# CHORAL PERFORMANCE IN A PANDEMIC:
# MODERN SOLUTIONS AND PROSPECTS

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**Summary**

The article is devoted to the research of new forms of organization of remote work in choirs. With the introduction of quarantine restrictions, the rhythm of life has changed significantly, which has led to the search for new forms and methods of work. Various methods of introduction of the newest technologies in music education of different levels are considered. The experience of using new teaching methods in professional and educational choirs in schools and universities is analyzed. The influence of new forms of choral creativity on Ukrainian culture in general is determined. Eric Whitaker's experience in organizing the world's first virtual choir as an international art project has been studied. Professional, amateur and educational choirs in the pandemic were forced to look for new forms of work organization. This was the impetus for the introduction of new forms of work. A characteristic feature of remote choral rehearsal is the shift of emphasis from collective to individual performance. Awareness of oneself as an integral part of the whole characterizes the positive consequences of remote work. Among the negative consequences of remote work, we can identify low efficiency, depression as a result of loneliness, deterioration of the quality of the material. The unification of singers into virtual choirs has become a new wave in the modern cultural process of Ukraine and the world.

**Keywords:** remote work, virtual choir, methods, training, cultural process.

## 1. Introduction

As a result of quarantine measures, millions of people around the world are in self-isolation, whether voluntary or forced. For many, remote work becomes a real challenge, as the usual rhythm of life changes dramatically.

With the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic in the world in 2019, our lives have changed dramatically. The restrictions imposed by the WHO affected all spheres of life, but the quarantine most severely affected the arts – a field of life that cannot be imagined without the interaction of performers and listeners, actors and spectators, artists and the public. Today the world has moved to another dimension, from the real to the virtual, digital, on-line mode. The process of communication, interaction through the monitor screen limits our ability to interact, express our emotions and get impressions. In the age of the Internet, this "moment of art creation" is almost eliminated, because, unfortunately, it is quite difficult to feel one with art when watching videos on YouTube at home on the couch. It is another thing to sit in the majestic hall of the Opera House, which is over a hundred years old, and wait, breathtaking, for the climax of Habanera's aria Carmen in Bizet's opera.

Today the problem of innovative methods and techniques of music education is very acute. World events are forcing teachers to look for new approaches to teaching, given all the

restrictions imposed by the authorities. Unfortunately, today there is no scientific study that has covered the use of modern digital technologies in working with the choir. The theoretical and methodological basis of the work were the works of Ukrainian and foreign scientists in the field of research of virtual art and distance education. Modern Ukrainian scientists O. Olkhovska, D. Olkhovsky *(Ivanov et al., 2017: 58–62)*, A. Zabolotsky *(Zabolotsky, 2016: 19–23)*, Yu. Ivanov *(Ivanov, 2017)*, in their research considered the application of computer technologies for distance learning in higher education. Zakhar Duboviy's dissertation investigates distance learning as a set of modern innovative pedagogical and information technologies, including multimedia, network, music and computer, e-learning, blended and blended learning technologies that provide interactive information delivery from teachers to those who are studying *(Oak, 2019: 200)*. The issue of virtual choir as a component of distance learning was studied by Ukrainian scientist Lilia Kachurynets, but in her research, she did not study the activities of professional and amateur choirs in the conditions of remote work *(Kachurynets, 2020)*.

**The purpose of this article** is to identify the place of new technologies in the process of remote work of choirs and their impact on the modern cultural process. This determines the following **tasks**:

– To study modern pedagogical methods and principles in distance learning;

– Investigate the practical significance of the introduction of remote work in the performance practice of choirs;

– Identify the positive and negative consequences of remote performance and the use of such a form of work as a virtual choir.

**The object** of research is modern choral culture in the conditions of remote work.

**The subject** of analysis is the methods and tools used in remote rehearsals in the context of counteracting the spread of coronavirus infection.

