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Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics 19 (1): 29–44
DOI: 10.2478/jef-2025-0003

SINGING OUT STRANGE DAYS

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ABSTRACT
In Slovenia, group singing played an important role in times of political change and crisis. It was deliberately used in times of uncertainty, when there was a greater need for cohesion, such as during the First World War, the Second World War and the Covid-19 pandemic. The songs that were most widely used at a given time reflected the emotional needs and desires of people in precarious situations. With the advent of new technologies, new modalities of group singing, such as singing at a distance and virtual choirs were enabled. During the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, group singing was realised via online tools, which has a number of limitations. Using three examples from times of uncertainty the specific characteristics of group singing that allow it to thrive in times of crisis are analysed.

KEYWORDS: group singing • First World War • Second World War • Covid-19 pandemic • virtual chorus

INTRODUCTION

Group singing, especially choral singing has been considered one of the most remarkable cultural phenomena in Slovenia since the 19th century, as it awakens a sense of social connection and represents an important element in the political emancipation process of the Slovenian nation, which for centuries did not have its own nation state. This is particularly true of the widespread singing of folk songs, whether in their original form or in various choral arrangements, as they were perceived to be national identity markers following the ideas of national romanticism (Fikfak 1999; Cigoj Krstulović 2000; Slavec Gradišnik 2000; Pisk 2012; Kovačič 2015). Since the 19th century, the pro-

* The author acknowledges the financial support of the Slovenian Research Agency (research core funding No. P5-0408 Heritage on the Margins: New Perspectives on Heritage and Identity within and beyond the National, and research project No. L7-4629 Episcope of Borderscapes: Projections of the Gorizia Region's Pasts and Futures as part of the European Capital of Culture, Nova Gorica 2025).

ISSN 1736-6518 (print), ISSN 2228-0987 (online)

motion of not only folk songs by national cultural elites, but also their collection and study throughout Central Europe was closely linked to the broader efforts of growing ethnic and national movements (Anttonen 2005; Judson 2006; 2016). For Slovenians living in the Austrian (and from 1867 Austro-Hungarian) Empire, collections of Slovenian folk songs were published as evidence of the long and rich history of a people who spoke the same language but were divided into different lands under the Habsburg crown without national political rights (more in Pisk 2020).

Similar to the later conceptualised and theorised notion of heritage, singing was then used "to constitute a 'people' who make up a collective singularity, however internally diverse, by virtue of perceived affinity, territorial co-presence and sense of connection to a common, coherent and evident historical story" (Whitehead et al. 2020: 208). Through singing – which is not only about producing musical sounds with the voice, but also about communicating with the audience through song, telling a story and thereby engaging them and provoking emotions and thoughts (Juntunen et al. 2023: 4) – motivated elites sought to create a sense of belonging among the broader population. The inherent enjoyment and participatory pleasure of singing (Hofman 2015: 152) contributed significantly to the success of mobilisation through singing. Singing as a pleasurable leisure activity also had a social impact by creating a sense of unity, forging new bonds between people and facilitating collective memories "that increasingly connect the Collective through the revival of affective relations" (Guilbault 2010: 24). Beyond its social functions, music also regulates mood and arousal (Schäfer et al. 2013), promotes well-being (Grape et al. 2003; Gick 2011) and reduces stress. These effects are particularly pronounced in group singing (Stewart and Lonsdale 2016; Schäfer 2023: 3), which is central to this article.

The article presents three case studies of group singing in times of major community crisis in Slovenia in the 20th and 21st centuries. In times when not only individuals but also various social groups felt an increased need for cohesion, group singing was used both spontaneously and deliberately. A sense of crisis is often linked to a kind of search for the self at both the individual and collective levels, as identities are nurtured in moments of crisis (Delanty 2018: 196 after Whitehead et al. 2020: 216). As the strongest notions of heritage tend to emerge among individuals and communities "who see their sense of identity and community most threatened and who seek to empower themselves to resist this process in some way" (Harrison 2013: 164), this also applies to singing, especially in times of uncertainty. This article therefore deals with the modalities of group singing in specific crisis situations, as well as the initiators or ideators of the promoted singing. It also explores the possible differences between the composition of singers and the functions of group singing across different periods, resulting from the different types of crisis and other contextual factors. The central question of the article is how singing is promoted and organised in moments of crisis and what types of song are used.

