



Sing Out Brussels! asbl
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Sing Out Brussels! Activity Report 2022-2023 (Season 5)

NB: this report contains links to online articles providing more detail about the events referred to. (www.singout.brussels)

1) A Growing Community

While the choir's previous three seasons were hampered by the pandemic, our association was finally able to kick off this season under normal circumstances. Preparation began as early as July 1 with training for those interested in joining the choir's Board. Though there can be a maximum of 7 members, the board had only 3 in 2021-2022, which was a challenge when it came to organising work and ensuring representativity. In July 2022, there were enough candidates for the ASBL to have a full board for the first time in its history.

We made the most of the summer, holding meetings to bring the new board members up to speed regarding how the choir is managed: Statutes, Internal Rules, organisation of work, assigning roles, accounting... A whole day was dedicated to planning the upcoming season to make sure a full, detailed activity plan could be shared with our members at the start of the season, while also leaving room for eventualities.

We also drew up a list of volunteering needs for each project. The pandemic had led to a large drop in the number of volunteers in the choir, and too great a burden was resting on the same few shoulders. Though it might seem a contradiction, we decided to consider volunteering 'compulsory', meaning each member would be requested to do something for the choir at least once during the season. These contributions could range from lending a hand now and again, e.g. running the bar after a rehearsal or getting groceries before a choir weekend, to more significant commitments like joining a Joy Team, leaving flexibility for members according to the time and energy they were able to offer.

We also planned the [auditions](#) held in August and September. The pandemic had weakened the choir, with several members leaving and participation at rehearsals particularly variable. Audition invitations were sent out to the almost 150 candidates on our waiting list, with recruitment aiming to maintain musical quality as well as building a balanced, diverse group. There were two stages to the process: shortlisting based on candidates' audio recordings of two of our songs (to test motivation, musicality and rhythm), and an in-person session involving vocal exercises with our conductor, as well as a chat with members of the board about the choir, its values and volunteering. The choir recruited 27 people, bringing the total members to 82 and total singers to 69.

Our ultra-keen new recruits played a key role in the success of the season. They shifted balances within the choir and contributed to a considerable improvement

of musical quality. To build cohesion in this larger group, the month of September was dedicated to settling in our new faces. We purchased badges (with names and pronouns) for members to wear at rehearsals, as well as using a buddy system and organising various [fun/informative activities](#) to help members get to know each other and to explain how the association functions. This process continued throughout the season, further boosted as we made memories together at various events.

2) Promoting Our Values at Events

With the association, and the cultural sector as a whole, back to normal, we were invited to take part in a number of concerts and events throughout the season. We also staged a flashmob with a political message. These concerts and events also allowed us to set milestones and hone our repertoire as we worked towards *School's Out*, referred to later.

- [Fame Festival](#): we took part in the first edition of Brussels' new queer, feminist festival.
- [Sing for Life](#): we were invited by LGBTQI+ choir Tapalanote (a member of Brussels Gay Sport) to participate in this charity concert on December 3. The event brought together Brussels' three LGBTQI+ choirs for the first time and all profits were donated to the association GRIS Wallonie Bruxelles (preventing LGBTQI+ phobia in schools)
- [Rainbow Cops 10th Anniversary](#): our choir sang a few songs at a reception marking the 10th anniversary of the LGBTQI+ police association, which fights for greater openness within the police and better provision for LGBTQI+ people. It should be noted that this project divided our choir with several singers refusing to have their image or the choir's image associated with the police.
- [Winter Vox](#): as part of the Plaisirs d'Hiver Christmas market, this concert was an opportunity to revisit our festive repertoire and to come together as a group in the runup to Christmas.
- [Santé op de Chaussée](#): we kicked off 2023 at GC De Maalbeek, our choir's first home, where we performed a series of mini concerts as part of a New Year's event in January.
- [Baraye](#): an Iranian colleague of one of our members asked if we might sing this song in support of women and the LGBTQI+ community in Iran. A video was shared on our social media.
- ['I Am Her' Flashmob](#): on 31 March, we staged a flashmob at Brussels Central Station to mark Transgender Visibility Day. This event was planned in collaboration with the association Genres Pluriels and was supported by the City of Brussels (Equal Opportunities) and RainbowHouse (Rainbow Visibilities - Cocof). We sang 'I Am Her', a song written and recorded by US trans artist Shea Diamond, but we changed the end of the song to add the slogan 'Trans Rights are Human Rights'.
- [Les Equinoxes Festival](#): in April, we performed as part of this feminist, inclusive, accessible and sustainable festival. The event took place at La Tricoterie in Saint-Gilles.
- [Pride](#): the choir had a full diary during Pride week in May!
 - **Pride at the Museum**: as part of Pride week, we performed several mini concerts at the Museum of the City of Brussels (both inside the museum and on the Grand-Place).

