



Ageing  
Voices



**CREATIVE AGING  
INTERNATIONAL**  
*We Celebrate Aging*

Clár Éire Ildánach  
*Creative Ireland  
Programme*  
2017–2022





## **Building a Dementia Friendly Choir: Part I**

Norah Constance Walsh  
Musical Director

# Overview

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- Primary Elements for a Dementia Friendly Community Choir
- Variations on this model of choir
- Break for Questions
- An Introduction to the Forget Me Nots
- Getting Rehearsals Online
- Expansion
- Break for Questions
- What Works Online
- What Doesn't Work Online
- Getting Started



# Primary Elements: 1/2

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## ○ Objectives

- Fixed/Flexible
- Participation in singing, a social recreational outlet
- For a Target Membership
- Output
- Tone

## ○ Vocal Forces

- Community
- Dementia-friendly

## ○ Choral Director

- Essential skills
- Additional skills





# Primary Elements: 2/2

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## ○Committee

- Membership administration
- Venue administration – H&S
- Rehearsals organisation
- Concert organisation – H&S

## ○Funding sources

- Membership fees/donation box
- Local businesses
- Local council grants

## ○Expenditure:

- Venue
- Music professionals
- Insurance

- Publicity - social media, promotion
- Financials
- Insurance



- Weekly refreshments
- Concert expenses – transport
- Admin

# Variations on a Community Choir

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- Singalong:
  - Memberships/Participants
  - Leaders
  - Organisation / Administration
  - Programming and materials
  - What you get involved in

- Choir in a Healthcare Setting

- MISA Choir St. James's Hospital

Dublin [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yaulC\\_kHWio](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yaulC_kHWio)



# The Forget Me Nots

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- Origins

- Membership

  - Community choir

  - Special welcome for people who have memory loss and their carers

  - Diversity

- Quality Arts

  - Music professionals

  - Both challenging and enjoyable

  - Collaborations

- Pre-Covid

  - Weekly rehearsals

  - Performances

  - Collaborations



# Getting Rehearsals Online

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## ○ First Contact

- Early closure
- Trustees/Committee/Volunteers – Zoom call for planning.
- Two challenges: Getting people on. 2.What can we actually do on such a call?
- Initial phone contact to members to gauge response and viability

## ○ What'sApp - What's That?

- What'sApp Groups
- Choir logistics and staying in touch

## ○ Zoom

- Karen Meenan's 'how to' video and tech support desk
- First sessions – Zoom call opened with background support calls getting people online
- Later sessions – only occasional tech support needed






# Expansion

- Music Appreciation Sessions
- Virtual Choir
- Promotional Video
- Recordings with other artists


### Background to Opera

- Opera – 'work' in Italian
  - Music and drama of equal importance
  - Text = libretto
- Forerunners of Opera:
  - Ancient Greek plays, medieval liturgical dramas
  - Renaissance forms especially the intermedio
  - Humanist desire to emulate Greek tragedy
  - Florentine Camerata – monody
- Composers of note:
  - Peri
  - Monteverdi



### Early Origins: Ragtime

- Late 19<sup>th</sup> century
- Drew from the dances and march music of the time
- Musical features:
  - Syncopation
  - Steady bass accompaniment
  - The rhythms were an example of a changed rhythm from what went before, but were then played straight
  - Piano legacy
- Prominent composers:
  - Tom Turpin
  - Scott Joplin



### The Forget-Me-Nots Choir - 'We'll Meet Again'



# What Works on Zoom:

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## ○ Music:

- Warm-ups

- Learning by ear

- Varying between use of clips and live accompaniment

- Inviting party pieces

## ○ Social Engagement

- Participating in discussion – musical related or otherwise
- Seeing each other and being part of a bigger social event
- Celebrating happy events, and marking others

## ○ Long-term benefits

- Structure to the week

- Mental health

# What doesn't work on Zoom:

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- Music
  - Singing together
  - Anything that goes on for too long
- Social Engagement
  - Private conversations
- Technology
  - General technology failures
  - Individuals having technology issues.



# Getting Started

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- Research and visit choirs in your area
- Form a committee
  - Common goal
  - Up front if possible
  - Varied skills
- Source funding
  - Project plan and budget
  - Start-up funders, later funders
- Source members
  - Parish
  - Community organisations
  - Local arts/sports organisations
  - Word of Mouth



## Questions:

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- Any questions on what we have discussed today?
- What would you like to hear more about in the next session?