**Research methods.** The methodology of research of methods and techniques of remote choir work is quite complex. Longitudinal and praxeological approaches were used to study and analyze the process of remote work and the impact of new forms of choral performance on cultural processes in Ukraine.

## 2. Ukrainian virtual choir

Let's start with the same YouTube service, where today we can find recordings of performances of world opera houses in just two clicks, or even more – watch the play online, along with thousands of other viewers from around the world. Even 20 years ago it was difficult to imagine this, and today we can see the show without leaving home, without traveling to another country, almost free (excluding internet traffic fees), and we can compare performances by different singers, etc. YouTube has become a platform for many art projects.

One of them is a virtual choir in Ukraine, created by Olena Slobodyska, an artist of the Vinnytsia Chamber Choir named after V. Gazinsky, a graduate student and lecturer at the Mykhailo Kotsyubynsky State Pedagogical University. The Virtual Choir in Ukraine art project is a search for new forms of cooperation to support and develop choral art in Ukraine, attract the general public and creative intelligentsia, unite Ukrainians from around the world, and establish creative relations. On May 11, the Virtual Choir in Ukraine art project, which brought together 111 Ukrainians from Italy, Poland, England, Russia and Ukraine, was presented on YouTube. All singers, performing parts of the same work, recorded themselves on video, and the organizers combined everything into one common video clip. Singers from Kyiv choirs and the capital's educational institutions took part in the project. The project is officially registered in the Book of Records of Ukraine as a

national record – the largest virtual choir in Ukraine, which gathered more than a hundred participants. The organizers received a certificate of record holders of Ukraine, and the singers were awarded diplomas.

To date, this art project has three records, the last – Ukrainian Christmas, has gathered 153 Ukrainians from around the world.

The virtual choir performed such works as:

• "Silent Night" (comp. F. Gruber, lyrics by J. Moore) – a Christian Christmas song belonging to the intangible cultural heritage of UNESCO;

• "Immaculate Virgin" – Ukrainian folk carol, which has a cult-religious character;

• "Oh, the peacocks walk" (from the rap. "Picardian third", music by J. Nudyk) – folk Christmas song;

• "New joy has come" – one of the most famous Ukrainian folk carols;

• "Good evening to you, sir" – a popular Ukrainian folk carol, is a shining example of a close combination of religious and folk carol traditions.

In the third season, the organizer Olena Slobodyska acted as a generator of ideas for finding ways to develop and promote the project, as well as a copywriter. One of such ideas was the registration of the song "Ukraine" in the international competitions "Jiskra" (Czech Republic) and "Constellation Ukraine – Europe", the victory of which was a pleasant surprise and encouragement for choristers. And also, participation in the International Choral Festival "Perú Canta", where the project "Virtual Choir in Ukraine" worthily represented our country among fifty groups from around the world. All singers of the previous season received personal diplomas, and the project – a valuable prize – a certificate for € 200 to participate in competitions next year.

Currently, work is underway on 4 projects, where leading soloists are invited, and from the Song Theater "Sources". The song "Fog by the ravine", and the soloist will be the author of the arrangement Olga Tokar.

Many Ukrainian choirs have chosen this format of work, and, as we see, it turned out very well.

Here is another example – the chamber choir MORAVSKI – Ukrainian choir, at the charity fund "School of Paul Muravsky", which was established in September 2017 on the initiative of Honored Artist of Ukraine, choral conductor – Larissa Buhonskaya. The constant leader is a graduate of the Tchaikovsky National Academy of Music of Ukraine (conducting class – L.M. Venediktov), winner of international competitions Olena Radko. Several choral works were recorded during the pandemic. Last year, the world premiere of a joint music project of the Central Conservatory of Music (Beijing) and the Tchaikovsky National Academy of Music of Ukraine in support of medical workers around the world, who save many lives every day in difficult pandemic conditions. NMAU them. P.I. Tchaikovsky, led by Rector Maxim Tymoshenko, supported an international project aimed at raising the morale of the heroes of our time. Joint virtual choir of the Tchaikovsky National Academy of Music of Ukraine and the MV Tchaikovsky National Specialized Music Boarding School. Lysenko recorded Li Xiao Bin's We for the Beijing Central Conservatory.

