

## SINGING FOR BLUE SKY

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As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, we do not yet know what will be possible for our singing community this fall. We can rely on one certainty: singing is an undeniably powerful source of spiritual and emotional strength for so many of us. How do we remember this when the date for the resumption of singing in church keeps getting pushed further into the future? How do we move forward when we read reports about things like viral load and the particular dangers of spreading the coronavirus through singing?

We all experience days when we are too mentally and physically drained by current events to feel much like singing. I have found it impossible, for example, to get through the first hymn of any virtual worship service without weeping. But eventually we must let go of the soul-crushing frustrations of our online musical lives and focus on the future. As Samuel Johnson said, "Nothing will ever be attempted if all possible objections must first be overcome." I want to be ready for the day when we can sing together again, and this motivates me to attempt to practice.

"Practice" and "singing" are not quite the same thing. Practice is about developing

and maintaining skills, both technical and musical. When you are away from your choral director, you can work on your skills by doing simple breathing exercises, checking your posture, and repeating the warmup exercises you recall from rehearsals. If you spend a mere ten minutes a day doing this, you will increase your likelihood of being in shape for that first two-hour rehearsal, whenever it happens. Focus on the intention of your practice time, not on aimless repetition.

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These days I practice when I am in the right frame of mind, but I *sing* when I am moved by something more personal. I have been thinking a great deal about what "singing" means in my life, and why I still need to make space for it now. As a little girl, I used to go out into the backyard and sing "Over the Rainbow," pretending I was Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. As an adult, I realize that what I was really doing was freely expressing my innermost feelings. It was an emotional conversation with myself. Now I find myself singing in that way again because I have to say something about how all

of this is affecting my emotional well-being. Sometimes this means giving a mini-concert with my window open, consisting of anything from Sondheim to Schumann. ("No One is Alone" from *Into the Woods* has been a recent favorite of mine.) I find myself revisiting the pop ballads, beloved choral pieces, and musical theater songs of my teen years, the songs that first stirred my emotions and helped me to mature into adulthood.

Some of you may not have been singing lately because you are too saddened by our situation. I encourage you to recall your first songs and to let them soothe your heart once again. Give yourself permission to sing anything that helps you connect with what you are experiencing now. And never underestimate the healing power of Mozart. As liturgical singers, we know that singing in worship fulfills a particularly profound longing. We understand this now more clearly than ever after having been deprived of it for so long. We will be back together again soon, because we simply must be. As Robert Lowry put it so beautifully in the beloved hymn:

*I lift my eyes; the cloud grows thin;  
I see the blue above it;  
And day by day this pathway smooths,  
Since first I learned to love it,  
The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart,  
A fountain ever springing;  
All things are mine since I am his—  
How can I keep from singing? •*