## Building a Dementia Friendly Choir – Part II

Norah Constance Walsh  
Musical Director

# Overview

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- Musical Director Role
- Rehearsal Content
- Break for Questions
- Repertoire
  - Brainstorm Genres
  - Sourcing Materials
- Arrangement
  - Popular/Mainstream
  - Choral
  - Instrumental
- Break for Questions
- Concert Preparation



# Musical Director Role

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## ○ Various Skills

- Leadership, choral/musical direction, interpersonal skills
- Awareness of dementia

## ○ Responsive Approach

- Knowing your membership
- Repertoire – responding and choosing
- Participation in concerts

## ○ Working with Members and Partners

- Members with dementia and their carers
- Committee
- Collaborators



# Rehearsal Content

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## ○ Warm-Ups

- Upper body: loosening and relaxation
- Posture and breathing
- Vocal exercises

## ○ Pacing

- Old and new material
- Work-fun balance
- Music-social balance

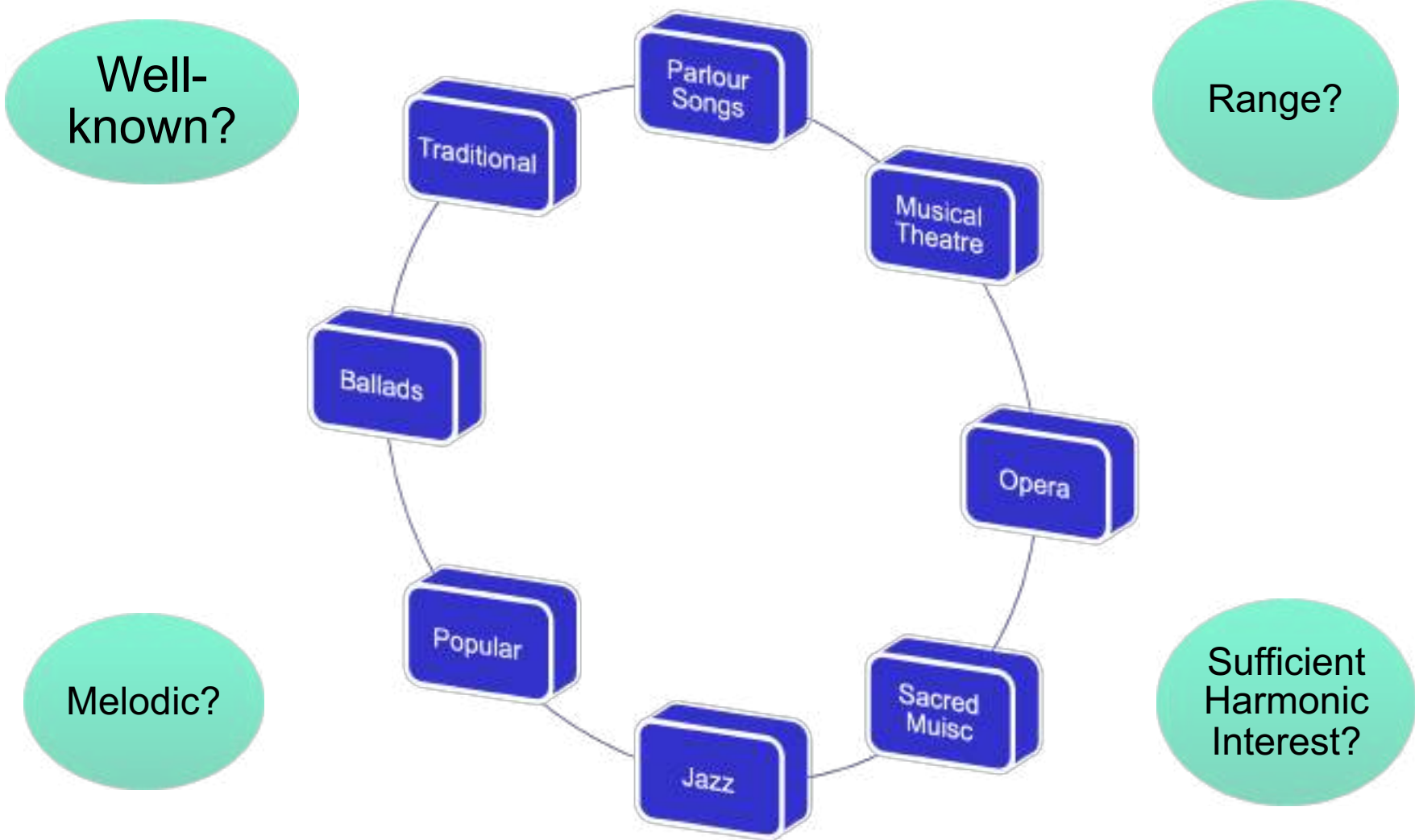
## ○ Other Elements

- Learning aids
- Rounds
- Musicianship / Ear training
- Songs from the floor
- Guests





