

Early Music in the Time of COVID-19

It was thought that Washington state (WA) had the first case of COVID-19 in the U.S. on January 19, as well as the first death and the first epidemic outbreak. Later reporting put the first case and subsequent death earlier, in the California (CA) Bay Area. Hardest hit states soon became New York, New Jersey, and the expected WA and CA—all areas with many ARS members.

Starting in March, we all practiced **social distancing** (a 2006 public health strategy) and wore masks (a lesson from the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic). On March 13, ARS Board president David Podeschi wrote by e-mail to chapters, consorts and recorder orchestras, encouraging them to cancel meetings in the name of safety. Playing seasons for most ARS chapters were called off—which also affected **Play-the-Recorder (PtR) Month** events, unless they were held in early March. By April the embargo on social gatherings and in-person participation began to have a positive effect. The month of May saw businesses begin to reopen, at least with curbside pickup of goods.

Many iconic events were called off: Spain's Running of the Bulls in July; Germany's Oktoberfest; the Scripps National Spelling Bee, continuous since 1945. Likewise the early music world was affected. The **Berkeley (CA) Festival** was canceled, as was the **Stockstadt Recorder Festival** in Germany. With meetings and workshops halted for months to come, recorder professionals (and anyone working in the gig economy) suddenly lost income. The **ARS relief fund drive** that began in March has helped provide temporary support to some of these professionals (see box at right). Other organizations—early music or music in general—did likewise (for instance, www.amherstearlymusic.org and www.earlymusicamerica.org/support/weareearlymusic).

Humans adapt well. How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected you? Here is a glimpse of what some in the early music community are doing.

When ARS member Jitka Konecna, from the Czech Republic, received her April ARS Nova e-mag (titled "Preparing for your first online lesson," with instructions and links to find online teachers), she wrote: "I am a recorder player and teacher and very much admire your work in the U.S. I just want to thank you for this great activity and for sending me the American Recorder magazine directly to my home. After visiting the Amherst Early Music Festival in 2018, I can recognize many friends in the articles. :) During these days I appreciate it very much."



From the ARS in the Erich Katz Music Series

Suzanne M. Angevine,
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\$5 PDF or Member price/
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americanrecorder.org/
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Recorder players have taken to the air—online, that is. After canceling meetings, ARS chapters are hosting Zoom sessions. A Denver (CO) chapter Zoom, opened up to a few others on April 19 and led by **Jennifer Carpenter**, filled two screens with players from six states. Philadelphia (PA) members (<https://philadelphiarecordersociety.org>) held a synchronized at-home playalong on **PtRDay**, March 21; plan Zoom meetings through July; and gathered for a Piffaro concert online watch party. ARS chapters and musicians in general now play **Zoom duets**—where a “leader” plays live, with the other player(s) muted. (Visit <https://americanrecorder.org/playitsafe> for Carpenter's Zoom tips. Similar tweaks may work on Facetime, Google Hangouts or other online meeting tools.)

On different air waves, musicians serenade from porches (while others howl or applaud at a daily set time, honoring first responders). A TV report showed musical residents of a Berkeley (CA) street (including *AR* Recording Reviews Editor **Tom Bickley**, https://americanrecorder.org/docs/AR202006_Bickley_IMG_0923.m4v). Virtual choirs and orchestras perform online. Spearheaded by **Sarah Cantor** in Brookline (MA), a **Global Community Recorder Orchestra** of over 100 players in 27 countries offered “Lascia Ch'io Pianga” (Let me weep) from G.F. Handel's opera *Rinaldo* (follow the link to Cantor's channel from www.youtube.com/americanrecordermag; play along at home with a PDF from www.cantornote.com/downloads.html).

Recorder professionals, workshops and others have adapted to offer online lessons or webinars—or, on YouTube or Facebook, share ideas for what to play, practice or watch while at home alone. **Team Recorder's** Sarah Jeffery posted a Pachelbel *Canon* playalong, www.youtube.com/watch?v=qh-pMpQpA4k&t=3s. Others join **Shira Kammen's Noony Toons**: at 12 noon Pacific time (or any convenient time), participants everywhere play a daily tune uploaded at www.facebook.com/Noony-Toons-105433457786556—then the “**plague orchestra du jour**” members post a first name and instrument.

In lieu of canceled concerts, professionals in the early music community keep in contact with their fans via daily or

weekly e-mails, some with free mp3 downloads, or with links to past concerts or livestreams (*several examples are <https://tempestadimare.org>; www.piffaro.org/covid-19, link at right, and a Quarantunes series at www.youtube.com/MusicaPacificaSF. Hanneke van Proosdij of Voices of Music created a RecorderTV playlist of 49 YouTube videos, posted at www.youtube.com/Walvis2007/playlists (four rows down, if you aren't distracted by other lists!).*

It became clear to the ARS that, besides financial relief, there is a **need for information**. On March 26, the ARS contacted teachers on file to ask if they teach online. Two editions of *ARS Nova* e-mags have covered **staying musically active while safe at home**. A timely April edition gave tips for online lessons, with a link to online teacher information compiled earlier. **Phil Hollar's** May *ARS Nova* feature covered ways that recorder players can play multi-part music by themselves—from simple smartphone recordings to more complex multi-tracking apps to professionally recorded backing tracks (visit https://americanrecorder.org/ars_nova_e-mag_archive.php). April 27 inaugurated a twice monthly e-mail newsletter, where the ARS shares links to online classes and workshops.

There is a need for further information—to which the ARS is responding by compiling some of the above resources, a growing list posted at <https://americanrecorder.org/playitsafe>. *Playing It Safe: Social Distancing for Recorder Players* currently includes links to lists of **online recorder teachers** and webinars; **playalong music** on the ARS web site (free or modestly priced), plus suggested apps to slow down recorded accompaniments; *AR Music Reviewer* **Beverly Lomer's list of solo music**; and, from the *Summer ARS Newsletter*, a special **Zoom canon by Jamie Allen**. Our shared social experience of playing the recorder may take on a new form for a while, but the recorder world is adapting.

RECORDER ARTIST RELIEF FUND DONATIONS

Contacting recorder teachers and professionals on March 17 to let them know of plans for an **ARS Recorder Artist Relief Fund**, the ARS launched a quick response to the effect on recorder professionals of cancellations related to the COVID-19 pandemic. An e-mail was sent that day to all members, requesting contributions. The fund, including ARS seed money of \$10,000, has exceeded **\$40,000**, with over half so far distributed to 21 individual applicants over three grant cycles. Through April 29, the following generous donors contributed over \$30,000 to the relief fund. Thank you so much for your support!

These grants have made a significant difference in the recipients' lives. Here is one poignant response from a grant recipient: *"I am in shock, in tears, and in awe of you all at ARS. Thank you so much for going above and beyond. I will put the funds to good use and do my best to pay some of it forward to other musician friends in need. We're all in this together and will make it through by helping one another!"* To make a contribution to the fund or to apply for a grant, visit <https://americanrecorder.org/relief>.

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