



**Sing Out Brussels! asbl**  
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## **Sing Out Brussels! Activity report 2021-2022**

### **1) Introduction**

The 4th season of our ASBL started in the still difficult context of the Covid-19 health crisis. From March 2020 to September 2021, we had barely been able to hold any rehearsals, except for a few small group outdoor sessions. During these 18 months, the Board of Directors spared no effort to keep the community alive, through virtual activities promoting contacts or the realization of artistic and musical projects in the respect of health rules (the recording of two songs and two video clips during season 3). But we missed the practice of collective singing and concerts.

This 4th season was therefore conceived with two main objectives: on the one hand, to concretize all our pending projects, in particular those for which we had obtained a promise of subsidies such as "Listen, care & share", which was of crucial importance to rebuild our community, but also our project of the "Dance with Pride" show (initially planned for June 2020), and on the other hand, to plan activities that could be carried out in case of a new confinement (a studio recording, a video clip...)

In the end, we were able to carry out all of these projects, zigzagging between health measures (rehearsals authorized, then prohibited, then authorized again) and trying to get our members to respect them as much as possible (the obligation to wear masks until March 2022 was the object of many tensions) while trying to respond as much as possible to their sometimes contradictory demands in terms of activities and level of commitment. It was a difficult season for human resources. Our Board of Directors was reduced to three members and the lack of volunteers has very regularly weighed on the organization of our events.

At the end of this fourth season, the impression that emerges is one of great pride in having seen the group evolve artistically to an unprecedented level of quality, and in having been able to begin important work on community spirit, all of which constitute a solid foundation for our 2022-2026 strategic plan.

### **2) Our recurring activities**

During August 2021, we held auditions at RainbowHouse in Brussels. We had 58 people on our waiting list. 22 of them sent in a preliminary recording (two excerpts of our songs to be prepared) and 15 were finally selected.

The rehearsals started again on September 1st in our new rehearsal place, the GC Elzenhof, following the works in our usual room of the GC De Maalbeek. In December 2021 and January 2022, due to the closure of the GC Elzenhof because

of the sanitary measures of the Flemish government, we found temporary shelter at the Saint-Boniface Institute in Ixelles.

During the season we were able to organize two residential work weekends. The first one at the Domaine de Mambaye in Spa in October, the second at the Kaleo de Hastière in February. We had missed these weekends of work a lot. They are crucial for the musical work and for the community spirit. During the weekend in Hastière, we enjoyed vegetarian and vegan meals cooked by Charlotte Lambertini (Apus & les Cocottes volantes), with whom we had already collaborated previously. The weekends are also moments where we can take the time to present to the choristers complete information about our different projects. In Spa, we presented the annual program of activities and made a presentation on volunteering in the choir. In Hastière, we had presentations on the script of our music video In These Heels and on the script of our next shows "Dance with Pride" and "School's out".

Finally, in October, the choir acquired a brand new website. This was a major investment, but one that is essential to improve our communication.

### **3) Listen, care & share**

This project focused on the well-being within the group had started during season 3. A survey had then allowed to diagnose different problematic phenomena within the group (sexism, racism, grossophobia, transphobia or lesbophobia...).

The 2nd step of the project consisted in the organization of different workshops, organized with the support of Equal.Brussels. In October, we welcomed Aïda Yancy, from the RainbowHouse, who animated, in French and in English, two workshops on the theme of Safer Spaces. In March, Karin Ferfers, from the Hathor-Instituut, facilitated a series of three sessions in French, Dutch and English on non-violent communication.

These workshops contributed to a progressive change of mindset within the choir. They will lead to the collective writing of a manifesto on which we will work during our fifth season.

Due to the health situation, the number of social activities organized during the season was unfortunately very limited. However, we were able to end the season with a potluck evening during which we thanked all our volunteers.

### **4) Stronger together**

Under this heading, we gathered all of our main artistic projects of the season, whose objective was to create a connection: between our members, with our LGBTQI+ community and with our public.

