

Contact Us

Dementia Inclusive Singing Network

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**Dementia Inclusive
Singing Network**

Copyright and Licensing for Choirs and Singing Groups

This guide explains what copyright is and how you will know if the songs your group is singing are in copyright. If songs are in copyright it affects what your group is allowed to do with them. There are two more guides to read depending on what your group wants to do:

- Copying Lyrics and Sheet Music and Making Arrangements
- Performing in Public and Recording

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**SUPPORTING AND
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What is copyright?

Copyright is the law that protects the rights of whoever who has written the songs you are singing. The law of copyright means that only the songwriter(s) has the right to:

- make a copy
- adapt it
- perform it
- record it
- and distribute recordings

A song remains in copyright until the songwriter dies and for 70 years after their death. Sometimes this right is passed on to a publisher or is inherited by a family member.

There are two different copyrights covering a song your group is singing.

1. Musical: the copyright of the actual music (notes in a certain order). In the UK a piece of music is in copyright as soon as it is created, and remains in copyright until 70 years after the death of the creator.
2. Literary: the copyright of the lyrics (words of the song). The same 70-year rule applies to the lyricist.

If you use sheet music in your group, there is another copyright to know about.

3. Typographical: the copyright of the published sheet music edition. Typographical copyright lasts for 25 years after the first publication of an edition.

Is a song we are singing in copyright?

The simple way to find out is to use an internet search to find out:

- Who wrote the song? Sometimes this is more than one person. Sometimes the writer of the music and the writer of the lyrics is different.
- Are these people still alive?
- If not did they die less than 70 years ago?

If the writer(s) are alive or died less than 70 years ago then the song is in copyright.

You might not realise that a song everyone knows has actually been written by someone and is in copyright. Until 2017 the song Happy Birthday was in copyright.



Who owns the copyright?

The songwriters own the copyright but this is often signed over to a music publisher, or the publisher manages the copyright.

This makes the publisher a good place to start to find out who owns the rights to a piece of music. You can find this out by using an internet search or by checking the published sheet music if you have it.

[The Music Publishers Association](https://mpaonline.org.uk/faqs/) (<https://mpaonline.org.uk/faqs/>) can also help you find out who owns the copyright if you contact them with any information you have about the song.

Are we allowed to sing a song in copyright?

You can sing a song in copyright with your group. But there are some things that you might want to do that you need to get permission, pay a fee for get a licence for.

These are:

- Making a copy of the lyrics
- Making a copy of the sheet music
- Singing the song in a public performance
- Making a CD or DVD of the song
- Putting a recording of the song on the internet

There are unfortunately no exceptions to copyright law for groups who are not professional musicians or who are charities.

Links

Music Publishers Association: <https://mpaonline.org.uk/contact/>

To find out who the copyright holders of a piece of music are or put you in contact with a publisher.

We hope you find this Making Music resource useful. If you have any comments or suggestions about the guidance please contact us. Whilst every effort is made to ensure that the content of this guidance is accurate and up to date, Making Music do not warrant, nor accept any liability or responsibility for the completeness or accuracy of the content, or for any loss which may arise from reliance on the information contained in it.