



# One is the Loneliest Number

Thomas N. Gellert – The School Music News Editor

What happened to the summer? Even after six months I'm still having a hard time wrapping my head around the fact that for many of us, making music has become a solitary activity in these difficult times.

Being a once-in-a-while soloist is never easy (ask any kid who has ever performed a solo at an evaluation festival). We are by nature sociable creatures when it comes to making music. Perhaps this is why we have lost so many in our music profession to the scourge we know as COVID-19. Whether it is in an intimate jazz club, a Broadway theater, a concert hall or a rock concert in a stadium, music was meant to be performed by more than one for the many. Times have changed.

## We make do

The amazingly fast transition that many teachers made from in-person to online instruction last March shows just how creative and resilient our profession can be when faced with enormous challenges. We know just how much we have missed making music with our students and how much they in turn have missed making music with one another and us.

Sadly, these desperate times have pushed the performing arts completely out of focus for all of us and, more important, for all of the world around us. Despite wars and moments of national and international tragedy, music has always been there for us.

It's helped us to heal, helped to bond us together and given us strength to endure.

In these difficult times we are left with recorded memories; Broadway theater reduced to television movies; previously recorded theater presentations sans the energy of a live audience; and, "virtual" online art exhibitions and museum tours. Are these attempts to provide the same experience and a replacement for "in-person" opportunities? Hopefully, no!

We can watch video of great modern dancers and the giants of the

the opportunity to experience the arts in our schools? Most of all, I wonder how much of what we have cultivated in the arts in a century since the last worldwide pandemic will remain? What will our world look like and what role will the arts play moving forward?

We are tired of "virtual" meetings and classrooms. We are stressed when thinking about the loss and profound impact that this pandemic is having on our programs right now, and worse, the future of our programs. We are resourceful and creative souls but there comes a point where our efforts keep falling short because we lose that special connection that is so unique to being a music educator.

The "intimate" experience that making music is all about is gone right now and we are in a withdrawal of sorts. They didn't cover this in college methods courses. There's no established historical foundation for teaching music this way. We're all rightfully concerned about the reality of the way things are and, more important, where we are headed. We try our best. Sometimes we connect, other times we worry about those we do not see at all.

We look at the faces of our students to gauge reaction. Today those faces are two-thirds obscured by a mask, and it is very difficult to measure a student's reaction. More than anything we need to see our students' faces as an affirmation that what we are teaching is connecting with them. This is hard.

*We must continue to be tireless advocates for music education*

past; marvel at the grace of a beautiful ballerina; watch in awe as a stage becomes an incredible Paris street scene in a filmed opera but, it isn't the same, is it?

## Will appreciation return?

I have often wondered to myself whether when this pandemic is finally over, there will be a newfound passion for the arts in today's world? Will our politicians refocus their attempts to muster support for the arts at the highest levels of government? Will parents (and their children) jump at

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## The future is in our hands

We know that all music educators are especially vulnerable right now as schools struggle with concerns over maintaining social distancing. What we have always taken for granted is no longer the case. I thought that I had seen many, many strange things happen during my career, but I can honestly say that never ever did I think we'd see what we've seen in 2020.

We must all be a willing part of the rebuilding process when the end of this awful virus comes. Furthermore, we must continue to be tireless advocates for music education during a time when there is much confusion about how we can best perpetuate music in our schools and communities. We must rise again to not only help others to understand but also to look toward a renewed and collaborative effort to keep all of the arts as an integral part of our lives.

If there is any consolation to be taken out of this moment in history it is this: every single one of us continues to face radical changes in the way we live and work. We all have a pretty good excuse for not conducting "business as usual," don't we? The real problem is that despite the predicament we all find ourselves in right now, it seems that there is no universally accepted way of dealing with the delivery of instruction.

So much of what we do as teachers is determined locally, and that is where the concerns start. Our music education community remains strong in these uncertain times but we nevertheless continue to hear troubling stories about music programs hit very hard by locally applied "guidelines" and policies. How does music education survive moving forward?

Sometimes in nature there is a reset button when the "playing field" (no pun intended) is leveled and we

must recalibrate and rebuild after the storm. We are resilient when we work together and have for many, many years weathered all types of disasters, some resulting out of poor judgement and others that occur by nature. In these tough times the only solace we take is in knowing that this isn't an isolated occurrence. Instead, we recognize that this is an experience shared worldwide in every small corner of our world.

Go ahead and make plans. Be creative. Share ideas with colleagues and most of all, be supportive and encouraging of your students. Try to engage the parents of your students, as well. They need to be a part of our resurgence and we will need the parents of our students to help us to keep kids going and motivated.

One is definitely a lonely number but we are not alone in any of this. Keep the faith! ||