- Concert at Grands Carmes: the night before Pride day, we brought Pride week to a close at this new LGBTQI+ community venue.
- Pride Day Main Stage: we opened Pride day performing on the main stage for an audience of thousands.

We also sang at the wedding of one of our founder-members, Julie Loriaux, and her partner Violaine.

3) “Listen, Care & Share” to Strengthen our Community Spirit

This project, focussed on wellbeing within the group, was launched during season 3 (2020-2021), after a survey had revealed various problem areas in the choir (sexism, racism, fat shaming, transphobia, biphobia, lesbophobia...). During season 4 (2021-2022), we organised a series of workshops on Safer Spaces and non-violent communication with the support of Equal.Brussels. These workshops contributed to a gradual shift in mindset within the choir and it had been planned to round off this project by drafting a manifesto.

During season 5, we continued this project aiming to improve decision-making within the group and to draft the manifesto, all while reinforcing community spirit.

On decision making, we attended initial training on [systemic consensing](#), a method which aims to make the choices that meet the least resistance in a group. We used this method to assess whether or not to take part in the Rainbow Cops event. Our Joy Team Creative used a survey and a vote to pick the theme of our 2024-2025 show, and another survey to collect anonymous testimony of members' schooltime experiences in preparation for the School's Out show.

While considering the possible drafting of a manifesto, Joy Team Strategie opted to shift towards a code of conduct instead. Discussion groups were organised first in January and later at our Hastière working weekend in March. These opportunities to exchange views were very constructive, but with pressure mounting to learn our new repertoire, time was lacking to deepen discussions, and it was not possible to vote on the Code of Conduct by the end of the season as planned. However, work on this will continue over the course of the next season.

In light of the size of the group this season, we made sure to organise more activities in small groups. At our [weekend in Spa](#) in October, the first evening was dedicated to icebreaker games. Having a second conductor, François Vaiana, meant we were also able to rehearse in smaller groups. Additionally, our General Assembly was held over this weekend to encourage wider participation, and JT Creative put on an information session about the School's Out show.

At our [Hastière weekend](#) in March, on top of the Code of Conduct workshops, Joy Team Creative organised groups and to present the script of the School's Out show and gather reflections. Over the course of the weekend, we were well taken care of with Charlotte Lambertini's vegetarian and vegan catering (Apus & les Cocottes volantes), who we had also worked with previously.

We organised various social activities such as dinners at Christmas and at the end of the season in June. Our members always appreciate these opportunities to socialise and frequently organise other activities through our fun group on

Whatsapp. This season, one of our members also led yoga sessions before Wednesday evening rehearsals.

Time was lacking to develop new projects to strengthen community spirit outside of the events we organised and took part in. Community will be the main focus of our sixth season (2023-2024).

4) School's Out

The concept of dedicating a show to our experiences of school was born during our second season (2019-2020). Belgium has little to be ashamed of when it comes to LGBTQI+ rights, but there are still battles to be fought. LGBTQI+ phobia still plagues our society, and schools are no exception. In the playground, in the classroom, in the changing rooms, on the bus and on social media, students are too often the target of aggression because of their (perceived) identity or that of their parents. From nasty jokes to physical aggression, insults and bullying can have dramatic consequences. But school can also be a great place where we meet new people and learn about the world – a place of openness to others.

Ever since our choir's creation, we have used the power of song to share our ambition for a more inclusive society. School and life as a teenager are two themes that came to the fore quite naturally, because it is there and at that age that we craft and assert our identity, but it's also where we first feel the pressure of societal norms. Paradoxically, resistance to this theme from within the choir (not everyone wants to dwell on that part of their life) only highlighted the relevance of this topic and why we needed to tackle it, but to do so sensitively, drawing from our own experiences.

The group brings together members from three generations, so school was more recent for some than for others, but none of us know first-hand how today's teenagers experience education. During the 2020 lockdown, we organised online discussions to share our formative memories, recollections of joy, but also of trauma. This was much more than a great opportunity to get to know each other better. The workshops, and later a written survey in 2022, also revealed we had shared experiences despite the broad diversity of the group, and regardless of nationality, age, sexual orientation or gender identity. First times, rebellion, friendship, hopes and dreams, self-discovery, coming out, social pressure... A number of testimonies were included in the show, with members stepping forward on stage to recount them.

