

PAST, PRESENT...AND FUTURE REFLECTIONS

When the Chorus began with just a handful of people back in November 1994, I had no clear idea of where we were going. I did, however, visualize a roomful of people gathering just to sing with each other. Over the years, as we grew into the thriving community arts group we are today, people have sometimes asked, “How big do you want the Chorus to become?” They’re usually surprised when I say I can imagine us growing to about 150 members. “Where would you put them?” their look seems to say.

After our 2019 winter concert, as we ended our 25th full year, I was feeling some burnout. We’d been through a lot. It had become clear that I was trying to do two separate jobs—Artistic Director and Executive Director. I still enjoyed the work and loved the Chorus, but even though we were solvent, we were underfunded. As the chief executive, I had no one else to hold responsible except myself. My big concern was the long-term continuation of our mission. What would happen after me? I wondered. I was grateful for a long winter vacation.

Then came the spring 2020 season, and with it a sudden groundswell of interest. Membership rose to an all-time high of more than 100, with a concurrent increase in financial support. Rehearsals were exciting. Our singers were learning the music quickly and starting to sound skillful right from the start.

And then—March 2020—Covid.

At first, we thought we’d just weather the storm for a few weeks, then get back



to normal. Fortunately, over spring break in my college teaching job, we all had to quickly prepare to work online. Who knew at the time we’d be teaching on that platform for the next 2½ years? For singing it was almost unimaginable. But it gave me an idea: Why not convene the Chorus on Zoom? That first rehearsal was a mess, with me and Evan, our pianist at the time, working from my living room. There was the cacophony of Zoom delay, and one careless trip over a wire that brought my computer crashing to the floor.

No need to recount all the trials and tribulations of working remotely—Christina has done that so brilliantly already. But to me the greatest gift of this Covid diaspora has been a renewed sense of mission for the Chorus. Even when internet time delays meant we could each hear only our own voice, it was clear that rehearsing meant a lot to us, bringing joy

and helping with the isolation. It connected us with love for each other and for our city. I realized that the Chorus needed me, but that what we had become was much larger than just me.

Now the Chorus seems to be truly recovering what we had before lockdown. Membership has crested at just below 100. Finances are returning to normal. While we’re actively recruiting for a new Executive Director, I look forward to continuing as Artistic Director for the foreseeable future. But I feel assured that when the time comes, there will be ample talent to replace me. I don’t worry anymore about the Chorus surviving. What we do for the public is unique and special. I think we all feel it, and I think that means we’ll be around for a long time to come.

All the best,
Jack Eppler
Founder & Director

CHORUS NOTES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOUNDER & DIRECTOR'S LETTER	1
A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF THE NYCCC... OR WAS THAT TWO... OR MORE?	2
VIRTUALLY POSSIBLE	7
STAGING A COMEBACK	10

EDITOR'S NOTE

I started putting together a timeline for the "Comeback Edition" in August, thinking, like most of us, that really, it hadn't been that long since we'd been in "normal times." It certainly hadn't felt that long. Interesting how we play with our heads to accommodate change. But OMG! By the time you read this, it will be just four months shy of three years since our COVID shutdown.

What struck me is how that stretch was marked by an extraordinary energy, affection and collaboration, on screen and off, and most of all joy, to be in the company of each other. It is certainly what makes us unique, and made the time whiz by.

As we take the stage this month, 75 singers strong, almost half of them new to the Chorus, it's not just a pipe dream to say that that tradition, that quality, will continue. Bravo!

*Christina Pagano
Alto I and Editor*

PAGE 2

A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF NYC COMMUNITY CHORUS...OOPS, OR WAS THAT TWO...OR MORE?

It's all a bit of a blur...

FROM A JULY 2019 EMAIL TO CHORISTERS SUMMARIZING RESULTS OF A SURVEY AND GEN- ERAL POST-CONCERT DEBRIEF MEETING OF THE CHORUS:

"To honor the fact that U.S. women got the right to vote in 1920, the Spring 2020 repertoire will focus on women composers from then until now. NOTE: 2019/2020 will also be our 25th anniversary year."

FROM THE JANUARY SPRING 2020 SEASON WELCOME LETTER:

"The concert is Sunday, June 14 at 4:00 p.m. There are two dress rehearsals: Monday, June 8 and Thursday, June 11, both from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Please clear your calendar now. You must be at both rehearsals in full in order to sing in the concert."

FAST FORWARD TO MARCH 22, 2020, EMAIL FROM CHORUS DIRECTOR JACK EPPLER ON THE EVE OF THE FIRST FULLY REMOTE REHEARSAL:

"I'm looking forward to 'seeing' you all (or hearing you) at our Zoom meeting tomorrow evening at 6:30. We'll do what we can to continue the great work we've been doing to prepare for a June concert (which may still happen, we don't know), but most of all let's let the joy of singing support us all through a challenging time. Andy is in Texas, ready to 'host' our Zoom meeting and manage the keyboard

during rehearsal.