Methodologically, I have approached the selected case studies by focusing on the best-known examples from the periods in question, using available archive and internet sources, interviews, autoethnographic methods and the study of digitally created folklore. The first example of group singing comes from the First World War, from the area of Goriška Brda and its surroundings, where I grew up, and so in addition to the written sources and field research (FM 2005–2012), I have also woven my own emic knowledge

into the research. I gained this knowledge from conversations with older generations in the region and from a mosaic of fleeting statements that I collected from interlocutors during field research in Goriška Brda and the wider Gorizia region (FM 2005–2012). My approach to how songs from the Second World War were sung, which forms the core of the second example, was to study the available songbooks and archive material kept in the Institute of Ethnomusicology (ZRC SAZU Archive). For the third example, which deals with recent singing during the Covid-19 pandemic, I communicated by email and telephone with the initiators of a distance singing project and spoke informally with the singers (FM 2022), as well as researching online sources.

GROUP SINGING DURING THE FIRST AND SECOND WORLD WARS

Since the 19th century, group singing in Slovenian public discourse has taken on the connotation of positive, effective community activity in order to gain public rights. It not only awakened a sense of social connectedness (Garcia 2011: 185), but singing and songs also functioned as sound objects that were involved in intense sonic encounters, for example during the Tabor movement and other public manifestations. After the establishment of the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy in 1867, Slovenian national elites followed the Czech model of the Tabori movement and in 1868 initiated a series of mass political rallies, called *tabori*, to demand a United Slovenia – a political and cultural union of Slovenians. The rallies were organised in all counties with a predominantly Slovenian population, despite protests from groups of German townspeople at the first gatherings, who unsuccessfully demanded a ban. The rallies, which typically attracted around 6,000 participants – many in national costumes – took place on Sunday afternoons in larger meadows near towns, in squares and in villages. At the end of the fiery political speeches given there, the crowd did not disperse, as music, dancing, singing and feasting followed. To commemorate the rally, special postcards, badges and candlesticks with the slogan "Slovenians, let us unite!" were provided. Between 1868 and 1870, when the rallies were banned, a total of 18 were organised, where group singing constructed a form of communitas (Specker 2014) and sonic bonding (Turino 2008), with the physical coordination of music-making creating social cohesion (Daffern et al. 2021).

In addition to articulating and representing existing identity formations, national activists also sought to foster unity by creating spatio-temporal collectives of participating singers and audiences – a lasting identity group, even if members did not necessarily agree on other matters (Hofman 2015: 134, 152). At the later *tabori* rallies, the Young Slovenians, who gathered around the newspaper *Slovenian Nation*, were joined by their political opponents, the Old Slovenians with their leader Janez Bleiweis. Political opponents avoided differences of opinion at the rallies, and the singing united the crowd into a single body. Intense collective musical experiences opened up possibilities for transformation – the shared experience is thus both a process and a product of self-emancipation (ibid.: 154). While group singing was instrumentalised in the 19th century and at the turn of the 20th century to mobilise the population in the struggle for political rights, new functions came to the fore with the outbreak of the First World War.

The events of the First World War had a profound effect on life in what is today Slovenia, especially with the presence of the Isonzo Front battlefields (May 1915 – October 1917), where an enormous number of soldiers of various nationalities fought, of whom over 300,000 fell. In addition to the plight of the soldiers who fought in the 90-kilometre-long section of the front that ran along the Soča/Isonzo river,[1] the people who lived on the home front in the Soča valley and larger Gorizia region, or who were displaced, also suffered greatly from the hardships of the war (Svoljšak 2002).

During fieldwork in Goriška Brda, my interlocutors cited the song "Mary Help Us" (*Marija, pomagaj nam*) when asked about the songs associated with the First World War (FM 2005–2012). As the majority of the population professed allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church at the time of the First World War, in the diocese of Gorizia, the location of the Isonzo Front, many people followed the orders of the local bishops and prayed three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys after Holy Mass on Sundays and one Our Father and one Hail Mary after every silent Mass with the aim of ending the war quickly. The priests had to say a special prayer for peace at every liturgical celebration (Podbersič 2015: 271). In addition to the prayers prescribed by local bishops, the people spontaneously sang a variation of the religious song "Mary Help Us" after each liturgy (Figure 1).[2] From there, the singing of this song spread to the privacy of homes and the open spaces of villages.

