

AGMAzine

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and perseverance

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Singing Through the Pandemic



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Last March, when we all thought the pandemic would just be a few weeks and then things would soon be back to normal, I didn't think I would need to become a tech-savvy, self-taping whiz. But as those first few weeks passed and turned into months, I learned that I needed to upgrade my equipment and learn exactly how to create high-quality recordings and live broadcasts by myself from my home.

I decided to delve into the virtual world of performing because I truly missed singing with and for other people. Even though I have a husband and three small kids who are keeping me quite busy with Zoom school and alternating schedules, I still missed singing and that human connection, so I decided to jump into the virtual world!

As an AGMA regular member of the San Francisco Symphony Chorus, I am blessed to still be involved in virtual projects with them while maintaining a paid position. Most exciting was singing in "Deck the Hall," which aired on NBC Bay Area and Telemundo. I am truly grateful for this AGMA contract and grateful for AGMA's help in solidifying this contract for the 2020-21 season during these challenging times.

In my first few virtual performances, I just used my phone or computer. The quality was not great. I decided to purchase a Blue Yeti mic, a pop filter, a ring light, a green screen, and a Logitech webcam (and waited over a month for it to become available). I am happy to say that I have made more than enough money doing virtual performances to cover those purchases and more. (If you haven't

invested in equipment yet, I would say it's worth it!)

After I had my equipment set up and spent many frustrating hours figuring out how everything works (including FaceTime calls with friends and even sound engineer colleagues), I delved right in and sought out virtual opportunities.

I am grateful to say that I have been quite busy. I have performed a solo recital with Sparrow Live, founded by Fran Rogers, and am now a virtual Artist-in-Residence with them. I have performed with Moon River Opera in their virtual performance series on YouTube. I am currently working with Christman Opera Company in NYC in their Voices Raising Voices series, highlighting the work of artists and composers that are people of color, women, and/or LGBTQIA+! I decided over the summer to stretch my artistic abilities and performed a lead role in a straight play with the company Put Ur Play On Productions. I even composed a song that was turned into a film with Yonder Window Theater Company. (I stretched my creative abilities as much as possible.) I have done many virtual choir projects as well and was involved in the opera *L'enfant et les sortilèges* with VOPERA and the London Philharmonic Orchestra. I am also currently involved in the virtual production of *Norma* with A Little Knight Music Productions, coming out soon!

I would say the most artistically fulfilling project so far, however, has been working with composer Grey Grant on the pieces that she composed for me. This was fulfilling because I was able to accompany myself on music I never dreamed I would be able to play on the piano. Grey and I started working together because we were randomly paired by the Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music for the #GLFCAMgigthruCovid program. We both were paid to collaborate and the songs she wrote blew me away. "Short songs to sing aloud" is a song cycle of four short songs to self-accompany

(three on piano and one on drum). I truly did not think I could do it and asked her if she could have a friend record the accompanying parts. I started practicing the piano part though, for fun and just to see, and slowly I started to get it. I then started singing my vocal line at the same time and surprised myself that I was able to do both. I am very happy with the end result and happy I stuck with it by practicing piano every day. Grey and I continued to work together on another piece, "Three Months In," which was even more difficult on the piano, and after practicing, I was able to play and sing that too. I feel like I gained so much confidence in my self-accompanying skills and use it often now when making self-tapes.

What has been so great about doing these projects is the human connection of it all. I have worked with composers, companies, and musicians I would never have met otherwise. I love how I can connect with anyone in the world and make music with them since, for the time being, location doesn't matter! What I'm most excited about is a full album I am working on that premieres the works of new composers. I hope things are better for all of us in 2021, but until then I will continue in this new virtual world. ■