Teachers of art schools and universities in Ukraine were also forced to transfer their classes online, and if there were no special problems with individual classes, the choir or ensemble became essentially individual, when the teacher works with each student individually and then combines parties.

The scientific novelty of this article is that for the first time the methods and techniques of remote work with the choir were studied and the influence of the newest art forms on the choral culture of Ukraine was determined.

### 3. Amateur virtual choirs and their place in the world cultural space

Internet and remote work expand the possibilities of choirs, there are many remote competitions, where you only need to send a video performance (you do not need to go anywhere, which compensates for the cost of quality video – travel and accommodation costs).

But Ukrainians are not the only ones to unite in a virtual choir during the pandemic, for example the Lyon choir performed Do not Stop Me Now – a song by the English rock band Queen. Each of the 60 participants recorded their party on a smartphone. Then the installation was done. For several days, Frederick Glass "collected" the composition at home. He was satisfied with the result.

The idea to organize an online choir came from New Yorker Casper Ter Kul. He asked his Twitter followers if they would join him online to learn a few songs. "I'm not a doctor, I'm not involved in any way with the 'advanced', but knowing that the best thing to do now is to stay at home, I thought I could do something that would make people happier at home." he says. Casper teaches everyone involved simple songs, one line at a time. He says that if you are ashamed to sing so that everyone can hear you, you can just turn off your microphone and sing just for yourself. The online choir is held every Sunday through the Zoom video conferencing app. "These songs are a kind of medicine. Medicines for the soul. This is what I wanted to share. True medicine is such an important craft. But there are also ways we can take care of ourselves and our loved ones" he said. Anyone can join the choir, just have the app installed and follow the link that Casper posts on his Twitter.

### 4. The idea of creating a virtual choir and the world's first "Virtual Choir"

But the idea of creating a virtual choir is not new. More than a decade ago, a girl named Britlin Lossi posted a video on YouTube in which she performed a soprano from Eric Whitacer's "Sleep." She preceded her singing with a warm introductory speech addressed to the composer, where she confessed her love for his work. The video touched Whitacre and led him to address people with the following proposal: to record individual parts of his works in order to then consolidate them into a single file. He created a video in which he described the concept of his work called "Lux Aurumque", and then conducted for future performers to the accompaniment of piano – so that singers can make their own recordings using this "backing track". Many people responded to the request. The first "Virtual Choir" included 185 singers from 12 countries. Everyone liked the project so much that "Virtual Choir 2.0" was soon announced – for the song "Sleep" (the same one she sang in the fan video of Brittany Losi). This video, published in 2011, included an order of magnitude more participants – 2,000 people from 58 countries. Later, the number of participants increased. In "Virtual Choir 3.0" (2012), performing the work "Water Night" – about 4,000 participants from 73 countries, in version 4.0 (2013, the song "Fly to Paradise") edited 8409 videos from 5905 people from 101 countries.

### 5. Conclusions

As P. Chesnokov said – the basis for working with a large team is discipline, curriculum implementation and systematic movement towards the goal. Each concert, art program is erected as a building – from design, sketch, drawing, logistics and up to completion *(Chesnokov, 1961)*. All participants must work in concert on local tasks and deliver the result in a timely manner. Unfortunately,

the quarantine adjusted both the deadlines and plans, as well as the process itself. An important factor that, in my opinion, changed the attitude of children, teachers, society as a whole – was the need for self-organization, self-discipline, which organizes and becomes the main guarantee of results.

Thus, we observe positive trends in distance learning, mastering modern technologies and their implementation in art education. The Internet is blurring the boundaries, so it's important to use it to your advantage. Quarantine has made us feel an urgent need for live communication, so perhaps this will be the impetus for increasing interest among young people in classical music, live performance in front of gadgets and the Internet.

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