"Attached below are words for a group song for tomorrow. This is 'How 'Ya Gonna Keep 'Em Down on the Farm?' by Walter Donaldson. If you're my generation, you may remember Alfalfa singing this on 'The Little Rascals.' That's where I learned it! But why I thought of it today is that it was published in 1919, which was not JUST the official end of World War I, but it was also the middle of the Spanish Flu epidemic that infected one-third of the world's population and killed some 50 million people worldwide. Here's hoping our current situation clears up a lot faster and with less damage!"

AND SO IT BEGAN!

While the rest of 2020 seems like a blur, the year did evolve. Over the next four months, Monday Zoom rehearsals flourished, with a 7 p.m. clapping break in sync with the City's nightly expression of appreciation for all the essential workers giving their time, and in some cases, risking their lives for the good of the rest of us.

According to Eppler, "At the start of 2020, we had more than 100 singers at Holy Apostles, more than we'd ever had at the beginning of a season. After we switched to online rehearsals, with just Evan and me in the church, it soon dwindled to about 60, and then gradually, to about 50." Most rehearsals ran only an hour, with time at the end for unmuted conversation. By late May, in a letter to supporters titled "The Purloined Spring Concert," he announced the postpone-





(Left): Choristers join in the weekly 7pm clap.
(Above): Sherry Masengarb lent her stellar soprano voice to rehearsal tapes and videos.

ment of the June concert, but held out the hope that it still might happen.

In the midst of Covid's turbulence, on May 25, the country—and the world—was shaken by the senseless, very public, death of Minneapolis resident George Floyd, at the hands of a police officer. In the course of the rest of the year, the social unrest and societal inequity that were causing turbulence throughout the world influenced some of the musical choices and the “spirit” of the community-oriented group.

In preparation for the chorus's first-ever remotely recorded video, Carole King's “Will You Love Me Tomorrow?,” everyone learned how to light their home backgrounds properly, sing along with a click track, and just how many takes (lots!) it might require to be sufficiently satisfied with the sound of our own voices, devoid of accompaniment and our fellow section singers, to forward on to accompanist and administrator, and video coordinators-in-chief, Evan Alparone and Andy Garza.

That video benefited from having been part of the repertory the chorus had been rehearsing since January. It also benefited from Alparone's recording of the bass and tenor tracks, and new-to-the-chorus soprano Sherry Masengarb's generous “donation” of her time and voice for both altos and sopranos.

As she explained, “In the early days of Covid, I had joined a group called the ‘Stay at Home Choir’ run by some friends in the UK. We'd done three or four recordings by the time NYCCC's came up, so I had some insight into how things could work, and offered to record the tracks for the women. I loved putting those together, learning the different parts and then knowing that what I was doing would help people. Singing by yourself into your phone is incredibly vulnerable and humbling, and I'm proud so many chorus members did it.”

The fully edited version, artfully crafted to reflect the times by chorus bass and professional sound and video editor, Alejandro Delgado, dropped formally on July 11 and on July 14, was featured in then-Governor Andrew Cuomo's “Deep Breath Moment” of the day.

On July 27, nineteen weeks after shutting down, five brave choristers entered the church for rehearsal.

On July 24, Eppler sent the following message: “For the first time since March, we'll welcome those of you who want to rehearse in person this week. We'll distance ourselves from each other at 12 feet and you'll need to wear a mask the entire time you're in the church. We'll provide one if you don't have one with you. If you haven't already told me you plan to show up in-person, please do so now.” The evening of the 27th, nineteen weeks after shutting down, a brave four

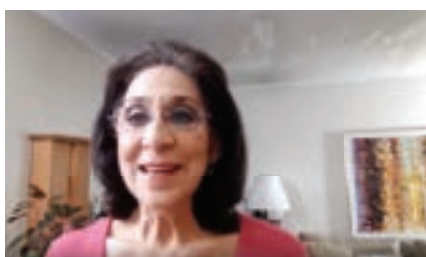
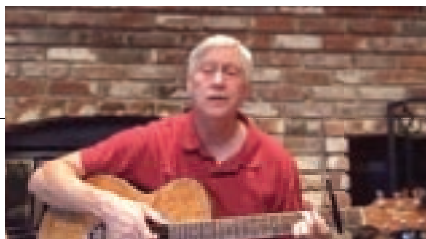
or five choristers entered the Church for rehearsal, launching a truly hybrid season where those on Zoom could see their in-Church colleagues, but could not hear them. Initially, only one microphone and Eppler's laptop were involved in the production and the sound quality was...well, wanting. New equipment and better mics were purchased gradually but perfect sound quality was months away.