According to Catholic tradition in Slovenia, the final song of the Eucharistic liturgy is always chosen from the great collection of hymns dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The lyrics of the folk religious Marian hymn, sung even today in the arrangement by Franc Kimovec,[3] were altered during the hardships of the First World War to better express the people's feelings and their pleas for a quick end to the fighting and mercy for all those suffering from the war. The first line was changed from "Mary, help us all the time" to "Mary, help us, it is wartime" (ZRC SAZU 2005; ZRC SAZU GNI R 17.942).

The original lyrics, which had been adapted to wartime living conditions, fell into oblivion during peacetime, but were used again a few decades later during the Second World War in the wider Slovenian context. However, the modified version was never included in the church songbooks, therefore it was transmitted only orally.

The verse that shows support for orphans has remained in the song to this day:

Marija, pomagaj sirotam vojske,	Mary, help the orphans of the war,
jih milostno sprejmi na svoje Srce.	graciously receive them to your heart.
Marija, vse k tebi hiti,	Mary, everyone hasten to you,
Marija, pomagaj nam ti!	Mary, help us thee!

(*Slavimo Gospoda* 1988: 236)

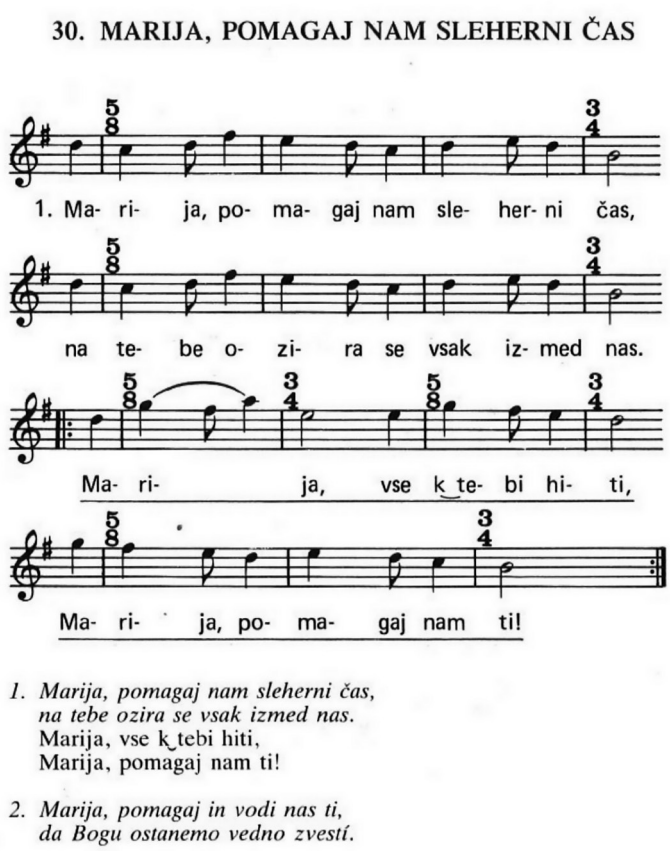

Figure 1. Zmaga Kumer (1988: 61–62) has included the song "Mary Help Us" as one of the most important songs in the collection of Slovenian Marian songs, noting that it was sung in a modified form in times of war.

This song clearly shows that as well as strictly religious activities such as prayers, processions, etc., singing at religious gatherings, which were the only ones allowed during the war without special permission, bound communities through personal synchronous actions (as described by Keller et al. 2014), through the memory of common struggles, and through common devotional histories (Chiu 2020).

The history of the well-known military folk song "The Regiment Is on the March" (*Regiment po cesti gre*), which became popular around 1866 during the Austro-Prussian War, is different (Kumer 1992b: 138; Golež Kaučič et al. 2007: 40, Klobčar 2007; see also Figure 2). In the song, which was originally classified as a love song (Štrekelj 1903: 256–257), a girl whose boyfriend belongs to a regiment marching down the street recognises him by a bouquet of flowers of different colours. Each stanza describes a colour of the flowers and their symbolic meaning. During the First World War, the song gained importance as a means of encouraging soldiers (Andrejka 1916: 53) and was included

in the military songbook *Slovenian Military Folk Songs* (Marolt 1915: 7). During the Second World War, it was published again in various military songbooks. In the songbook *Home Guard Singing* (*Domobranci pojemo* 1944: 6–7) the verse in which red flowers are mentioned was omitted.[4] The testimony in the Archive of the Institute of Ethnomusicology (ZRC SAZU 2006) shows that members of the Home Guard sang the song in its original form, including the red flowers, when they sang spontaneously (Grabrovec et al. 2024: 184). The songbooks thus show a more ideologically orthodox expression than the spontaneous singing of the soldiers. The song, which was known beforehand, was thus also given a propaganda function during the war through its publication in songbooks.

