

Oxford University Guidance on Musical Activities during COVID-19

Why music matters

Extra-curricular activity forms a hugely important component of life at Oxford. Music is no exception. The University is renowned for the calibre of its musical traditions and performances, and many alumni have gone on to lead successful careers in the performing arts.

The time people might spend working on a performance piece has significant benefits for mental health and wellbeing. Music-making is an active, creatively stimulating, and community building activity. It is a way to make friends, forge support groups, spend time outside the library or away from the screen, and maintain a creative mind set. Playing or singing together, in-person where safely possible, is life-enhancing. The University places a high value on all of these attributes. This guidance document does not represent an attempt to diminish the performing arts but rather to ensure they can continue safely during this period of uncertainty.

Overarching Government, Professional Body and Oxford University Guidelines

Government

All musical activities will need to follow the prevailing Government guidelines in place for the performing arts. These are subject to change in line with measures to mitigate COVID-19 and the following sources should be referred to regularly to ensure activities take place within the latest guidelines.

1. Current government advice from DCMS at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/performing-arts> has a specific section on the performing arts, with guidance for people who work in performing arts, including arts organisations, venue operators and participants.
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses#compliance-with-guidance>. Issued 10 September 2020 (this link is the closest to get to the particular section on performing arts), pp15-17 when printed.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-meeting-with-others-safely-social-distancing>. Issued 14 September 2020 and includes the information about the "rule of six".
4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do>

Professional bodies

Sources of advice for specific types of performing arts activity include:

5. [Guidance from the Royal School of Church Music](#) (primarily for Chapel Choirs, including a template risk assessment)
6. [Basic guidance from the Musicians Union](#)
7. Making Music (e.g. <https://www.makingmusic.org.uk/news/and-still-we-play-and-sing>)

Oxford University

8. A toolkit for managing University events during COVID-19 is available at <https://communications.admin.ox.ac.uk/event-management>
9. A COVID-secure risk guidance tool for student organisers of in-person events is available at: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/coronavirus/students/student-life/risk-guidance>.
10. Oxford SU has published tips and tricks on organising events in person and online: <http://bit.ly/SUTipsForEvents>.

Currency of this guidance

COVID-19 regulations and guidance can change frequently. If there is a discrepancy between the advice in this document and the advice in the latest government and professional body regulations and guidance, please follow the latest government and professional body regulations and guidance. Note that it may take varying amounts of time for the various sources of professional and university guidance to be updated following a change in government regulations, so please check them regularly to be sure they have incorporated the latest position and that therefore the most up-to-date advice is being followed.

Purpose of this guidance

This advice is intended to give advice on possibilities and responsibilities for music groups during the COVID-19 Pandemic. A guidance document for drama groups has also been produced, under the auspices of OUDS (Oxford University Dramatic Society): it can be found on the University's Coronavirus student life page at <https://www.ox.ac.uk/coronavirus/students/student-life>. All group members are encouraged to make judgements about what is safe for them as individuals, and group leaders are urged to respect the needs of individual members.

Seven key action points for organisations and group leaders for each rehearsal

1. Complete a COVID-19 **risk assessment**. Examples of risk categories are available [here](#). You can also consult the COVID-secure risk guidance tool for student organisers of in-person events is available at <https://www.ox.ac.uk/coronavirus/students/student-life/risk-guidance>.
2. Ask your participants, professionals and volunteers to use hand sanitiser and **wash their hands** frequently.
3. Ask your participants to wear **face coverings** in any indoor space or where required to do so by law or the University's policy on face-coverings at <https://www.ox.ac.uk/coronavirus/health/face-coverings>
4. Make sure everyone is observing **social distancing** (2m at least between each member). Make it easy for everyone to do so by putting up signs or introducing a one-way system that they can follow.
5. Increase **ventilation** by keeping doors and windows open where possible and running any suitable available ventilation systems.

6. Take part in **NHS Track and Trace** by keeping a record of all your attendees for 21 days. If you are in an indoor location you must use the NHS QR posters. (These should be provided, and if not you can create one [here](#).)¹
7. Turn people with coronavirus **symptoms** away. If an attendee (or someone in their household) has a persistent cough, a high temperature or has lost their sense of taste or smell, they should be self-isolating.

A checklist of key actions is provided at the end of this guidance.

Auditions

Auditions should be conducted online, wherever possible, in order to minimise unnecessary contact between individuals and to allow for a fully accessible audition process. There are many ways to ensure an equally high audition standard online and candidates can be encouraged to submit recordings/videos in advance.

Where in-person auditions are necessary, they should take place within the guidelines, with no more than six people present at one time, with face coverings in use by anyone present whose instrument does not require sound to be produced via the face.

Sufficient breaks need to be planned between each audition to allow for thorough cleaning and ventilation of the space, for example ten minutes ventilation after a five minute audition. When planning an audition timetable, be aware that it is likely that at least twice the amount of normal time per audition candidate needs to be factored in. Care should also be taken in case auditions over-run: there needs to be a dedicated, marked space where candidates can queue in a socially distanced way.

Audition candidates should not share scores and/or sight music: a fresh copy should be provided for each candidate.

Rehearsals

At the time of writing, professional and non-professional performing arts groups can continue to rehearse and perform as set out at section 3.18, “Can I go to my hobby club / amateur musical group / other leisure activity?” at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do#visiting-public-places-and-taking-part-in-activities>.