Breaking a long-standing summer hiatus tradition, NYCCC continued rehearsals through August 24, taking only a three-week break, to start again on September 14. By this time, the group was completing its second video, its 25th anniversary newsletter was about to be published, and rumors of a streaming cabaret were buzzing.

Though Covid vaccines were still wending their way through approval, Ep-

pler extended a formal invite to anyone in the chorus who wished to return to the Church if they felt comfortable doing so. Rehearsals would run an extra half hour to 8:00 p.m., he said, and section rehearsals, beginning at 6:00 for 30 minutes, were reinstated. In-person attendance “ballooned” to about 20.

“Having joined the chorus in the fall of 2019, and knowing very few people before the lockdown happened, I think the real bright side of Zoom was that I



(From top): Don Colbourn, May Cheung (singing on the beach at Coney Island) and Cheryl Kann-Ferst were among the stars of our Zoom Cabaret. (Top right): The livestreamed concert on December 28 paid tribute to women composers.

learned people's names, and could put names with faces," noted Masengarb. "When we finally started with small groups meeting back in the church, it actually felt like I knew these people, even though we'd not really spoken, only meeting on 'mute' on a computer screen."

As the first weeks of the Fall season progressed, there was more an air of "We've got this," among choristers. Plans to stream not only a fund-raising cabaret, but also a concert took shape, dates were set (and re-set). There were actual goals to achieve.

The late November cabaret, showcasing thirteen choristers on video plus an introduction from Jack and live banter from cabaret host and chorister, Barbara



Good, raised more than \$2,200 and kept the group in the game of performing before an audience, albeit virtually.

"Life is a virtual cabaret old chum... somehow that doesn't have quite the ring of the original line," Good mused, "but it was exactly what we decided to do. Between the technical direction of longtime friend of the chorus, Katrina Art, a collection of inspired self-taped song videos from enthusiastic members and a bit of live emceeing by yours truly, we managed to pull it off and I'm quite proud of what we were able to create."

"The Zoom Cabaret was a super-scary joy to produce," said Art. "Especially in a time of uncertainty and isolation, it was wonderful to have all of these beautiful, familiar faces 'in the room,' together. For me, the fear factor was in making sure that all of the technical aspects ran smoothly and efficiently so that these dedicated performances could be broadcast to our audience. The many simultaneously moving parts, ticketing, live-streaming, troubleshooting, etc., were an exciting new challenge that I hope I rose to."

The December 28 concert, celebrating "Women in Music" and the passage of the 19th amendment with guest artists Jahneen Otis, Emily Goes and K.J. Dehnert, ended with a live, unmuted rendition of "Have Yourself a Merry

Little Christmas," a song described by one viewer as "so right for this time." It prompted one participant to say, "I, for one, will weather the rest of this pandemic more easily knowing what can be accomplished when a group of people works as a team."

2021

A little shy of a month later, on January 25, the first rehearsal of the Spring season began. It was a week later than its normal start date, on Martin Luther King Day, with Jack emailing choristers to say "Enjoy MLK Day, since he taught us that no life matters until all lives matter."

It was just 19 days after the January 6 Capitol insurrection. Turbulent times. And some new music to rehearse, capturing the spirit of change, including "Empty Chairs at Empty Tables," "Fragile," and "A Change is Gonna Come."

The chorus's seasonal "Welcome Letter" reflected some of that spirit: "This is a very different kind of welcome letter," it said. "Normal operations have been up-ended for us, as they have for most arts and social organizations. We're grateful to have continued to thrive and to serve our members and our audience. Ordinarily we'd present a concert the third weekend of June, so you might want to reserve it. However, our last concert was entirely prerecorded, so stand by for updates."



Both internal and external changes marked the early months of the year. Accompanist Alparone returned to California, and by early March, new Assistant Music Director T.C. Kincer, had arrived, albeit virtually to many, to tickle the ivories for the group. Perhaps most important, the first doses of the newly minted Covid vaccine were reaching New Yorkers—could there be a light at the end of the Zoom tunnel?

Rehearsals on-site at the Church welcomed at least ten “regulars” each week. In an experiment on a Saturday afternoon in late March, Eppler arranged a video recording session for choristers who wanted some coaching for two upcoming videos, “Do You Hear the People Sing?” and “Empty Chairs at Empty Tables.” A number of singers showed up to record in the Church’s lovely space.

Video recordings abounded, numbering seven underway or completed, by early Spring.

MAY SHOWERS?

By early May, with Spring truly in bloom, more choristers being vaccinated, and an itch to sing live, together, somewhere, Ep-

pler arranged an outdoor rehearsal for up to 30 fully vaccinated, masked singers on the North Lawn of the Church of the Holy Apostles. It was a “full house” of about 30 that evening. Sopranos had a short section rehearsal and then, chairs in hand, at about 6:45, the rest of the group filed out to the lawn—the keyboard was wired up and so was Zoom. Neighbors stopped to listen to a pre-rehearsal warm-up. Some stayed to hear a song or two.

