

Network: Singing in Balance: Tuning and Supporting Socio-Musical Dynamics in Group Singing



Network Lead and Co-leads:

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Network summary

The aim of this network is to enhance understanding of three interacting levels of self-other actualisation and expression in group singing and how this varies depending on context. We consider that to better understand the affordances of singing in different contexts, we need to examine singing experiences at the level of musical expression and coordination (micro-level), social communication and interaction (meso-level), and its interactions with identity and lived experiences and backgrounds (macro-level). The three projects share a common interest in the power of group singing interventions. The research contribution is to investigate this at a musical, social, and sociocultural level, whilst considering in particular how self and others are perceived and merged in singing contexts. With three PhD projects on related topics, we aim to recruit students who bring varying disciplinary backgrounds. In collaboration with our partners, we are in a position to offer

interdisciplinary supervision, covering music performance, music psychology, technology, organisational management, wellbeing and health, musical acoustics and information, and social and cultural identity. The network will come together 4 times per year for progress reports and joint training. Additionally, the postgraduate researchers will meet for peer-learning and support.

PhD students joining the network will benefit from interdisciplinary support, the ability to share methodologies and resources, and measures of musical and social interaction.

Project Title: "Sing together, eat together and build our choir together": An investigation of the balance of socio-musical factors shaping the experiences of members of choirs for people affected by homelessness.

WRoCAH funded Collaborative Doctoral Award between School of Music, University of Leeds and Choir with No Name

Lead Academic and Partner Organisation Supervisors



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[Choir with No Name](#)



Project summary

Questions of identity and belonging are vital to homeless people suffering from stigmatisation and exclusion. The *Choir with No Name* runs choirs for people affected by homelessness, and this collaborative project will investigate the tripartite relationship between wellbeing, community, and musical interaction for its members. The project is innovative in two respects: 1) Attention will be paid to the musical interactions between choir members, as audible expressions of identity and belonging. 2) The student will evaluate an inclusive model for choir co-production being trialled by the *Choir with No Name* and be involved in supporting its rollout.

PhD Project description

The *Choir with No Name* facilitates group singing to support homeless and marginalised people, aiming to empower members within a positive community setting. Research into the impact of singing in similar choirs highlights wide-ranging emotional, social, and cognitive benefits for participants, with profound consequences for identity and self-esteem. Identity is of vital importance for homeless individuals who are prone to stigmatisation and exclusion. Consequently, the work of the *Choir with No Name* prioritises inclusion, and to that effect it is introducing a model of co-production whereby people with and without lived experience of homelessness sing and work together to build cohesive communities. "If you're looking for a family that you've never had, choir is the place to be" (quote from the *Choir with No Name* website). While families afford a powerful sense of belonging and identity, they are not without challenges. Consequently, there is a need for a critical exploration of the extent to which the experience of singing together and the benefits of participation are affected by a co-production model.

Weekly *Choir with No Name* rehearsals are structured around a hot drink and chat, a rehearsal, and a hot meal. Beyond the provision of invaluable shelter and the ability to connect with others, there is a need to understand how the musical interaction itself contributes to the choir members' experience. Social cognition research has demonstrated increased interpersonal trust following synchronization, and Dingle et al. (2019) observe the potential for musical coordination through group singing to promote social identification, experiences of 'flow' (conceived as a form of optimal experience), and interpersonal emotion regulation. Yet research on the wellbeing effects of group singing has largely neglected how musical goals are defined and navigated. There is a need to understand the impact of the music itself on how people feel during music-making and their sense of connection to others.

This project is concerned with questions of voice (identity and power through song) across different levels.

Macro/meso level:

- How do aspects of relational choir organisation and musical interaction affect participants' sense of belonging, identity, empowerment and wellbeing within different choir settings?

Micro level:

- What happens within musical interactions with respect to singers' subjective sense of connection to others and the extent to which different musical goals are achieved?

Additional questions:

- What are the socio-affective correlates and musical goals associated with different models of choir organisation?

- What is the importance of the specifically musical experience of singing together to achieve the *Choir with No Name's* mission of empowerment?

Empirical research methods are needed to investigate the musical, community, and wellbeing experiences of choir members, musical directors, volunteers, and staff at the *Choir with No Name*. Contrasting choirs may form the basis of longitudinal case studies, comparing the *Choir with No Name's* existing choir model with their new approach of community co-production. Aligned with the *Choir with No Name's* inclusive and empowering agenda, the PhD student may adopt Participatory Action Research methods (Aldridge, 2016), though there is scope to adopt any methodology that is sensitive to the ethical and practical parameters of research with vulnerable participants. This is likely to involve mixed methods, with subjective reports of experiences in the musical moment (e.g. measures of self-other merging, flow, musical satisfaction), and interviews/focus groups with musical directors and choir members. Rehearsals and concerts will be observed and recordings may be used for video-stimulated recall and to analyse properties of the musical performance.