One of the main focuses was the production of the music video In These Heels, a song written by then-choir member Simon Finn in honor of the victims of the 2016 homophobic massacre in Orlando. The media portrayed the victims of that massacre as sons and daughters of loving parents, but never as people in a loving or friendly relationship. The homophobia that inspired the killer was also present in the news treatment. Directed by Julie Janssens, the clip illustrates the strength of the group in the face of violence and isolation. It is not only about challenging

people outside the LGBTQI+ community but also about questioning the internalized queerphobia that reigns within it. It is therefore a call for solidarity and visibility.

This clip was the subject of a collective writing and preparation work (brainstorming, preparation of a storyboard, pre-production) before the shooting in March 2022 at the Boiler in Laeken. The clip, supported by the City of Brussels, was broadcast on social networks as part of the World Day against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia. It was also screened at the Cinema Palace as a prelude to the animated film *Flee*, as part of Pride Week. It was also shown on a giant screen at the Mont des Arts, at the opening of the Belgian Pride.

In preparation for the filming of this clip, the choir recorded four original songs in the studio in January 2022 (including of course *In These Heels*). This project, supported in part by Equal.Brussels, was also the subject of a call for donations via the Kofi platform to help us pay for the production costs, and it is with great emotion that we saw more than 130 people respond to our appeal, allowing us to realize this project.

And finally, we were able to present our show *Dance With Pride*, which we have been waiting for two years. This project, supported by the municipality of Uccle, Equal.Brussels, the Cocof and the VGC, gathered more than 600 people at the Cultural Center of Uccle. The show traced the debate and the path of the LGBTQI+ community towards emancipation and freedom through the theme of dance. Our thread was based on audiovisual archives filmed in Brussels in the 70s and 90s. The evolution from secrecy in closed places to freedom in the public space was illustrated in songs with a link to the theme of dance or emancipation. This show was a great success from an artistic and commercial point of view. The concert was followed by an after-party at the bar "The Agenda" in downtown Brussels.

## **5) Other events**

- On September 18, 2021, we returned to the stage for the first time in almost two years, for a small outdoor concert at the Jardin Hospice (Brussels) to open the Q.art.z festival organized by the RainbowHouse to promote queer cultures.
- On October 30, 2021, we presented, under the pouring rain, a small street concert in the Saint-Jacques district (Brussels) on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the RainbowHouse.
- On October 31, 2021, we participated in the World Choir Games in Antwerp (originally scheduled for July 2020) and won a silver medal in the category Jazz & Pop Choirs.
- On April 23, 2022, we presented a small open-air concert in Elzenhof, the place of our rehearsals, on the occasion of the opening of their new buildings.
- On May 21, 2022, we participated in the Belgian Pride and animated the parade with our songs.
- On June 28, 2022, we sang at the occasion of the charity gala organized by ILGA-Europe to raise funds for Ukraine.

## **6) Various Voices Brussels 2026**

On October 30, 2021, Legato, the European federation of LGBTQI+ choirs, announced Sing Out Brussels! as the organizing choir for the 2026 festival. Barcelona and Brussels were in the running to host the event, which is held every four years. The festival brings together around 100 choirs and almost 4000 singers from all over Europe, but also from North America, Asia and Oceania.

By singing together in the capital of the European Union, we will send a strong message and a clear signal to the countries where our community is facing repeated attacks. The highlight of the festival will be the "Let Your Heart Be Heard" evening in the European quarter. All the participating choirs will perform together a work composed for the occasion. The festival will take place over 5 days in June 2026 and will be open to the city and its population. In addition to the indoor concerts, free outdoor events will take place, notably on the Grand-Place of Brussels, as well as in the streets and parks of the capital.

Following this decision, the Sing Out Brussels! board created a separate ASBL named "Various Voices Brussels 2026" and started the administrative formalities: opening of a bank account, election of a board of directors, signature of contracts with Legato and MCI (Professional Congress Organizer). The organization of the festival is therefore the subject of a separate activity report.

## **7) Road to Various Voices 2026**

With our 2018-2022 strategic plan coming to an end, during our fourth season we began thinking about the 2022-2026 strategic plan.

This plan was prepared in different stages:

- The preparation of a survey on different themes (artistic, community spirit, volunteering, priorities...)
- Sending it to the choristers and writing a summary
- The organization of a brainstorming day with volunteer choristers
- The synthesis of these various reflections and the drafting of a new strategic plan that will be approved at the General Assembly scheduled for October 2022.