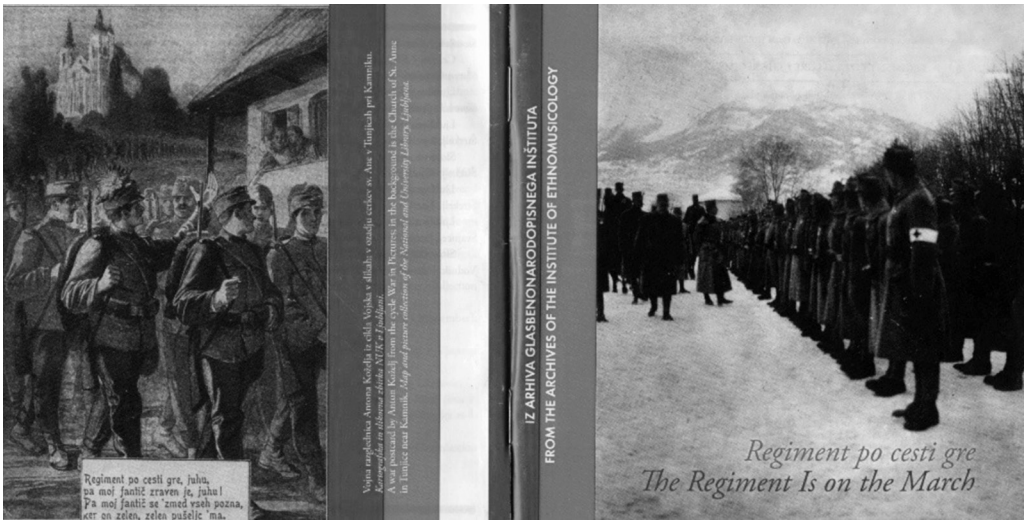

Figure 2. The beginning of the song "The Regiment Is on the March" was also the inspiration for the title of a CD with military songs from the Archive of the Institute of Ethnomusicology ZRC SAZU (see also Golež Kaučič et al. 2007).

When researching widespread songs that were very popular in times of uncertainty, we encounter a methodological challenge. Despite general knowledge about this, no recordings of them are preserved in the folklore archives.

This reflects the historical orientation of Slovenian folkloristics and ethnomusicology, which recognised authentic traditions as those shaped through selective processes. These research preferences were not unique to Slovenia, but were based on common principles linking folkloristics to national self-awareness, as mentioned at the beginning of the article (Bendix 1997; Anttonen 2005).

For a long time, Slovenian folkloristics focused on collecting and researching exceptional examples of folk poetry that served to prove either the longevity or *differentia specifica* of the national community (Fikfak 1999; Slavec Gradišnik 2011; Pisk 2018). At the same time, they failed to explore the songs that were considered inappropriate in terms of genre or language, as well as those deemed too recent in origin, i.e. popular songs commonly sung in daily life. Therefore, little data exists on the songs that were most frequently sung and on their further development. We can assume that it was the

lyrical expressiveness and the deeply moving experience of hardship together with the well-known and popular melody (Kumer 1992a: 98–99) that enabled the song to spread widely in this war-adapted version during the Second World War.

THE STRANGE DAYS OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC LOCKDOWN AND GROUP SINGING

The last major crisis to affect the population of Slovenia was the global Covid-19 pandemic, which had the greatest impact on public life in 2020 and 2021. The entire population was affected with some groups more vulnerable to the health crisis itself and others, particularly young people, more impacted by the protective measures taken to contain the virus. For many people, the world was turned upside down as established patterns of life were made impossible during lockdowns. In March 2020, group activities, including group singing, were banned. As an embodied form of interaction and a connection with others and the world (Juntunen et al. 2023: 2), singing was either silenced or new modalities had to be found.

