



I've been a member of Southend Vox for approximately 8 years. Never before have we faced the difficulties that 2020 has brought us, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The MD's & committee have worked tirelessly to try and adapt Vox to the situation and new safety rules to continue rehearsals and keep members engaged.

When we went virtual after lockdown, like many, I was relatively new to Zoom. But although I'm not very technical I was able to pick it up pretty quickly. I was even able to advise a friend how she could use it for her personal training business and ended up being her Zoom technical advisor! A shock to both of us! And I hosted some family zoom fun and games.

The virtual choir rehearsals, though a necessity as the only way forward at the time, worked better than I expected possible. We started working through some songs we've sung before, so it wasn't too tricky. But when our adventurous MD wanted to learn some new material, I admit, I was worried that as a non-music-reader, I'd struggle. I learn by ear whilst following the score. But with patience and a note-bashing by our lovely accompanist, I gradually picked up the new songs well! We even managed to host a fun social event at the end of summer, on Zoom! We, as a committee, were always looking for ways to improve and try to tempt those that weren't so keen on the virtual gatherings, to join us. But we know it's not been possible or practical for all our members. Our greatest wish was that sometime soon, we'd get to restart live "in-person" rehearsals.

After many false hopes, and much time spent assessing rule/regulations and negotiating with venues, from Wednesday the 23rd September we were finally able to hold our first 'in person' rehearsal after almost 7 months! The stringent protocols were put in place for every one of the attendee's and the organiser's safety. We were finally "covid-secure". It sounds scary, but actually, all it means for members is using common sense and the everyday safety measures most of us are already accustomed too. Hand washing, sanitiser use and mask wearing, whilst limiting movement to only that necessary once in the venue and answering a few questions to confirm we're not putting anyone else at risk. However, the organisers (some of the committee and MD), have taken on the role of preparing the venue and cleaning afterwards. The forward planning and organisation put in place, means it's all straightforward and easy to do for the members!

We did have a strict limit on the number of 'in person' attendees, and I was lucky to be on the rota for the first 2 weeks. The reality of singing again with my choir, was soooooo goood!!! Even though we were sat over 2 metres from each other, it was just great to be "out out" and hear the others singing too! And having real feedback because our MD can actually hear us! Having to go stand outside for a ventilation break, under an umbrella and not socialising with my choir friends, was not a hassle at all. But a good coat, a hot drink and an umbrella is a must! It's tough not being able to chat and socialise during the break, but everyone understands that's for the safety and wellbeing of our members, and to ensure we are completely compliant with the rules.

Last week I was not on the rota for the live rehearsal. At first I was really disappointed, but I'm also glad that someone else was getting a turn to attend 'in person'. I admit to expecting to be underwhelmed when I went back to being a Zoomer. However, I was completely wrong. The Zoomers have developed a camaraderie all of their own and it was entertaining being a part of their group, including supporting emoji's and messages. The best bit was that we could actually socialise because when the ventilation break happened at the live venue, we were able to chat and have a giggle, in the safety of our homes. We were supportive of each other and I really enjoyed being a part of their gang!

So in conclusion, I actually feel like I'm getting the best of both worlds in the crazy world we are all in right now, and I'm so grateful to Vox for keeping the music alive 😊

Natalie x