Dear PYC Families,

Our community has been through a lot in the last four months. Many of us are longing for a sense of normalcy and wondering when we might gather again without the tension that the COVID-19 pandemic has generated. Simultaneously, we have been experiencing (more collectively than ever before, it seems) the sting of racism, inequality, and injustice.

I want to take a moment to acknowledge the difficulty, hardship, loss, and in some cases heartbreak that many in our community have suffered as a result of the events of the last several months; my heart is with those who are grieving and struggling.

As we all work to make sense of where we find ourselves, I know that many of us are now looking to the future with a great many questions, concerns, and (perhaps) a bit of hope. At PYC, we’ve been asking our own questions about the future, listening to yours, and working hard to generate answers about our 2020-21 Season.

Before getting into the details of the Season, I want to take one more moment to celebrate some of the bright spots that PYC has experienced over the last several months:

- “Homeward Bound”, our first virtual choir video, received over 4,760 views;
- Our Go Fund Me campaign raised $1,460 after the cancellation of our spring performances;
- 40 young singers enrolled in PYC Summer Online courses and one-to-one vocal coaching, engaging in unique offerings like Musical Theatre, Songwriting, and Ukulele;
- Our much-anticipated collaboration with Hill Dance Academy Theatre received $7,500 of grant support from Opportunity Fund; and
- Our collection of families and fantastic staff have all helped to hold our community together despite our inability to gather in the same space.

PYC is fortunate to have such a dedicated and resilient group of individuals as its organizational family.

Now as promised, below you will find details about the nature of PYC’s programming for the coming months. These plans have been made upon this foundational principle: the health of our singers, families, and staff takes top priority.

We continue to watch what our public health officials, schools, fellow arts organizations, and researchers are doing, and we listen closely to what they are saying. We are especially eager to see the results of an unprecedented study on viral transmission through participation in the performing arts (results are already out for instrumental music, and the choral music results are expected in the coming weeks; here is a link to the study).

As you read below, I hope that it will be evident that we have taken great care in considering the safety of you and your singers. I trust you will find that, while our programs will look very different at the start
of the 2020-21 Season, the educational value offered to your singers remains of the highest quality. Furthermore, we plan to make every effort for our singers to connect with one another, even if it means doing so from their own respective living rooms.

All that said, should you still have concerns about the format of the Season, I encourage you to reach out to us directly so that we can discuss how to make your involvement in PYC’s programming as comfortable as possible for your family.

In times like these, **music can be strong medicine for the soul.** We are honored to share, together with you, the power offered by music this Season.

Wishing you all things best and beautiful,

[Signature]
Lee Saville-Iksic

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**SUMMER PROGRAMMING**

In late summer, we typically offer programs to gear our singers up for the Season. This gives them the chance to connect with their peers and develop crucial skills for their involvement in PYC all year long. This year, we have cancelled our Summer Singers day-camps (Pittsburgh and Grove City locations) and our residency CAMP (normally required for singers in Talisman and Bel Canto Singers).

With the purpose of still providing a way to prep our singers for the Season, we plan to offer a handful of events and activities – both virtually and in-person in outdoor spaces. Expenses related to these activities are included in your normal season tuition, and all in-person activities will be optional. You will be contacted directly by your child(ren)’s conductor(s) with details about these activities.

**Impact on Tuition:** As mentioned in an email sent on July 10, PYC wishes to acknowledge the cancellation of CAMP (in both the typical residential format and the day-camp alternative that was being considered) in the form of another small tuition reduction for singers in Talisman and Bel Canto Singers, in the amount of $160. This is in addition to the $200 reduction made when we announced that CAMP would not be residential. As a result, Talisman tuition will be $1,390 and Bel Canto Singers tuition will be $1,490 for the 2020-21 Season.

If your family could have afforded the cost of tuition prior to this reduction, please consider donating to our Tuition Assistance Program, allowing PYC to make tuition affordable for a family with a lower household income:

https://www.pittsburghyouthchorus.org/donate/
TUITION ASSISTANCE

The pandemic has caused significant financial loss. PYC has experienced some of this loss as an organization, and we know that many of the families of our singers have as well. In response, we have budgeted for a significant increase in our Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), knowing that families that had previously paid full tuition may now need some assistance to continue participating in PYC programming.

As part of a larger, multi-year effort to make PYC’s tuition structure more equitable and user-friendly, we have streamlined our TAP application, making it easier to complete and minimally invasive with regards to your family’s financial situation.

Applications are being accepted from families with combined household incomes up to $120,000. To learn more, follow this link to the Application Form.

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UNDER ONE SKY

Our 2020-21 Season theme, UNDER ONE SKY, seeks to evoke that which we have in common – a way in which we might remind ourselves how we are connected to one another, despite our experiences of quarantine and the other different ways in which we see the world.

As a part of our Season programming, our Executive Director will compose an original song to be sung by our choirs, using words and ideas that will come from our singers.

