

SETTING a Different STAGE

*Because the show must
go on ... line — a strategy that worked out
pretty well, all things considered.*

BY G.K. SHARMAN

THE SPRING 2020 CULTURAL SEASON DIDN'T QUITE GO AS PLANNED.

When the coronavirus hit, nearly every aspect of contemporary life, including the arts, came to a screeching halt. Even two of the city's most well-known and well-attended annual events — the Florida Film Festival and Orlando Fringe — were canceled.

But in lockdown, the arts had a crucial role to play.

"It became evident very quickly that people were looking to the arts for respite, for enjoyment, for relief from being in isolation," says Orlando Ballet Interim Executive Director Cheryl Collins.

Joshua Vickery, founder and executive director of Central Florida Community Arts (CFCArts), agrees, and saw a larger perspective: "The performing arts are more than just concerts and shows — they're about teaching and learning, growing, connecting, community,

cultural exploration and innovating."

Orlando cultural organizations found creative ways to connect, foster community and locate some silver linings.

Enzian

Enzian brought the indie-movie-in-quarantine experience to all sorts of small screens.

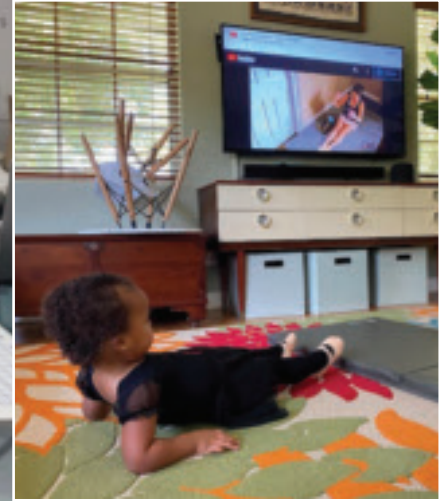
"Our Enzian friends have remained engaged with us throughout," says Janie Pope, director of development and public relations. "Enzian on Demand allowed streaming of more than 30 acclaimed independent films that otherwise might never have opened locally."

The rental option might continue even after the theater reopens, she added.

Rounding out the stay-at-home offerings: movie suggestions from Programming Coordinator Tim Anderson and cocktail how-to videos from Eden Bar bartenders.



COURTESY ENZIAN



Orlando Ballet efforts included staff making face coverings and teaching online classes (inset).

Orlando Ballet

Rather than cease operations in mid-semester, Collins says, “we combined virtual and live content in all areas of mission delivery, as appropriate.”

Dance classes for ages 3 to adult went online — and attracted participants from around the country. As many as 100 people “attended” some of the casual sessions.

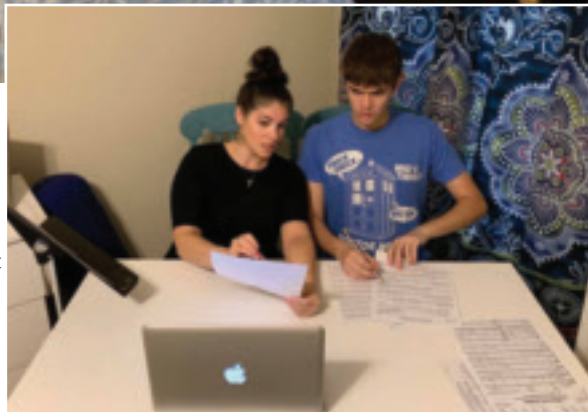
Meanwhile, the wardrobe department, with the contribution of some 3,000 yards of material by Walt Disney World Resort and volunteers, made non-medical-grade face coverings to share throughout the local healthcare community.

The lesson of the pandemic, Collins says, is about “being flexible and knowing that whatever art form someone is trying to deliver can be done in more than one way.”

CFCArts

CFCArts offered virtual classes and private lessons in various performing arts and the audiobook-style theater Time to Act. The popular — and free — Virtual Concert Series featured local performers and took place most evenings on the organization’s Facebook page.

“The way we experience them might look different right now, but creating and connecting through the arts is just



CFCArts music students engage in virtual learning.



as important as ever, as people cope with their feelings and adjust to a new normal,” Vickery says.

Music, in particular, created connection. “Music therapy opportunities as a way to help improve their mental health is so important to those who were suffering in silence from the pandemic — to those struggling with stress or anxiety in daily life who needed extra help to get back to feeling good,” says Ashley Lewis, a board-certified music therapist and CFCArts’ music-therapy program coordinator.

Orlando Shakes

Throwback Thursday featured actors from past productions performing from their homes or yards. Highlights ranged from Michael Hunsaker singing “Bring Him Home” from the 2014 production of *Les Misérables* to Dee Roscioli in a parody version of “The Diva’s Lament” from the 2015 production of *Spamalot*.

“The Throwback Thursday videos are such a fun way to stay in touch with our patrons and bring the joy of live theater right to their living rooms,” says Artistic Director Jim Helsingner. “Not to mention, our staff members get to reminisce as we look back at some of our favorite productions.”

Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra

Sound Bites, which included Musician Moments, featured Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra’s (OPO) musicians discussing their role in the orchestra and playing short selections. The OPO Ed vid-



Top: Orlando Shakes team members shared their surroundings in a Zoom session. Above: OPO’s Principal Clarinet Nikolay Blagov joins Executive Director Paul Helfrich for a Musician Moment as part of the Sound Bites video series.

eos take a more educational approach, looking at instrument families, including brass, strings and percussion.

“Even in the dark days of World War II or after 9-11, orchestras could still unite and inspire people with live concerts. The current circumstances don’t allow for that. So instead, we’re working hard to provide online content, both for patrons and for students,” Executive Director Paul Helfrich says.