“It is [against the law](#) to gather in groups of more than 6, where people are from different households or support bubbles. Some activities - such as those organised for under-18s - are exempt. In a COVID-19 Secure venue or public outdoor place, non-professional performing arts activity, including choirs, orchestras or drama groups can continue to rehearse or perform together where this is planned activity in line with the performing arts guidance and if they can do so in a way that ensures that there is no interaction between groups of more than 6 at any time.

¹ <https://www.makingmusic.org.uk/resource/can-group-get-back-in-person>

If an amateur group is not able to ensure that no mingling takes place between these sub-groups of no more than 6 (including when arriving at or leaving activity or in any breaks or socialising) then such non-professional activity should not take place.”

Who can meet?

It is vital that thorough planning goes into the meeting in-person of performing arts groups if they are to take place in 2020-21. The Government guidelines of 14 September 2020 stipulate that although groups larger than six cannot meet, venues following COVID-19 secure guidelines will be able to continue to host more people in total, although no one should mix in a group of greater than six. Crucially, “there can be **multiple groups of six people** in a place, provided that those groups do not mingle.”²

There will be limits set by each COVID-secure venue on the numbers who can be involved in planned activity taking place inside or out, even when there is social distancing (of 2m) for all members. It is vital that all groups and individuals consult and obey the rules set out by individual venues. This may include ensuring that the space is limited to a certain number of people based on floor space and restrictions on ventilation. Please check with the venue-provider at the earliest stage of planning.

For instrumental groups and choirs, each person within a group of six needs to be socially distanced 2m apart within that group, and there also needs to be the same social distance of 2m between the groups of six.

What do groups need to do?

In order to proceed safely with rehearsals in 2020-21 there are a number of safety measures specific to music.

Face-coverings should only be removed when playing instruments where sound is produced via the face. At all other times, a face covering must be worn. It is vital that social distance of at least 2m is maintained by all.

Ensemble members should enter the room one at a time and, after sanitising their hands, proceed directly to their individual space where they should keep their belongings, including their instruments.

As far as possible, a seating plan should have been devised and publicised to group members in advance of their entering the rehearsal space. Where it has not been possible for a seating plan to be devised in advance, or where changes have to be made, a designated person should create a detailed seating plan which will allow for an accurate Track and Trace implementation. Records of the seating plans should be kept for as long as they would be needed for Track and Trace. The seating plan record should include the date, location and length of time of the rehearsal.

Ensemble members should bring their own copies of sheet music to rehearsals, and not lend or share copies. Sheet music should not be kept in communal folders. Groups may like to consider using/creating PDFs of parts/scores that can be displayed on individuals’ devices.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do>

The following equipment should not be shared between ensemble members under any circumstances:

- brass, wind and string instruments;
- mutes;
- mouthpieces;
- reeds;
- percussion instruments;
- oils and greases;
- cloth swabs and pipe cleaners;
- any other form of cleaning equipment;
- pens/pencils;
- sheet music;
- water bottles.

There should be regular breaks during rehearsals to refresh the air within the space by natural ventilation. Refreshments should not be provided by the ensemble for communal consumption. Encourage members to bring their own water and snacks if needed.

On leaving the rehearsal, ensemble members should leave the rehearsal space one at a time, stands should be sanitised after packing away instruments and equipment, and again after leaving the rehearsal space. All shared equipment (such as pianos and percussion) should be disinfected by a single person. When disinfecting instruments, do not spray cleaning fluids onto an instrument directly. Instead, spray directly onto a disposable cloth and use the cloth to clean the instrument. Cloths should then be disposed of safely.

COVID responsibility

The person responsible for the musical group should *either* take responsibility for ensuring that the information about COVID security measures set out in the latest guidelines and regulations is known to all group members, *or* should delegate that responsibility to a named person. Group members should know who carries the responsibility for having the latest COVID security information. It is the responsibility of *all* group members to behave in the required COVID-secure ways at all times.

Socials

Social events related to musical activity are treated under the same rules as any other social events and do not benefit from any exemptions applying to performing arts activity.

It is strongly recommended that in-person social events, which may have traditionally followed rehearsals in the past, do not take place at this time, to ensure maximum safety for members. Online social events have been shown to be enjoyable and successful ways of maintaining a sense of community amongst members of arts groups.

Performances

This guidance note focused on rehearsals rather than performances, as the conditions for performances will be governed by the COVID rules required to be in place for any given venue. However, given that live performances (whether indoor or out) will not be possible for all groups, it is worth drawing attention to the excellent resources for helping groups pre-

record or livestream their concerts. Highly recommended advice can be found [here](#) for those new to this practice.



Checklist in brief

- ☐ Complete a Risk Assessment (in compliance with your venue)
- ☐ Make sure you have Track and Trace info. for all members
- ☐ Make sure all members are aware of symptoms and know the protocol if they/a household member displays symptoms (e.g. they must not attend the rehearsal)
- ☐ Stick to the 'Rule of Six' (includes seating plan arrangements)
- ☐ Be aware of maintaining good natural ventilation in the venue
- ☐ Ensure social distancing (2m+)
- ☐ Make sure all members enter and exit individually
- ☐ Ensure hand washing/sanitising before and after rehearsals
- ☐ Ensure individual music, whether paper or PDF on a device (absolutely no sharing of parts)
- ☐ Ensure equipment and peripherals are not shared and are adequately cleaned after use