Choir singers are the group that lost the most due to the collective nature of their activity. Many choirs stopped their activities during the first lockdown. Based on the recommendations of the National Institute of Public Health, the Public Fund for Cultural Activities and the Federation of Cultural Associations of Slovenia drew up ten golden rules for safer choir rehearsals after the first shock. However, as all social activities were banned during subsequent lockdowns, which recurred in Slovenia until April 2021, choral singing was called into question. By its nature, singing unites people. Thus, new forms of singing emerged via the internet, spreading the message that communal singing was not dead, even if it was confined to private homes (Figure 3). Those who decided to continue singing remotely had to face the harsh reality that no online platform enables truly simultaneous communal singing, the quintessence of choral activity, as emphasised by David Bandelj (2021: 21), who encountered the issue while working with Slovenian-minority choirs in Italy.

One of the highest profile YouTube projects of this kind in Slovenia was carried out by the students of the Diocesan Classical Gymnasium in Ljubljana and their choir mentors. As young people are generally more comfortable with new technologies, many of them began using these tools during the lockdown not only for remote schooling, but also to socialise and make music together. Alongside various orchestras that organised concerts by having each member record their part at home – or even some attempts to make music live and simultaneously – the choir conductors of the Diocesan Classical Gymnasium, along with a total of about 200 singers, took on a similar challenge. They faced the technical limitations of live networked singing, as differences in internet connection speeds cause echoes and delays, making real-time choral singing impossible for large groups. As a solution they opted for a multi-track choir format, in which each individual recorded a solo part that was later mixed into a unified chorus soundtrack (see also Daffern et al. 2021).

Every year in November, the school celebrates the feast of its patron saint, Saint Stanislaus Kostka, with an academy where students perform a rich cultural program. Since the lockdown made a live event impossible in 2020, the school administration

decided to organise an online celebration instead. By that time the school choirs had already experimented with remote video production, and so the head of the academy came up with the idea of having the choirs produce a video for this festive occasion.

If we follow the thought of Charles Seeger (1977), who emphasised that "music is communication of world view as the feeling of reality" (see in Feld 1994: 77), then the music made in this period is a good indicator of people's feelings and thoughts. Furthermore, singing can be seen as an enactment or expression of significant human emotions (Thurman 2000) and is considered an outward manifestation of emotions and feelings (Hoffmann 2016: 14, after Juntunen et al. 2023: 3). It is therefore significant that the master of the academy chose the song "Strange Days" by the British rock band The Struts with Robbie Williams from 2020, as it seemed to fit perfectly with the oddities of the times (see Zavod sv. Stanislava 2020).

The choir director Tine Bec arranged the song, some teachers handled the translation and the choirs' chief conductor, Helena Fojkar Zupančič, engaged musicians to record their instrumental parts. Having rehearsed remotely with all the school choirs since the start of the lockdown, they learned the piece via MS Teams with the students given clear instructions on how to proceed with the recording. First, they sent audio recordings made with cell phones, all of which had to be listened to and evaluated for quality and usability. Then the students shot music videos, for which they were also given instructions, but which still left them enough scope for creativity. The sound editing and mixing was carried out by student Samo Vovk, who also performed as an instrumentalist on the bass guitar. A renowned film studio handled the video editing but was not prepared for such a large number of videos and the requirements of the film's makers. The head choir director felt that the video could have been much more modern, as was the case with the prior videos edited by the students themselves. Nevertheless, the students and mentors were happy and proud after the release of the video, especially because they saw how quickly the number of views increased (FM 2022). This was also one of the rare moments when the singers were able to hear the final music recording as an audience and not just as performers (cf. Daffern et al. 2021). Not only did it make them feel that their shared singing experience was still alive and strong, even if they had not met in person, but the content of the songs also uplifted the young people and gave them hope to continue singing in front of their screens. As well as having a therapeutic effect on the students, the video also lifted the spirits of their classmates and other YouTube viewers.[5]

The music of the online celebration was primarily intended to facilitate relationships between people and convey a positive message, rather than simply to produce sounds for some listeners in the audience (cf. Juntunen et al. 2023: 6). Therefore, the singers communicated with their audience not only through their voices but also through facial expressions, gestures and the very meaningful settings of the scenes. These included scenes depicting the hardships of remote schooling and the complexities of the situation they faced: from the coziness of a student's room filled with plush toys and playing with younger siblings in the garden, to expressive autumnal and despair-filled scenes featuring an alcohol bottle, a lonely railway line, or students themselves in front of an impregnable wall, etc. The images were linked together by motif of orange, which connected the different backgrounds into a coherent story, made even more dynamic by the donning and doffing of face masks. The students' gestures and movements in the

selected scenes aimed "to embody the expressive character of a musical work", as the integration of musical, textual and visual elements "as inter-linked modalities is considered essential for an expressive performance" (ibid.: 5) in order to appeal to fellow students and the wider audience.

