

Lucy's Lockdown

The last six months have been surreal. I think we have all gone through every emotion possible at some point and have had to find our own personal coping mechanisms. I have managed by keeping busy! I teach at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, Royal Northern College of Music, the University of Manchester and Yorkshire Young Musicians. Each institution has got its own guidelines and specific ways of working, but basically, I have been teaching on Zoom since March. My eyes are definitely in danger of squaredom! I am fortunate to have a lot of experience of distance-teaching, having taught for the Arco Project since 2016. (Arco is a distance-learning project that runs between Royal Birmingham Conservatoire and the Morris Isaacson Centre for Music in Soweto which involves weekly lessons delivered from the UK to Soweto online.) Because of this, I didn't find the transition too difficult, although of course, I miss the sound of real-life violas. However, I do think that Zoom lends itself particularly well to the viola... perhaps it is quite close to the human voice... the most perfect instrument one might say?!

I am so proud of my students - they all adapted brilliantly to the challenges of learning online and have taken real responsibility for aspects of their playing that are trickier to observe on screen. I am really excited to hear them all in real life over the coming weeks, for the first time in six months.

Another thing keeping me busy over the last six months has been practice. With concerts cancelled, it has been a real luxury to have so much time to devote to my viola. Although I miss performing, usually note-learning takes up so much of my time. In the absence of concerts, it's been wonderful to work on viola playing for the sake of viola playing. I've enjoyed spending time being a beginner again, curiously going back to basics and learning repertoire that I haven't had the time to in the last 10 years. I have spent most time on Sevcik and Bach - my two lockdown friends! I have also been running a Practice Club for my students since March, where we all join a scheduled meeting on Zoom, mute, and practise to our hearts??? content. Practice Club has been absolutely optional, but has really helped some people with motivation and accountability (me included!).

I moved house a few months ago and a lot of my library had been in boxes for months before while I squatted in my (ever-patient) sister's spare room. The first thing I did when I got the keys to the new house was to set up my music room and unpack all my music and viola paraphernalia. Having a dedicated, peaceful space to practise makes such a difference.

I am also extremely fortunate to have been able to create a bubble with my trio and work with them. We have done some recording, and explored some new repertoire. We are also at the final stages of preparation for the release of an album of British String Trios that we recorded last year, so watch this space!

Looking forward, I am very hopeful that the patience and tenacity that musicians have had to muster up during this time can be channelled into making music with greater vigour and passion than ever before.

Lucy Nolan. September 2020