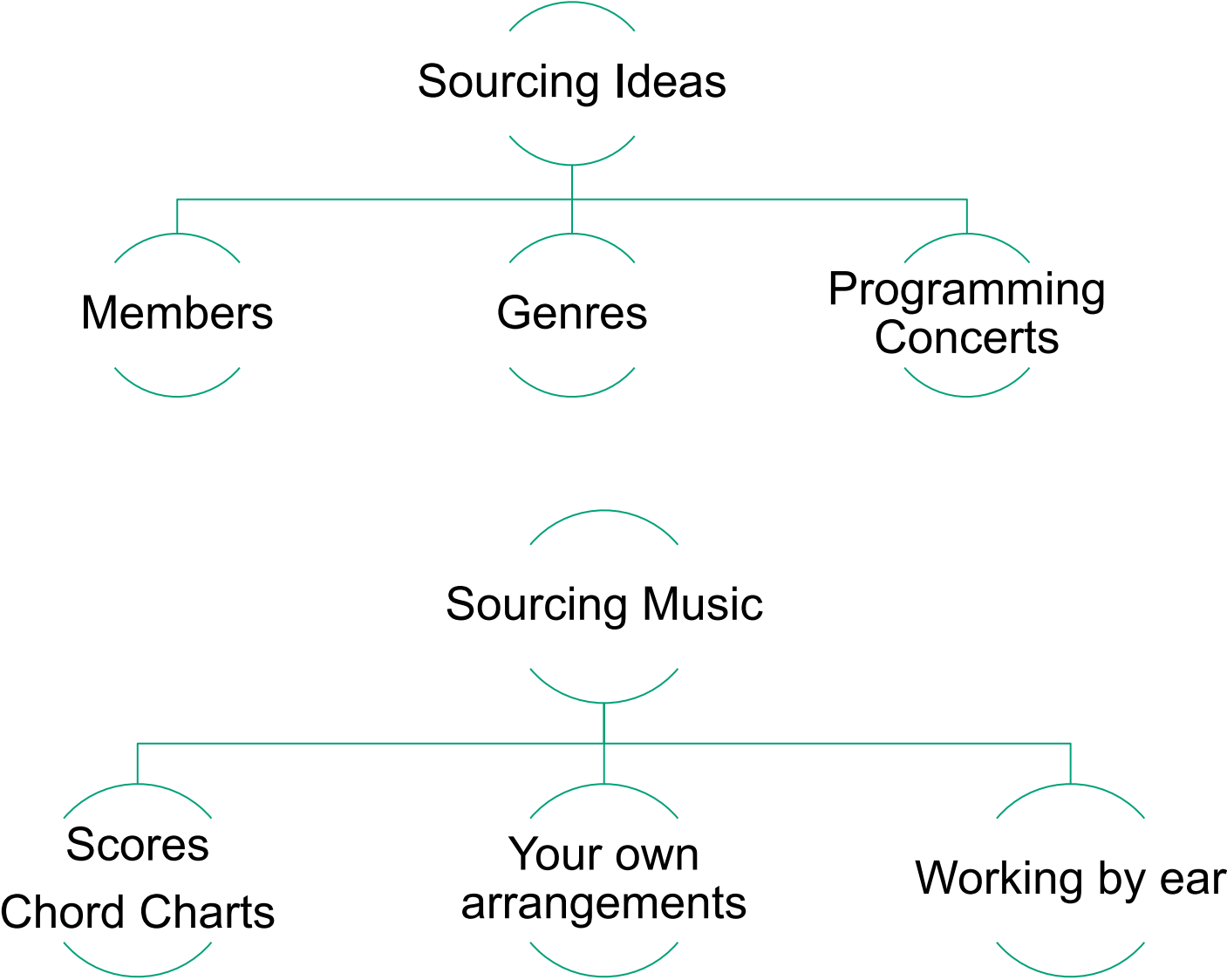
# Repertoire – Brainstorming Genres





# Repertoire – Sourcing Materials

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# Arrangement

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Echoes,  
echoes,  
echoes

Strong  
Melodic  
Content

Arranging  
Popular

Light  
Harmonies

Square Off  
Rhythmic  
Nuances

# Arrangement

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## ○ Choral Music

- No arrangement necessary!
- Retain the melodic line if a distinct single melodic line exists
- Combining parts

## ○ Use of Instrumentation

- Accompaniment support
  - . Enhancing the sound
  - . Pitching/Intonation
  - . Filling harmonic gaps
- Drawing from the membership
- Professional musicians

# Concert Preparation

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## ○ Music:

- Something to aim for
- Be ambitious but prepared
- Back-up plans

## ○ Logistics:

- Transport
- Health and Safety



## Questions:

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- Any questions on what we have discussed today?







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