During the crises of the First and Second World Wars, group singing was a shared, temporary bodily experience, unlike participation in a virtual choir, which did not have this dimension. Therefore, it required greater effort from the participating students to imagine how an individual voice would fit into the absent group sound. A musical performance is always a highly interpersonal and interactive phenomenon in which all participants influence each other (ibid.: 6); in contrast virtual choir models do not offer "an experience of singing together in real time, where singers can hear each other and therefore react and interact with each other" (Datta 2020). They could not "simulate any aspects of live performance as a spatially, temporally situated act undertaken by embodied beings engaging in an immediate and intimate mode of co-creation" (Daffern et al. 2021). The acoustic complexity of group singing includes not only tuning and harmony, but also "dynamically adaptable acoustic features created and altered by the voices adapting to each other through complex relationships that result in a 'blended' choral sound" (Ternström 2003 in Daffern et al. 2021: 12), but this is missing when recording solo voices and then merging them. In multi-track choirs, singers were unable to blend their voices as they did not share the physical space and could not consciously or unconsciously interact with each other's sound in the shared acoustic space (Daffern et al. 2021).

However, this focus on the individual singer also brought some advantages. When selecting individual recordings, the choirmasters had the opportunity to devote themselves to the voice of a particular singer, which is difficult to do in live rehearsals. They even prepared individual singing lessons to improve students' voices. As in the case of the youth chorus in Italy, on which Bandelj (2021: 22) writes, this also meant "close encounter with each of them, because singers are first and foremost 'voices that express', so listening to each singer was a deeper search for his or her expressive nuances". For some young singers in the choir led by Bandelj, this was a particularly difficult endeavour because they had to get to know, or deepen the relationship with, their own voices and listen to them in the recording, which distinguishes it from the live voice.

At this time, the singers' individual consciousness began to develop instead of the collective consciousness of the choir (ibid.). This focus on the individual singer could be observed in some choirs during their first joint rehearsals after the lockdown. Each singer, positioned at a prescribed distance from the others, closely monitored their own vocal production, but there was no longer any awareness of a collective sound, colour or harmonic purity (ibid.: 23). In contrast to the close interweaving of individual singers into a single choir on site, in the online performance each singer remained in his or her own frame, juxtaposed. Even when using video conferencing software such as Zoom, which technically allows the for simultaneous singing, latency issues required singers to mute their microphones, with the exception of the facilitator "which means that the singers in the choir cannot hear each other whilst they are singing" (Daffern et al. 2021).