During season 4 (2021-2022), we brought our Dance with Pride project to life while also continuing work on School's Out (mainly choosing the repertoire and ordering arrangements).

Season 5 (2022-2023) was completely dedicated to this project. Ten original arrangements were composed for us by professional artists (Emily Allison, Margaux Vrancken, Ellinoa, Antoine Delprat, Philippe Maniez, Leander Moens and Thomas Mayade). We learnt the new repertoire, guided by our conductor Emily Allison), between September and March. In April and May, we took the opportunity to get used to performing the new repertoire at a number of small concerts, as well as learning the choreography created by our team of volunteers and familiarising

ourselves with the script of the show. From March onwards, we benefited from the precious support of our Artistic Director, Simon Paco, following their application to work with us. The pace of work has been very intense, and the Board of Directors has been careful to communicate positively in order to support the choristers and take account of their needs in this context.

We developed partnerships with associations active in the field of prevention in schools: Gris Wallonie, CHEFF, Ligue des Droits de l'Enfant (Ecole pour tous.te.s project), Go to Gyneco, Crible, Moules Frites, Alter Visio and Transkids. These associations were present at our show (at a stand at the Uccle Cultural Centre), and were also highlighted in the programme and referred to on stage. We organised a workshop with students in the Ecole pour tous.te.s (School for All) group at the Lycée Maria Assumpta, where we collected the testimony of today's young people to include in the show. School is one of the key places where we learn about life as part of a society. We wanted to open up the debate and draw the attention of parents, teaching and support staff, school leadership, and staff at health and welfare (PMS) centres for young people, who all have important roles to play in the provision of information and support.

Our project enjoyed broad support from the public sector: the Commune of Uccle (Equal Opportunities - Maëlle de Brouwer), Equal.Brussels, the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles (Equal Opportunities), VGC, Cocof and Loterie Nationale. Their support contributed to funding the runup to the show as well as the performance itself.

[The show](#) took place on June 10 at a sold-out Uccle Cultural Centre (800 seats). The audience was deeply moved by the show's theme and the way we approached it. It was a great success both artistically and commercially, and the concert was followed by an after-party at Grands Carmes in the centre of Brussels. This project will continue into the following season with a studio recording session planned and videos to be shared. An artistic portfolio has also been sent out to various cultural centres and schools with a view to sharing the show more widely ([full show on YouTube](#)). Finally, Vews (RTBF) devoted a long, high-quality report to our project, which was broadcast in August 2023 (season 6).

5) Various Voices, from Bologna to Brussels

In June, we took part in the [European LGBTQI+ Choir Festival, Various Voices, in Bologna](#). Over 50 of our members participated and it was quite the experience. Our Fab Fund (social fund) was able to support 11 participants' travel.

During our time in Bologna, we sang four times in concerts and mini concerts, attended concerts by the 105 other participating choirs, met so many new faces and celebrated our pride! And we took plenty of notes as the next edition of the festival in 2026 will be hosted by our choir in Brussels.

A separate ASBL has been created to organise the event (Various Voices Brussels 2026) but the two projects are inextricably linked. Most of the subsidy requests submitted this season (2022-2023) were sent in jointly on behalf of both associations.

A delegation from Bozar and a Visit.brussels representative were on site in Bologna and noted the size of the festival and how significant it will be for Brussels. Audiences responded enthusiastically to our concerts, putting our choir and our city under the spotlight and giving rise to high expectations!

6) Conclusion

Several positive aspects to be noted following this season:

- Musical quality of the choir and artistic quality of its projects and professional partners
- Many positive emotions felt and shared at key moments (School's Out / Various Voices 2023 / Pride).
- Financial stability of the association and ability to raise funds needed for its projects.
- Strong theme of School's Out show and how the show was created (partnering with professionals, participatory approach)
- Visibility of the association at key events (Pride, Trans Visibility Day) and the link to work behind the scenes building partnerships, as well as our visibility on social networks (Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, Twitter, to which Tiktok has been added this year).
- Success of small group workshops at working weekends
- Development of volunteering within the ASBL
- Induction of new members
- General feeling of having achieved our goals

Focus areas for improvement:

- Lack of time to work on the wellbeing of the community
- Struggle to develop media connections and cultural partnerships (schools, cultural centres).