SEASON 2020-21 PROGRAMS

We’ve all been learning to do things differently, while finding new ways to maintain the parts of our lives most important to us. PYC’s programming for the 2020-21 Season will follow suit.

In the spring, when we were forced to quickly pivot to online instruction, our conductors found ways to bring the singers together for regular meetings while they continued to prepare the repertoire they had started back in January. While we’ve received lots of feedback about how important it was to stay connected in this way, we also know that this format was a challenge for many. Plus, we all know that the choral experience doesn’t translate well to a virtual format.

We’ve learned a lot since the spring. With the success of our PYC Summer Online courses and one-to-one vocal coaching, we’ve determined “proof of concept” for other forms of vocal music learning that are robust, meaningful, and valuable to our singers.
Fall Programming Format: While none of us can expect “the usual” PYC programming in the fall, you also shouldn’t expect the virtual instruction of this past spring 2020. Instead, singers will have the opportunity to develop their musical skills through a comprehensive and engaging collection of programs that will cater to their needs/interests and keep them connected with their peers.

Between the demands of remote learning via our schools and doing our best to maintain our work schedules, the pandemic has been hard on parents. Because of this, we are taking great care to plan instruction and activities that are student-friendly, using the smallest possible number of platforms for easier navigation and creating content that is easy to follow with minimal adult assistance.

When it comes time to restart our in-person rehearsals, we believe that our singers will be more than prepared, and that our choral programs will be richer than ever as a result of these new opportunities.

The format of this Season’s programs will include:

- One-to-one vocal coaching with our staff (three sessions per virtual semester);
- On-demand lessons for choral music skill development;
- Elective classes (i.e. Musical Theatre, Songwriting, Collaborative Recording, and Ukulele); and
- Online and outdoors meetings with the other singers in your ensemble(s).

Our Season will begin in this way on September 14, 2020. When we are confident that doing so would present little to no risk of transmission of the coronavirus, we plan to return to indoor, in-person rehearsals. We may continue to incorporate some of the other aspects of this new programming format as interest, logistics, and finances allow.

Elective Format: Electives will run in six-week blocks, and each singer will have the opportunity to participate in one elective in the fall and – given to proper circumstances for continuing this program – one in the spring. Singers will be assigned to an elective block after informing PYC of their top choices (a link for doing so will be forthcoming).

We are currently working on ways to provide ukuleles for students wishing to participate in this elective, but who do not have an instrument at home and do not or cannot purchase one at this time.

Performances and Workshops: The popularity and success of our first ever virtual choir video (VCV) has prompted us to plan for more of these in the fall of 2020. In the spring of 2020, we had close to 50 singers participate in two different VCV opportunities. For fall 2020, we want to involve as many of our singers as possible, and we hope to release three or four such videos.

Our VCV releases will take the place of our normal Winter Concert, which has been canceled. We have also postponed our workshop with Dr. Raymond Wise (this will now take place in October 2021), and we have been informed by Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra that their performance of Mahler’s Symphony No. 8 – in which we had been invited to sing – has been canceled.

As of now, we are currently planning for in-person performances for the spring, including our productions of Crossings in collaboration with Hill Dance Academy Theatre to involve our older singers and other exciting opportunities for our younger groups. We will continue to provide updates on these events as the Season and the state of the pandemic progress.
**High School Singers:** High schoolers interested in the elective and virtual choir video experiences described above are welcomed to participate this fall. This will be limited to singers in grades 9-12. We are still working out a few of the details for this opportunity. If you are interested, please get on our radar by emailing Artistic Director, Shawn Funk (shawn@pittsburghyouthchorus.org), and we will contact you soon with more information.

**Neighborhood Training Choirs:** Early in the pandemic, we made the decision that our Neighborhood Training Choirs (NTCs) would be delayed until early 2021, and we are still hopeful that they will be able to begin in-person meetings around this time. For those of our youngest singers who would like to get an earlier start this year, we will also be offering packages of ten 20-minute coaching sessions. NTC families can register for this offering using the same link as our other programs.

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**REGISTRATION**

If you haven’t registered yet, you can do so by following this link.

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**WAYS TO SUPPORT PYC THIS SEASON**

You can help make PYC tuition affordable for families who might not otherwise have the opportunity to enroll in our programs. As mentioned above, we have begun a multi-year effort to make PYC’s tuition structure more equitable and user-friendly. This marks a change in our business-model, placing a greater emphasis on individual contributions and corporate sponsorships.

To make an individual donation, follow this link: [https://www.pittsburghyouthchorus.org/donate/](https://www.pittsburghyouthchorus.org/donate/)

PYC can offer corporate sponsors heightened visibility through our YouTube releases and from the stage at our future live performances. If you are a business leader interested in sponsorship, email PYC’s Executive Director at lee@pittsburghyouthchorus.org.

**RESOURCES**

PYC’s Executive and Artistic Directors held a “townhall” meeting with PYC families on July 6. Follow this link to watch the recording.

To read PYC’s anti-racism statement, follow this link.