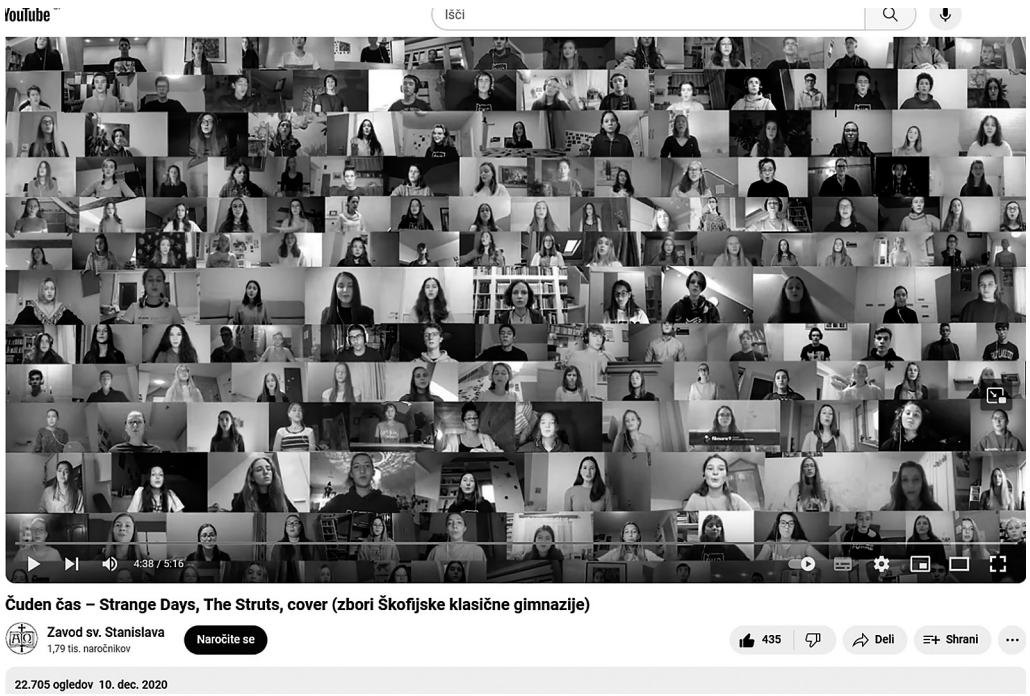

Figure 3. A grouping of singers singing their parts in a single virtual choir (Zavod sv. Stanislava 2020).

Even though new technologies enabled group singing at a distance, singing and self-recording were often an experience of loneliness for students of Diocesan Classical Gymnasium. Those who participated in the multitrack project had mixed reactions to the process of recording their solo tracks and later compiling them into a collective choir piece. It was only upon seeing the final video that all their experiences came together and formed an emotional whole that deeply touched them because they saw that they were not alone in this situation. Group singing can alleviate feeling of loneliness because it creates a shared 'product' that can only be developed together, which transcends the individual (Lamont and Ranaweera 2020). As other studies show (Daffern et al. 2021; Schäfer 2023; Theorell et al. 2023), during lockdown, the social aspects of choral activities were missed more than any other component of choral singing, and this proved the case for the students performing abovementioned song.

The song was an accomplishment because it succeeded in "moving and touching" the listener (FM 2022). Music affects people, evokes images and activates memories, emotions and feelings (Juslin and Sloboda 2001) that are relevant to the moment. Despite the great success of the students' performance of "Strange Days" (*Čuden čas*), the song was never performed live after the lockdown ended, even when the choir was once again able to sing together. This can be attributed to the lyrics, which were perfectly suited to that particular time but no longer appealed under changed circumstances.

Refrain:

O, čudni dnevi,	Oh these are strange days
ko se zazdi mi,	In many strange ways
znanstvena fantastika	Science fiction I believ
se je uresničila.	Has become reality
O čudni časi,	Oh these are strange times
vse v eni glavi…	Lost in our mi-minds
Hitro mine leto dni,	We don't know, it's unclear
kje bom jaz in kje boš ti?	Where we'll be this time next year
Oooo, čuden čas,	Oh-oh-oh-oh, strange days
čuden čas.	Strange days

The students' video was also very well received by their teachers. As it would be quite a challenge to sing together in a remote choir, they decided to express their gratitude to the students by filming the popular "Jerusalema Dance"[6] in December 2020 (see Zavod sv. Stanislava 2020b). They presented it as a Christmas gift from the teachers and to thank the students for their patient and constructive participation in the remote schooling. They chose the "Jerusalema Dance" because it is a prayer that conveys joy, cheerfulness and hope, especially in times of uncertainty and isolation. Like the students, the teachers also filmed the dance using their cell phones in their homes, nearby squares and villages. In post-production, a collage was created showing the teachers dancing alone or with their family members. With more than 59,000 views, the video was even more popular than the students' video. Students and former students were thrilled to see their teachers performing a popular dance in their home environments in such an unfamiliar light.

Most of the singing groups that performed remotely during the Covid pandemic did not have the organisational background or follow-up as the case described above. The joint singing of the various groups, which took place via platforms such as Zoom, MS Teams, etc., was often not recorded and even less was published online. Singing together remotely remained a temporary activity, as was common in normal life before the spread of affordable recording devices. The limited temporality of singing together seems to be surpassed only when there was organised post-production, despite the new technologies.

CONCLUSION

Singing as an embodied, holistic activity that depends on the mutual integration of physical, mental and emotional processes (Paparo 2016; Juntunen 2017; Juntunen et al. 2023) was deliberately used in the modality of group singing in contemporary Slovenia during the political nation-building movement of the 19th century and in subsequent periods of seeking stability in a crumbling world. Group singing thus served not only to strengthen social cohesion, but also to co-create music through the coordinated physical action of singing together in a shared space (Daffern et al. 2021) for the well-being of the singer(s). The joint singing at the official end of the liturgy, which became widespread

during the First World War, proved that people recognised the connective power of joint singing to alleviate their distress. The shared physical and sensory experience of making music together strengthened the social bond (Tarr et al. 2014) between the people who sang during the wars. Even if singing together at a distance was somehow possible – at least for the singers who knew the new technologies – the virtual choir did not function as a social substitute and no interpersonal coordination took place because of the lack of physical proximity. This 'separate communal singing' (Chiu 2020) lacked moreover a certain element of shared experience or co-creation (Daffern et al. 2021), "therefore any potential for the experience of entrainment (Clayton 2012) or mutual flow states (Keeler et al. 2015) was lost" (Daffern et al. 2021).