And then...raindrops? Looking up for clouds in the clear sky and seeing nothing, the chorus soldiered on...until suddenly, deluge!

Looking down, it dawned on those whose feet and music were suddenly drenched that the water was flowing briskly from strategically placed spigots in the ground around them. The Church’s sprinkler system, timed to start sprinkling at 7:30 p.m.! Some brave souls tried to limit exposure by clamping down on those spigots—to no avail.

The soggy group scurried back into the Church, dried off as best they could, and resumed rehearsal to 8:30.

The best laid plans...

NYCCC’s third season under the

scourge of Covid officially ended with its June 14 rehearsal, one day after its video, “Empty Chairs at Empty Tables,” premiered on YouTube. But the group didn’t stop singing. Just a week later, the chorus’ first “pop-up” concert, outdoors in the early evening at the Chelsea-Elliott houses, drew about 20 choristers. Singing selections from the season’s repertoire, volunteers passed out flyers and chatted with neighbors to stimulate interest in the group. And a NYCHA Street Fair at Chelsea-Elliott on a late August weekend brought the group back for a reprise of some of the same numbers, this time to a larger audience.

Pumped by the giddiness of actually singing together in person, the new season’s September 13 rehearsal brought 30 people to the Church. Requirements? Masking, social distancing and proof of vaccination.

Again, the season’s early weeks were marked by some profound changes. Intrepid and always genial administrative assistant Andy Garza landed a full-time gig and was replaced by actor/songwriter and administrator Tanzania Hughie. The chorus mourned the loss of longtime



(Left): Setting up for our outdoor rehearsal in May, before the deluge.
(Above): “A Change is Gonna Come” featured tenor Cort Cheek.

CHORUS NOTES

soprano, Margot Palmer-Poroner, and chose to honor her at rehearsal with “Come to My Garden”—later dedicating the song to her at its Virtual Concert featuring a compilation of its virtual videos. That November 1 concert, “Songs of Revolution and Enlightenment,” reflected much of what the group—and the city—had been experiencing throughout the year.

As Eppler pointed out in the concert invitation, “One of the good things that can come out of a time of great difficulty is the vision of a better way of doing things. What if we were able to sit down and talk things through instead of talking about each other or at each other? What if we really listened to what is going on in each other’s lives and could respect the things that are important to each of us? This music celebrates change—change in times past and change that we all need right now.”

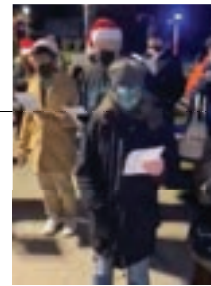
While the concert showcased the repertory on which the group had been working so diligently, there was general agreement that this could not be the end of the season. But what could? Given that 2021 was the end of a very extended 25th anniversary celebration, and that the chorus’ very first gathering in 1994 was

a neighborhood caroling outing, this one was a no-brainer: Caroling throughout Penn South and the Chelsea-Elliott neighborhood!

So it was that December’s rehearsals were devoted primarily to Christmas carols and a Chanukah song, in preparation for a neighborhood wander on Sunday afternoon, December 19. Ranging from the traditional, “Oh Little Town of Bethlehem,” to gospel, “Rise Up Shepherd and Follow,” to “Feliz Navidad,” and culminating in Mariah Carey’s “All I want for Christmas Is You,” every possible audience was covered.

For the group of about 15, including one newcomer, Miguel Frias, who later joined the chorus, the weather was cold but spirits were warm, fueled by the applause received from those on the street and some who opened their windows to hear the music.

A final gift for the year: On December 27, and in hopeful anticipation of a happier New Year, the chorus released its 12th video, “A Change is Gonna Come,” starring tenor Cort Cheek gazing out at the Hudson. In his message to all the chorus’ friends, Eppler noted, “Before we say goodbye to the Old Year, we want to offer you something for Auld Lang Syne.



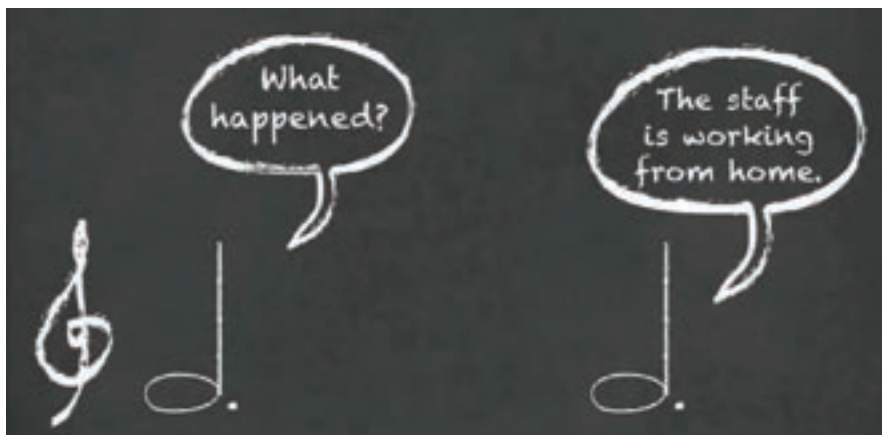
Over a dozen choristers brought holiday cheer to the 'hood with Kincer accompanying them on his melodica.



