



Activity Report – Sing Out Brussels! **22 February 2019**

Where the story begins: experience, ambition and freedom!

The idea of the choir was thought up in June 2018 by a group of friends who between them had a wealth of experience in the world of LGBT choirs. The founding members had for many years been part of Tapalanote, the choir linked to the Brussels Gay Sport (BGS) association. Several of them had also been involved in that choir's board. In this role, they had gained experience of recruiting singers, managing volunteers, developing an artistic vision, building a network of contacts with LGBT choirs both in Belgium and internationally. One of the founding members is also the vice president of Legato, the European association of LGBT choirs. Legato organises the international festival Various Voices every four years. Several founding members took part in the 2014 and 2018 festivals in Dublin and Munich. It was during the festival in Munich that discussion about founding a new LGBT choir began. The founding members prepared an application for Brussels to host the 2022 festival, which could not be submitted due to the opposition of BGS. These founding members shared the same ambition and thirst for freedom in terms of projects and artistic vision. Thanks to their love of music, their commitment and their energy, they managed in barely two months to bring their dream to life.

The participative development of the project

On 2 July 2018, the founding members organised an evening of brainstorming with the first singers who had expressed their desire to join a new choir. This process made it possible to create a joint vision for the mission, objectives and values of the new choir. The name of the choir was decided by secret ballot in two rounds based on suggestions made by all participants. The project was built around the principle of participation, accounting for everyone's opinions. This participative foundation has become a key element in the continuing success that Sing Out Brussels! enjoys today. This work led to the foundation of a not-for-profit association in mid-July 2018 and the adoption of a set of internal regulations.

Recruitment : Are you fabulous enough ?

A choir's identity always reflects its members' identity. So recruitment of choir members was preceded by an intense period of reflection before the campaign was launched in August 2018 with posters in LGBT venues and music schools alongside promotion on social media and through the networks of the founding members. A website was created to promote the choir with inspirational videos featuring singers expressing their vision of the project. The campaign made it possible for us to achieve our objectives. 67 people signed up to audition, 60 auditioned and 51 were asked to join. To ensure the candidates were committed, they were each asked to prepare their audition with a group piece and solo. Each candidate received a welcome brochure which introduced the choir, set out its mission, values and objectives, as well as the planned activities and the choir's governance structure. The brochure was presented as part of an information session led by members of the board in order to gauge how attentive and enthusiastic candidates were about the project. The selection of candidates was carried out in a participative way, involving all members of the board and the heads of section. The choir currently has 52 members who represent Brussels' diversity (in terms of age, nationality, sexual orientation, gender identity and language), which was one of our objectives. The choir works in three languages (French, English and Dutch). This recruitment strategy has proven very fruitful - the members are committed to the musical and social success of the project.

Team building through a shared love of music and socialising

Every association requires volunteers. Hence the need for a sense of community at the choir's heart. Through this community spirit, bonds are formed between choir members, creating a great atmosphere that encourages members to really engage. We're also stimulating new interests among members - when they signed up, singers were asked to specify their skills in a range of different areas (artistic, logistical, communication, association management etc.) This meant that we were able to assign roles to members based on their wishes and talents. We put together 'Joy Teams' which function autonomously and are responsible for different tasks in the day-to-day running of the association (artistic, logistics, communication, strategy). There are many different opportunities for members to bond, bringing the social aspect of the choir to life. After each rehearsal, singers meet for a drink in a local café. In mid-October, the choir organised a two-day workshop in Uccle. 40 singers took part, which allowed us to reinforce the bonds between the group members, through singing, of course, but also through shared meals, games and team-building activities. On the Saturday evening, for example, we enjoyed food prepared by a local organic caterer in harmony with the project's principle of quality in all activities - quality in music,

relations between its members, but also in food! Following a well attended Christmas meal, we will in the coming months continue to reinforce the connections in the group by organising more social activities, including a residential weekend in Spa, an end of season dinner and even trips abroad.

The artistic vision: This is us !

In terms of our artistic and musical vision, the choir has set the bar very high. The desire to attain musical quality is well understood by our members, who are ready and willing to learn and work hard at home to reach this aim. For this first season, the choir has already planned several concerts. The first one took place on 11 January as part of GC De Maalbeek's New Year festivities. This was our first taste of performing on stage to an audience in a convivial atmosphere. Our second performance followed on 26 January. This occasion was a real concert, which is described in greater detail below. Our next big concert is scheduled for 21 and 22 June. The theme "This is us" gives the choir the opportunity to express its identity through song. The engaging pop repertoire includes numbers such as Proud, This Is Me, I Wanna Dance with Somebody, A Little Respect and Born This Way. The choir collaborates with other artists and groups: with three choirs from outside of Belgium in January, and with La Diva Live (Brussels-based drag act) in June. These artists are chosen based on how closely they fit our choir's artistic vision and values.

Ambassador for Brussels

26 January marked the first Sing Out Brussels! concert on the occasion of the general assembly of Legato, the European Association of LGBT choirs. Around thirty representatives from choirs from all over the world came to take part in workshops and seminars in Brussels. We gave two concerts alongside choirs and vocal ensembles from Brussels and further afield: O!Boy (Brussels), Homonics (Dublin) and Die Zauberflöten (Cologne). The event was the opportunity for us to position Brussels as an important centre for the LGBT community and musical scene. It also allowed us to make contacts ahead of Brussels' candidacy to host Various Voices 2026.

The choir plans to carry out its 'ambassador' role both by welcoming international delegations to Brussels, but also by spreading Brussels' values abroad. In April, the choir is invited to go to Paris to give a concert alongside a non-LGBT choir.

The task of networking

The choir wants to build partnerships, and not only artistic ones. At the end of August, we organised a start-of-term evening at the RainbowHouse, and we'd like to become members at the next general assembly. We have also forged a partnership with VisitBrussels, who are very welcoming of our ambition to represent the city and sponsored us by provided us with "Be Fabulous Be Brussels" t-shirts we wear as our uniform. VisitBrussels also made available our concert space for the event on 26 January. The choir is in the process of completing its list of potential partners, and will be contacting them throughout the season. On Thursday 31 January, Sing Out Brussels! sang two numbers at a cocktail event announcing Belgian Pride 2019, demonstrating our desire to partner with this event, given its continued importance for the equality of opportunity in Brussels.

A long-term strategy

Sing Out Brussels! (The Fabulous Queer Choir) has barely started out, but we are already looking forward to the future with great optimism. Our first long-term aim is Various Voices 2022, hosted by the city of Bologna. It's our ambition, during the festival, to represent Brussels' application to host the following festival in 2026. The strategic path towards achieving this goal is still in development, but this first term is already striking our path for the future: musical quality, artistic ambition, a welcoming social atmosphere, inclusion, working with partners, and representing Brussels... Fabulous adventures are waiting just around the corner!