

## MAKING SPACE

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The past year has been challenging for liturgical singers, to put it mildly. Many singers are still sitting on the sidelines as their churches remain shuttered, while others are struggling with masks, social distancing, and an increased level of anxiety. During this year's season of Lent, we seek the kind of hope that extends beyond the promise of Easter. We look forward to relaxed restrictions following widespread vaccination even though there is still so much uncertainty around the timeline.

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How do we make space, both literally and emotionally, for singing during this waiting period? Some of you may be in crowded living situations in which you don't feel comfortable singing freely. There are some ways to manage that challenge. First of all, we are all facing quarantines of various kinds, and we all have an increased tolerance for other people's "work from home" noise. I know that my neighbors are home more often now, and I hope they understand why I'm making so much more music at home than usual. We need to give ourselves the permission we grant freely to others around us.

Second, you can make arrangements with your roommates for scheduled practice times. Notice the times they are devoting to other activities, and offer to work out a solution. "I'm going to be singing from 1:00-1:45pm today, so that might be a good time for your daily walk, or to listen to a podcast with your earbuds." "I noticed that you are playing your workout music more softly than you used to; why don't you just go for it, and then we can trade noise sessions?" Setting aside time and space for practicing ensures that you

will be in shape when it's time to come back to the choir, and it will help you to reclaim some normality in your schedule.

If you are an avocational singer, you may not have a pile of solo repertoire and a regular practice regime to keep you going. I would suggest doing some simple warm-ups at least three times a week. Think back to the vocalises your choir director led, or just improvise something basic for yourself. If you also sing through a hymn more days than not, you can keep yourself in reasonable shape. For extra credit and a boost for your sight-reading skills, try reading a verse in a different voice part than the one you usually sing. If you don't own a hymnal, you can use one of the many available online resources, such as [hymnary.org](http://hymnary.org) or [hymnal.net](http://hymnal.net).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we need to ensure that we are singing correctly, and not minimizing our instruments to accommodate smaller spaces. I have noticed that singers performing with accompaniment

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tracks tend not to breathe but rather to wait between phrases, trying to align themselves with the tracks. They often ignore their posture because they are leaning towards the computer's camera, and they restrain their sound because they are singing for a room in their apartment rather than a concert hall or large church. These tendencies all lead to poor habits that will haunt you when we get out of this environment. If you are going to sing, SING. Take deep breaths, make round vowel spaces, and don't hold back. Easter is coming, and we will glorify God with joy and full-throated descants when the time comes to throw open our church doors at long last. •