

# THE MASKED SINGER

*Information and advice about singing in masks*



It has now been over a year since the COVID-19 pandemic changed life for people all over the world. For many singers, a return to any kind of in-person rehearsal or performance remains impossible. Pandemic safety restrictions vary widely, and most ensemble singers who are able to gather in person do so with caution. Besides strictly enforced distancing, some ensembles, including barbershop quartets and choruses, have chosen to sing in masks.

Sweet Adelines International is part of a coalition of 125 performing arts organizations who support a study of aerosol transmission commissioned by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) and the College Band Directors National Association (CBDNA). The study is led by research teams at the University of Colorado and the University of Maryland (both in the U.S.). Most recent results (July 2020) focus on the distribution of respiratory aerosol (microscopic particles that can carry viruses) generated while playing wind instruments, singing, acting, speaking, and dancing.

According to a press release on the NFHS website, researchers

determined that “the amount of aerosol dispersed by singers varies on consonants, vowels, intensity and pitch” and that “singers wearing a well-fitted, three-layer, surgical-style mask have a reduced release of aerosol.” They also found that face shields alone are “only effective at close range to stop large droplets and do not prevent aerosol from being inhaled or released unless a mask is also worn.” More studies are underway by researchers in several countries to determine the safest ways for performers to return to practice rooms and stages.

The American Choral Directors Association’s “Resources for Choral Professionals During the Pandemic” includes an ongoing list of research as well as planning tools, webinars, and more. It can be found at <https://acda.org/resources-for-choral-professionals-during-a-pandemic/>.



## SWEET ADELINES IN MASKS

The Woodlands Show Chorus of Region #10 is one Sweet Adelines chorus experimenting with masked singing. Master Director Betty Clipman and Associate Director Kerri Mauney have been running hybrid rehearsals — with some members attending in-person, masked and distanced, and some members attending virtually — for several months, as their local rules allow.

The Woodlands Show Chorus began rehearsing outdoors, masked and distanced, with only a few members at a time. Eventually, they were able to move indoors, to a large rehearsal room at an arts school with good ventilation. They used pool noodles to mark proper distancing, and Betty says they have room to exceed the distancing guidelines, which they do.

Kerri helped design and implement the system of microphones and cameras that make it possible for members attending virtually to participate fully. She says it's been worth the trial-and-error learning because hearing the actual sound of barbershop chords, even through a mask, is motivating for everyone. They discovered

that having one camera facing the director and a second one facing the chorus works best so people watching at home can see the director's hands.

"When you are wearing a mask and you are separated, you have to really focus in on what the people attending virtually see," says Kerri. "This way, they can hear the chorus singing, see Betty's hands, and hear her feedback, and it's actually working out really well. We have experimented with microphones to find what works because we have to remember that whatever they hear is also filtered through a mask."

Because she is directing, not singing, Betty uses a regular mask with a silicone bracket underneath that keeps it off her mouth. She says several members of the chorus use that combination. The brackets, which are made of silicone or plastic, can be bought online and fit under most cloth or paper (medical-style) masks. They are a less-expensive option, and she recommends that singers try several versions to find what works.

Kerri uses The Singer's Mask developed by Broadway Relief Project.