The November 1 live-streamed concert ended with an in-person performance of “Down by the Riverside.”

Here’s the final song from our recent online virtual concert. We had planned to sing the concert for you in person, but like so many of this past year’s plans, we had to come up with an alternative.

“I would say, ‘Can’t wait for the New Year; this last one has been so tough.’ But then, that’s what we were all thinking last December at this time! So maybe it would be wise to just wear the future like a loose garment and wait and see what comes along.”



MASTHEAD

CHRISTINA PAGANO,
EDITOR (ALTO)

MARY GREENBERG,
ASSOCIATE EDITOR (ALTO)

DAWN BLASCHICK,
CREATIVE DIRECTOR
(FRIEND OF THE CHORUS)

VIRTUALLY POSSIBLE

How the chorus made beautiful music “together” while staying apart.

BY MARY GREENBERG

Before Covid, the only time founder and director Jack Eppler was forced to cancel a rehearsal was in October 2012 when Hurricane Sandy barreled through the city, leaving lower Manhattan, including Chelsea, without power (Eppler hesitated to do so until the very last minute and rehearsals resumed the following week). When Covid hit and the city went into lockdown mode—the chorus held its final in-person rehearsal on March 9, 2020—it was clear that this time, a return to normal was going to take a bit longer.

But Eppler refused to let a mere worldwide pandemic totally shut down his beloved chorus, and by March 23, he was leading Zoom rehearsals from the church. Seeing and talking with the director and their fellow choristers on

Enter virtual videos, the brainchild of composer and director Eric Whitacre, whose first one in 2010 brought together 185 vocalists from 12 countries. The ingenious concept enabled singers to record their own part at home, send in the clip and a tech team would take it from there. During the first months of 2020, the vids started popping up all over the internet. From high school and college choruses to professional chorales and community groups like the NYCCC, they were literally changing the face of choral music when singing elbow-to-elbow was impossible. “I believe it was Chorus Bass Alejandro Delgado who gave me the idea when he volunteered to help produce the first one,” recalled Eppler.

There were clearly a lot of obstacles to overcome. While the finished vocal and visual products ran just a few minutes, it

Virtual videos literally changed the face of choral music when singing elbow-to-elbow was impossible.

screen that day instantly buoyed members’ stuck-in-isolation spirits. However, when they all unmuted and tried to sing together, there came a collective “OMG” moment: Their usual four-part harmonies could best be described as a vocal trainwreck. Who knew the internet produced a few-second delay so each person’s “do-re-mi” came in at staggered intervals?

took literally 100s of hours for each of the chorus’ 11 virtual videos to become YouTube-ready. “I had no idea how difficult that must have been, especially for Alejandro,” Eppler said. “Our Administrative Assistant Andy Garza played a big role in keeping our singers’ work organized.” And the videos cost between \$1000-\$1500, which included audio and video engineering and music licensing.



Our first video dropped on June 11, 2020, and brought to mind the earliest days of the pandemic.

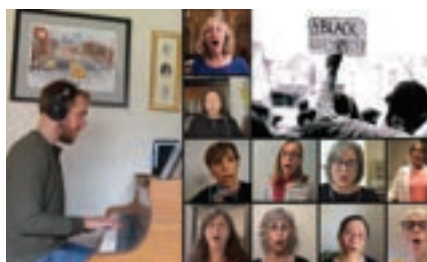
PIANO TRACKING

Forty plus singers recording themselves at home—what could possibly go wrong? Challenge #1 was implementing a system that would ensure that singers’ voices would be synchronized. Using basic how-to guides that were available everywhere, the chorus accompanist created a piano track that every member would listen to while recording their personal opuses; Evan Alparone did the first few before T.C. Kincer took over. “I used a special software package called Logic Pro X to record my digital piano, then I cleaned up any wrong notes, adjusted the tempos and overall made the piano part sound good,” said Kincer.