When crises shake people's ontological security, a selectively remembered past and its cultural phenomena become a kind of refuge from uncertainty (Giddens 1991). These crises can also have political repercussions in the present (Whitehead et al. 2020: 223). As song lyrics can evoke strong emotions (Yang and Lee 2009), and singers connect emotionally with a song through life experience, empathy and/or imagination (Juntunen et al. 2023: 4), not every song is appropriate. A song must speak to the listener either through its content or through the fact that the singer can emotionally identify with it. Music rooted in the past that is consciously or unconsciously idealised and perceived as homogeneous without internal contradictions can be used for this purpose as well as newly created songs responding to current circumstances.

The initiators of joint singing must not be overlooked either. In the case of the religious song "Mary Help Us", the people themselves – probably initially at the suggestion of the organist – began singing the well-known hymn and contextualising it. The second song, "The Regiment Is on the March", was included in songbooks due to its popularity. This inclusion consequently led to the song being sung even more frequently. The newly released song "Strange Days" was immediately translated into Slovenian, as it fitted in perfectly with the times in which it was performed. The teacher chose this song for the singers to present themselves at the school celebration because it was particularly fitting for the time. However, as the song is closely tied to a specific historical period, it was not included in the subsequent repertoire of the school choirs.

These examples demonstrate that the genre of a song used in times of uncertainty is of secondary importance. What is crucial is that the song is emotionally close to people and is part of their world of experience. Joint singing is not just a leisure activity, but also a therapeutic tool for all involved. It brings individuals together in a group that gives them a sense of security and stability, at least in the moments of singing, even if the group is internally heterogeneous.

NOTES

1 Eleven offensives were launched by the Italians, the last one, the 12th, by the soldiers of Austria-Hungary and Germany. The fighting took place mainly in the mountains. The last skirmishes occurred during the Twelfth Isonzo Battle. In the Austro-Hungarian literature, the battle is known as the Miracle of Kobarid**,** while in the Italian literature it is known as the Caporetto Retreat. Caporetto in Italian today means a terrible debacle since during the battle more than half of the Italian Army had to retreat across the Friuli lowland in just a few days.

2 The song is dedicated to Mary Help of Christians (Sancta Maria Auxilium Christianorum), whose feast was introduced by Pope Pius VII in 1815. In Slovenia has been especially renowned since 1900, when a church in Brezje was consecrated with the miraculous image of Mary Help of Christians and became the central place of pilgrimage in Slovenia.

3 Franc Kimovec (1878–1964), priest and composer, was assistant to the director of music at Ljubljana Cathedral. He was president of the Singers' Association for several years. As a composer, he was mainly active in the field of church music, but also collected folk songs. Kimovec's style, which was mainly polyphonic, was considered modern; the influence of folk songs is often clearly recognisable in his compositions.

4 The Home Guard was the opposition to the partisans, who were also called the Reds because of their communist flag.

5 Potentially very interesting audience research is not possible as due to the need to protect the safety of minors comments are switched off.

6 Jerusalema, recorded with DJ Master KG and Nomcebo Zikode in South Africa, has become known worldwide, mainly thanks to the dance challenge. Dance moves from Angola are credited with propelling it to becoming one of the most popular songs of 2020 and a soundtrack of the pandemic.

SOURCES

FM = Author's fieldwork materials. All information is available in the author's personal archive.
FM 2005–2012: Fieldwork materials collected in Goriška Brda and the wider Gorizia region.
FM 2022: Fieldwork materials collected through informal interviews and email correspondence, Autumn 2022.

ZRC SAZU = Archive of the Institute of Ethnomusicology of the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts.
ZRC SAZU 2005: Interview with V. P., male born 1925. Interview took place in Renkovci, June 26, 2005.
ZRC SAZU 2006: Sound recording. Digital audio tape. June 27, 2006.
ZRC SAZU GNI R 17.942: "Mary Help Us" (*Marija, pomagaj nam*). Manuscript collection.

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