

## Abstract

The social isolation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the need for virtual communities. Deemed “superspreaders”, choral singers have turned to virtual music making and have created subsequent virtual choir communities. In a music community, such as a choir or orchestra, participants may experience belongingness through music making. But can a sense of belonging be felt when this musical community and the act of making music occurs completely virtually? Prior research has addressed experiences of belonging within virtual communities, but experience of belonging within virtual music communities demands further research. This study explores how technology affects choir participants’ experiences of belonging within a virtual choir community, specifically composer Eric Whitacre’s Virtual Choir 6 – Sing Gently, which is composed of approximately 17,000 participants from 129 countries. To determine the degree of belongingness in Virtual Choir 6, choral singers who have participated in both in-person and virtual choirs were surveyed in order to compare their experiences in the two settings. The results showed that respondents were able to experience belonging in both in-person and virtual choirs through virtual ritualistic participation, as well as interactions facilitated through social media. These results extend applications of Collins’ (2004) *Interaction Ritual Chain Theory* and Small’s (1998) concept of *Musicking* to the virtual context, and have positive practical implications for virtual music making and arts-based community engagement beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.