Another technique Kincer used to ensure everyone’s voice came in at the same time was taken straight from the virtual video playbook. Known in the biz as a “click track”, he added two sets of 4 clicks at the beginning of each recording. Chorus members would be asked to clap along with the last four clicks to help them gauge when the music was about to begin because, without a conductor, an audio cue was a must. “This made it easier for me to sync up all the recordings when I got them back from the singers.” But wait! Before the tapes reached choristers, the tracks were sent off to a professional quartet who recorded their parts and returned

PAGE 7





(Top and middle): The upcoming general election gave "Save the Country" its overriding message. (Bottom): "Empty Chairs at Empty Tables" was brought to life with scenes of worldwide protests following the death of George Floyd. (Above right): Singer/songwriter K. J. Kenhert accompanied the Chorus' rendition of "Up Above My Head."

them to Kincer for final editing. Only then were they made them available to chorus members.

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!

The instructions from Eppler were emailed to chorus members in late April and were clearly meant to make it all sound super easy, but for most of NYCCC's members, recording a halfway decent video at home presented a steep learning curve. Under the subhead "Now, for the Most Fun Part," it listed what we'd need to cobble together a studio: an audio device with earphones to listen to the lead singer and piano track as we sang, a video recorder and, perhaps most important, some encouragement: "You may be shy about the sound of your own



voice--most of us are--but don't worry, your voice will be mixed into a recording with everyone else in the chorus and we'll all sound...well, like us!" The tech-averse were also given the option of doing a voice-only recording.

After that, we were pretty much on our own. Here's the abbreviated version of the recording process, which took place after we'd practiced each piece until we either knew it by heart or could comfortably follow along with lyrics and/or sheet music taped to the wall.

Step 1: Assemble tools from our stash of audio/video gadgets (iPhone, iPad, computer, Android phone).

Step 2: Position main recording device so your face is framed in landscape mode (vertical shots would not be accepted).

Step 3: Plug earphones into listening device and place to the side.

Step 4: Pop in earphones, arranging cords so they won't become tangled and come loose during recording session.

Step 5: Hit record and react with horror at your image on screen.

Step 6: Turn on audio device and wait for your cue.

Step 7: Sing!

AUDIO ADJUSTMENT TIME

When members' audio/video recordings were complete, they went back to Kincer, who extracted the audio only. Wearing

headphones, "I went through each recording with a fine-tooth comb, fixing vocal mistakes and removing page-turns, coughs and other outside noises, and I made sure everything lined up rhythmically," he explained.

The last step was some basic EQ-ing. Huh? Google defines it as adjusting the levels of frequency response of an audio signal. "This is where my personal expertise sharply declines," said Kincer. "It was a first for me and was a bit of an experiment." Kudos to Kincer, the chorus' phenomenal pianist, for a job well done!

ART OF THE MATTER

Professional videographer and long-time chorus bass Delgado had the perfect artistic sensibility and tech savvy to turn a bunch of home-grown vids into a visual and melodic story. "To keep the pace, after chorus members did their videos, they shared them with me and Evan at the same time," he explained. "Evan [or T.C.] created a master track that I had to follow and sync." Editing the 60 videos from home on his laptop (much of the city's "working class" had to "phone it in" during the first months of lockdown), he pulled it all together using professional software, arranging each chorister's clip into a collage of faces interspersed with personally curated sounds and scenes.





In 1911, “March of the Women” was the suffragette movement’s anthem. In 2021, images in NYCCC’s virtual vid reflected current struggles.

For example, to create “Will You Love Me Tomorrow,” the chorus’ first video done at the start of the pandemic, Delgado took a few black and white photos of buildings in NYC and recorded chirping birds and street sirens to depict a world suddenly gone silent, save for the blare of ambulances day and night. The 4-minute production’s centerpiece was a masked director/conductor Eppler who noted that as far as he’s concerned, it’s “the best one we did. When I first saw it with the sirens wailing in the background, I cried, and I still cry when I see it.”

The fact that the song is fairly easy and we’d been rehearsing it before the pandemic also contributed to its success, noted Eppler. “After that first video, we were recording things and we had not rehearsed much except on Zoom. At that point, I wasn’t expecting anything close to musical perfection. It was about staying in touch with our public and giving our members something to keep up their morale and create a sense of togetherness.”

Next on the virtual video agenda was “Save the Country,” and Delgado’s take was inspired by The Fifth Dimension’s cover of the Laura Nyro tune and the upcoming general election. “It was very funky with circular windows and other visuals,” said Delgado. The three-minute video had an American flag motif and its closing bars delivered a striking full-screen message: VOTE!

NYCCC’S COMPLETE VIRTUAL VIDEO PLAYLIST

You can find them on
our YouTube channel:
@NYC Community
Chorus

Will You Love Me Tomorrow
Save the Country
March of the Women
Fragile
Come to My Garden
You Are So Beautiful
Up Above My Head
Back to Before
Do You Hear the People Sing?
Empty Chairs at Empty Tables
Home
A Change is Gonna Come

TIPS FROM OUR SEASONED SINGERS

After completing 12 at-home videos, NYCCC’s diligent music-makers were happy to offer some do’s and don’ts to help other novices avoid common pitfalls.

