov.uk site, which includes guidance on a wide range of matters. Several subsections on we find the guidance to which we have been referred in '*meeting people from outside your household*' in the specific context of *COVID-19 secure venues*. This is what applies to us and it is not as clear as (1) above.

The summary below is taken from (1) above. (2) is dealt with in the appendix to avoid confusion.

2. Are amateur choirs allowed to rehearse and perform?

2.1. YES. Several passages in the guidance make this clear e.g.

2.2. Specific mitigations, such as extended social distancing, were previously required for singing given concerns that this was a potentially high risk activity. *DCMS commissioned further scientific studies...which has allowed us to reconsider appropriate mitigations. Both professionals and non-professionals can now engage in singing...in line with this guidance.*

2.3. *As of 15 August socially distanced indoor and outdoor performances can take place in line with this guidance, though we encourage organisations to continue to work outdoors wherever possible.*

3. What regulations and restrictions are in place?

Studies have indicated that it is the cumulative aerosol transmission from both those performing in and attending events that is likely to create risk...in that context, organisations should therefore consider the following:

3.1. **Social distancing**

3.1.1. Venues, performers and audiences should ensure 2m distancing applies wherever possible.

- 3.1.2. *Households should always remain socially distanced from each other (your support bubble counts as one household) in any location [i.e. singers from the same bubble do not have to observe distancing rules in relation to each other – unless the trustees decide otherwise].*
- 3.1.3. *Non-professionals should not engage in activities that may lead to social distancing being compromised. (e.g no over-enthusiastic greeting rituals!)*
- 3.1.4. *Limit the duration of social interaction opportunities ie rehearsals or performances as far as possible*
- 3.1.5. *Take steps to encourage audiences to support the overall safety of the event, including discouraging activities which can create aerosol (such as shouting, chanting and singing along): so no community singing at Christmas.*
- 3.1.6. *Seat individuals rather than allowing them to stand (to help maintain social distancing).*

3.2. **Numbers**

There are a number of unhelpful inconsistencies on this issue. 3.2.1 and 3.2.2 below appear to be a summary of what is required. If that is the case, it would have been helpful if the other statements, which do not support this overview, had been deleted.

- 3.2.1. *Within this guidance there are no set limits on the numbers who can be involved in planned non-professional activity taking place outside and/or in a Covid-secure venue. This is in line with guidance on “gatherings in Covid-19 secure venues” in the [meeting people from outside your home guidance](#). [As yet I’ve been unable to find this reference in Doc 2].*
- 3.2.2. *Limit the number of performers as far as possible (with non-professionals being restricted by rules on [meeting people outside your home](#), with planned activity needing to be aligned with the guidance under the sub-heading on gatherings in Covid-19 secure venues) – see Appendix 1.*
- 3.2.3. *Organisations must ensure ...that the numbers of individuals involved are able to be socially distanced at all times.*
- 3.2.4. *Limit the number of audience members, noting that capacity should be maintained at a level that allows social distancing to be maintained.*

3.3. **Ventilation**

- 3.3.1. *Take steps to improve ventilation as far as possible and whenever possible, both through the use of mechanical systems and opening windows and doors*

3.4. **Risk assessment**

- 3.4.1. *organisations must ensure an appropriate COVID-19 risk assessment is carried out*
- 3.4.2. *Section 1 of the guidance gives details of the risk assessment*

3.5. **Cleaning**

- 3.5.1. *Section 5 of the guidance gives details of the cleaning, which we will have to take note of.*

3.6. **Performances**

- 3.6.1. *Section 3 gives detailed guidance on managing performances*

3.7. **Other**

- 3.7.1. Continue to take the other vital steps outlined in this guidance, including preventing unwell people from attending, maintaining cleanliness, supporting contact tracing and other mitigating measures

APPENDIX

[As indicated above, we have been referred to [Doc 2] <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/meeting-people-from-outside-your-household-from-4-july> for further details. In my view, this document, which pre-dates the revision of Doc 1, confuses rather than clarifies and adds nothing useful.

- 1) Choirs are referred to the section on meeting in COVID-19 secure venues. Doc 1 includes a summary of what, apparently, is said in Doc 2 regarding numbers (see above 3.2.1).
- 2) Doc 2 includes a summary of its guidance on distancing. This is clear and helpful: *Clubs or groups can begin to meet again in COVID-19 secure venues. However, you should take care to remain socially distant from anyone you do not live with or is not in your support bubble... Venues should ensure they comply with COVID-19 secure guidelines.* This has already been said in 3.1.2. above.
- 3) The clarity of this section is compromised by the following statements, which would helpfully have been deleted. They have caused widespread confusion;
 - a) The most confusing statements, as quoted by Sue, are about who you can 'meet', which don't really work in the context of rehearsals. The confusing word is 'meet'. I think that this guidance was written initially for pubs and restaurants – or possibly copied over from households. At first sight it appears to say that indoor meetings can only consist of people from 1 or 2 households or a max of 6 people. But that would be nonsense – it would mean that a max of 6 people could be in a pub or restaurant at the same time!
 - b) This lack of consistency between a clear summary and unclear details has already been noted in Doc 1 (above 3.2)
 - c) Equally unhelpful is this passage in Doc 2: *It's against the law for gatherings of more than 30 people to take place in private homes...* They then point out that this doesn't apply to secure venues, which are the subject of this section. So why mention it?

SUMMARY

Amateur choirs can resume rehearsals and performances on condition that they:

1. Observe and promote social distancing regulations
2. Implement other safeguards against the transmission of COVID-19, as required/recommended in DCMS guidance.

BW 24.08.20