About the Choir with No Name

The *Choir with No Name* runs choirs and builds joyful singing communities with homeless and marginalised people. Currently based in Birmingham, Liverpool, London, Brighton, Cardiff and Coventry, the organisation has plans to expand into more towns and cities in the coming years. Regular performances are given in a wide variety of settings including world class concert halls, corporate events, community festivals and homeless hostels. The choirs are a supportive, safe space for people going through a tough time to be among friends, where they can experience the joy of singing together, have fun, build confidence and skills.

The *Choir with No Name* are currently pioneering co-production within the context of choirs, to disrupt the power dynamic inherent in services for people affected by homelessness and to give choir members the opportunity to share their expertise and ideas. This new venture has the potential to deepen the impact of their choirs for people affected by homelessness, and the potential to impact the wider Choral sector, directly challenging the power dynamics inherent in a traditional, hierarchical choir in the UK.

The CDA partnership will:

- contribute insights into the relational dynamics within a co-produced choir as compared to a 'traditional' choir, and implications for both musical and social outputs and outcomes
- explore the impact of the *Choir with No Name's* work
- enable the organisation to join wider policy conversations and campaigns
- create new evidence of the ways in which the musical and social components of group singing support health and wellbeing, and recovery from homelessness

- support the setting up and delivery of new choir communities in Yorkshire

Engagement, outreach, dissemination and impact initiatives

1. The studentship will contribute to the *Choir with No Name's* sharing of learning from the project with other choral organisations and music for social change bodies.
2. The student will be encouraged to present findings at relevant academic, arts and homelessness conferences.
3. The student will be involved in developing the organisation's impact report, which will be shared with funders.
4. The *Choir with No Name* are developing a training course for community choir leaders which will equip conductors and music directors across the UK to create inclusive choirs that focus on strengths and not deficits. The student's findings are expected to contribute to the content of this programme, with the opportunity for the student to gain experience in the development of professional training.

Financial support

Studentships for doctoral research are 40 months in duration for full-time study. Awards are subject to satisfactory academic progress. Awards must be taken up in October 2023; no deferrals are possible. Awards will comprise fees at Research Council rates and a maintenance grant (£17,668 in 2022/23). The grant pays the fees at the Home/UK rate; international students are, however, eligible to apply for this Studentship and the difference between the Home/UK and International fee will be met by the University of Leeds for a successful international applicant. Awards may be taken up on a part-time basis if a student is eligible to undertake part-time study; international applicants may be required to study full-time by the terms of their visa.

Qualifications

Applications are invited from students with a good first degree in an appropriate subject (e.g. music, psychology, sociology, organisational management) as well as a Master's degree appropriate to the topic (or be working towards one). We especially welcome applications from candidates belonging to groups that are currently under-represented in PhD cohorts; these include (but are not limited to) individuals from under-represented ethnicities, members of the LGBTQ+ community, people from low-income backgrounds, and people with physical disabilities.

The successful candidate will need to obtain an enhanced DBS check in time to conduct one-to-one interviews with choir members.

Requirements of the Studentship

WRoCAH students are required to undertake a bespoke training package and to complete a Researcher Employability Project of at least a month, a Knowledge Exchange Project, and to engage with Internationalisation.

All WRoCAH students must submit their thesis for examination with the funded period. This is a requirement of the Arts & Humanities Research Council, which provides the funding for WRoCAH, and is a condition of accepting a Studentship.

Before applying for any WRoCAH Studentship, please first ensure that you have read the WRoCAH webpages about the WRoCAH training programme and requirements, as well as other funding opportunities

<http://wrocah.ac.uk/>

How to apply

By 5pm Wednesday 8 March 2023, applicants are required to submit to WRoCAH an Expression of Interest, which should include:

1. A CV with details of academic qualifications
2. A covering letter comprising a two-page statement to convey your motivation and enthusiasm for the project, and to demonstrate your suitability for your intended PhD studies with the University and Project Partner.

The covering letter should specifically highlight the following:

- Your interest in the project and details on why you have chosen that University and Project Partner.
- How you will apply your current skills, knowledge and experience to undertake a PhD and the approach you would take to develop the project.
- How the project fits into your career plans and ambitions.

Expressions of Interest must be [submitted via this form](#).

- **17 March 2023: decision on short-listing**

The short-list of candidates to be invited for an interview will be announced on Wednesday 17 March 2023. *Short-listed candidates must complete a PhD*

programme application before interview. If you are short-listed for an interview you will be sent details of how to apply for a place at the University of Leeds. At that point you will need to submit the names and contact details of two referees, copies of transcripts of your academic qualifications and (if applicable) an IELTS certificate.

- **w/c 17 April 2023: interviews**

Interviews will involve the academic supervisor, Project Partner supervisor and a member of the WRoCAH Studentships Committee. They will be conducted online.

For more information about this project contact

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