■ “Video-record late in the morning while everyone’s asleep and warn them to be quiet if they’re not.”

—May C.

■ “I placed a photo of my granddaughter on the wall above my computer which helped me stay connected and motivated.”

—Julie G.

■ “At the beginning, it was difficult to set things up; I had to move everything around and make lots of adjustments so it’s important to be patient. Street noises were also a problem and I had to re-record many times. Later, I found out that outside noises can be removed.”

—Jacqueline C.

■ “Some of my best takes were ruined because I forgot to push the record button.”

—Laurie L.

■ “Even though the production team told us not to worry about small mistakes because they’d be edited out, I found myself doing take after take for stupid stuff like messing up a lyric or hitting one wrong note. I wish I’d listened to them. Full disclosure: I also deleted a recording because I didn’t like my hair!”

—Mary G.

■ “No matter how many takes I did, when I played them back, I thought I sounded terrible. Then, somebody’s editing magic made us all sound terrific!”

—Neal G.

■ “I discovered an app called Teleprompter for Video. I could type in the lyrics and as I was recording, I could see the words on the screen. It made the process a whole lot easier.”

—Laurie L.

2022 - STAGING A COMEBACK



PHOTO BY JUDY COPPOLA.

On Monday night, January 24, 2022 at 6:30 p.m., about 20 choristers filed into the Church of the Holy Apostles, most with at least some music in hand, ready to begin the season. Among the new musical selections were Marvin Gaye's "Ain't No Mountain High Enough" and Journey's "Don't Stop Believin'." The laptop was still on the piano, but the Zoom/church ratio was about 50/50--a hopeful sign that this might just be a true season of change. The chorus welcomed its third Covid-era administrative assistant Katie O'Sullivan, after bidding a fond farewell to Hughie on the cusp of the New Year.

Vaccines were easily available and surveys of choristers had shown that many members were comfortable coming back in person to an environment in which their colleagues were fully vaccinated and wearing masks. New York City's choral world seemed to be reappearing on stages. Even at Holy Apostles, performance dates

were being booked. For the Chorus, the big question was—what was the plan?

To continue making music online? Just before the first rehearsal, the group's recording of "Fragile" had dropped on YouTube. Or would NYCCC really reach out and "touch" an in-person audience?

Section leaders on site that night weren't sure what to expect, but were generally pleased to see their singers show up.

Cort Cheek, longtime tenor section leader, said, "I thought people would come, but had no clue it would be so many, even though I certainly needed to be present. I was glad I took the risk—it made me happy."

Bass section leader Steve Jones agreed. "I had no idea how the season would go, but I had high hopes. I'd been coming to the church for most of the hybrid rehearsals and turnout was usually low. Sometimes I would be the only bass at the church, and was very happy to see us all returning." (Cheek felt the same way about periodically being the lone tenor.)

It took a few weeks and a bunch of happy coincidences for a plan to gel. First, at an early rehearsal, Eppler suggested that people with ideas of how the season should play out get in touch with the Executive Committee, opening the door to all possibilities.

Next, on a chilly Sunday afternoon in February, two Chorus sopranos and four altos hopped on Metro North, headed to a performance by the Limelight Theater Company of "Marry Me a Little." The Chorus's own Associate Music Director T.C. Kincer was the production's music director. Chatting on the way to New Rochelle and back, the group got talking about how nice it would be to perform live again in the spring. Speculating that they were not the only ones interested, they discussed various aspects of what it would take. The result of their discussion was an extended email to Eppler regarding concert possibilities, numbers of people necessary, Covid logistics, and the benefits of coming back live.

Just a few weeks later, on March 3, Eppler emailed choristers with this request (and a survey): "Some of us have enthusiastically asked if we could return to a regular public concert presentation this spring. (There are several other performing groups already having sold out concerts in our venue.) It might be a full 1 1/2 hour concert with all our repertory, or a shorter one, depending on our readiness. In order to have a live concert, we'd need a 'critical mass' at rehearsals. We will continue hybrid (in person and on zoom) rehearsals for as long as necessary to keep us all safe, but we'd like you to honestly consider whether you would be willing to attend live rehearsals to help us prepare for a concert."

The result? By March 21, the swell of interest prompted a pivot toward rehearsing for and planning a live performance.

There were, of course, concerns.



(Clockwise, from top): 1. The announcement made it official! 2. NYCCC fav Bob Dee added a rockin' vibe to the show. 3. Guest artists Jahneen Otis & Emily Goes joined vocal forces in "For Good" from *Wicked*. 4. The grand finale wowed the crowd with a rousing rendition of "Don't Stop Believin'". 5. Associate Musical Director T.C. Kincer.

PHOTOS BY DONNA ACETO.

Among section leaders, they varied. For tenors, the smallest section, "it was very unstable in our section," noted Cheek. "I remained the constant, but early on, different people were showing up week to week."

The same was true of the altos, said leader Miriam Duhan. "When we began planning for the live event, about a dozen altos were participating. Some people were there regularly, some not so regularly."

Jones was the optimist in the bunch. "Voting to do a live concert gave us all a boost, I think. It provided a sense of context and common purpose that the videos couldn't. I felt everyone began to take the process more seriously."

But the checklist was long!

1. Set a date.
2. Schedule section and special rehearsals.
3. Book talent.
4. Coordinate production and live-streaming.

5. Invite the public and our local City Council person.

6. Organize art for postcards, signage and programs.

7. Write and produce the program.

8. Establish performance protocols.

9. Ticket sale roll-out, advance and in-person. And perhaps most important...

10. Pull together a Concert Planning Committee!!! Oy!

April 7 was the first ZOOM meeting of the Concert Planning Committee for the newly scheduled Saturday, June 11 concert. Comprised of sopranos Fran Falkin, Sheila Egan, Barbara Good and Judy Korman; altos Julie Garrity, Mary Greenberg and Christina Pagano; bass John Fitzgerald, Eppler and admin O'Sullivan, the group split up tasks like publicity, volunteer recruitment, program development and Covid protocol creation. Nine weeks to showtime!

While weekly section and general rehearsals chugged along, eventually reach-

ing a "critical mass" of about 35 potential concert singers, a flurry of in-front-of and behind-the-scenes activity was pulling together the performance.

Concert theme and audience song selection? Check. "Change is in the Air" fit both the repertoire and the overarching state of the world, which by Spring was disrupted by the eruption of a Russia-initiated war in Ukraine that upended governments worldwide.

Audience song selection? Check. "Blowin' in the Wind", "If I Had a Hammer", "Give Peace a Chance" (with updated lyrics to reflect the times), and "Three Little Birds."

Guest artists for the performance? Check. Old friends of the group The Bob Dee Trio and Jahneen Otis signed on, as did Eppler's former student Emily Ann Goes and another recent NYU grad, Cameron Cave.

Coordinate video production and live-streaming? Check. Katrina Art, intrep-

CHORUS NOTES

id showrunner and longtime friend of the chorus was recruited, once again, as Stage Manager to pull together the production for a live and online audience.

Performance protocols? Check. Aiming to keep choristers and audience safe, committee member Barbara Good, whose regular gig included monitoring the theater world's evolving requirements, was chosen as the chorus's Covid Safety Manager. "It made sense for me to take the lead," she said.

Program, postcard and concert banner art selection, drafting and production, plus the mechanics of sales, distribution and seating? Check. Egan, Greenberg and Pagano divvied up assignments to get the

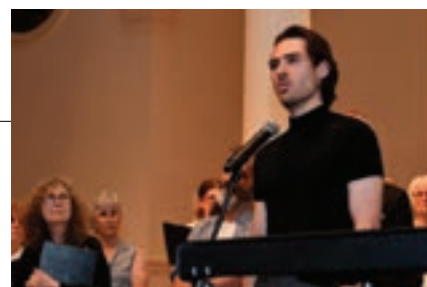
word out to the chorus community, its Chelsea neighbors and beyond, with Epler creating his contemplative copy on the event for the program and its online invitation. By the time the week of June 6 rolled around for the final dress rehearsals, all the prep was done.

JUNE 11, 6:30 P.M. SHOWTIME!

As planned, choristers were allowed to shed their masks for the performance, but only after taking a rapid test that morning and bringing proof of a negative result for Good to eyeball. The in-person audience showed proof of vaccination and wore masks.

And so it was that the New York City Community Chorus launched its 47th live concert since its founding, belting out "Make Them Hear You" and "The Times They are A-Changin'" to start a rousing 90 minutes of song in tribute to justice and humankind.

While the in-person audience was



smaller than normal, the online attendance was robust. Recently elected New York City Council Member Erik Bottcher stopped by to enjoy some early numbers and to express his continuing support for the group. By the close of the show, a rollicking "Don't Stop Believin'" had the audience on its feet, celebrating the spirit of the music and the joy of singing.

We'll let the photos tell the rest of the story...



(Clockwise from top right) 1. Cameron Cave was one of the show's star attractions. 2. Alto Judith Jablonka won audience approval for her successful stints as a soloist. 3. Singing in perfect harmony. 4. Soprano Erica Cruz. 5. New York City Council Member Erik Bottcher expressed his continuing support for the chorus. 6. Long-time tenor Lee-Ann Freilich. PHOTOS BY DONNA ACETO.