Orlando Repertory Theatre

At Orlando Rep, everything went online in a hurry, including Youth Academy performances and the organization’s popular camps for May and June. That wasn’t necessarily a bad thing.

“We had to pivot and pretty quickly figure out what our style of virtual activities was,” explains Artistic Director Jeff Revels. “We have been wanting to do this for a while now, but it was always on the list that we would get to someday.

Orlando Rep Online has turned out to be an amazing silver lining for us.”

Orlando Museum of Art

Orlando Museum of Art’s (OMA) digital Museum From Home toolkit allowed visitors of all ages to enjoy the museum’s collections through virtual galleries, *Book and a Look*, an OMA-themed coloring booklet, and educational videos based on the museum’s permanent collection.

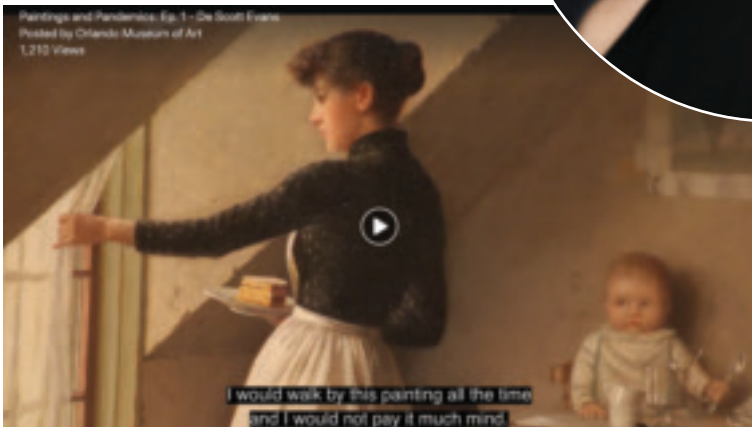
“Our #MuseumFromHome activities have allowed us to connect with thousands of followers — both new and old — while our doors have been closed,” says Curator of Education Jane Ferry.

“By providing bite-sized spotlights of beloved artwork from the museum’s collection, we engaged and inspired through thought-provoking programs. People have found them very meaningful and just what they needed to feed their minds and nurture their souls during this challenging time.”

Rising star soprano Abigail Rethwisch joined Opera Orlando's Gabriel Preisser on the opera's weekly livestreamed series, *The High Note*.

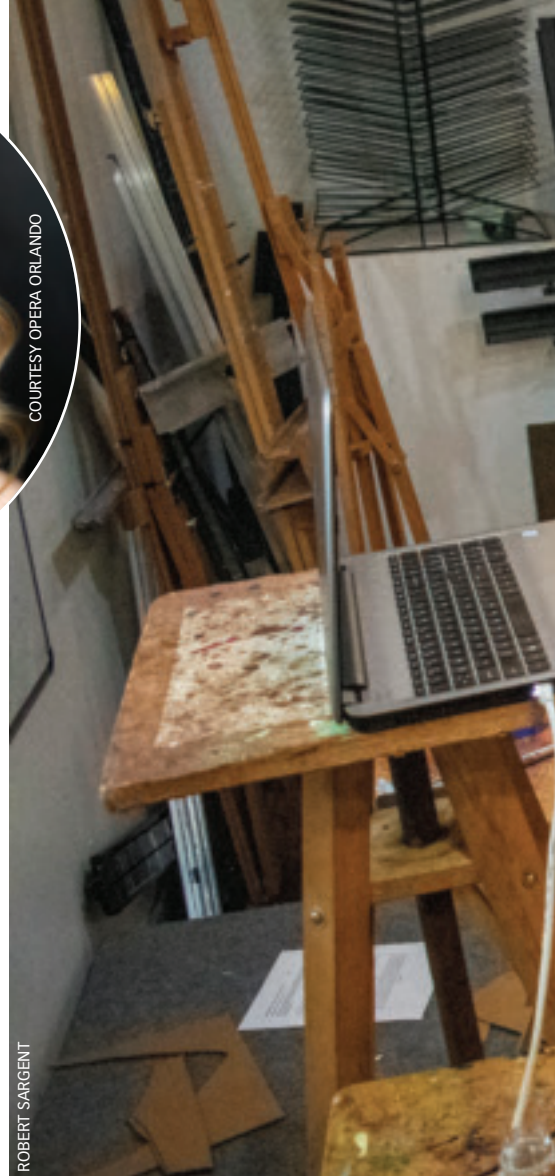


COURTESY OPERA ORLANDO



COURTESY OMA

Orlando Museum of Art's video series, *Paintings and Pandemics*, OMA educators David Matteson and Molly Driscoll guided viewers through a look at both art and pandemics of past generations, contextualizing the current crisis and the role art can play as we persevere through this difficult time. The first episode featured *At The Kitchen Window* by De Scott Evans and an influenza outbreak that wracked the Northern Hemisphere in the late 1880s.



ROBERT SARGENT

Right: Orlando Science Center's Early Childhood Specialists in KidsTown put together this OSC At Home STEM DIY "How to Make Bubble Snakes," a fun exploration activity highlighting observation and critical-thinking skills.



COURTESY OSC

Opera Orlando

Opera Orlando regularly featured a live-stream series, *The High Note*, on its Facebook page, as well as its YouTube channel.

Also part of the effort was a Youth Company virtual showcase and online voice master classes in partnership with Orange County Public Schools.

"We eagerly look forward to producing live theater again and are working with other arts groups locally and nationally to determine best practices and best next steps to get us there," says Executive Director Gabriel Preisser.

CityArts Orlando

The day before everything shut down, CityArts Orlando staff did walk-through videos of all of downtown galleries and put the virtual visits on YouTube and Facebook. The CityArts website also added e-commerce functionality that proved enormously popular with the artists.



COURTESY ORLANDO FRINGE

Left: Adam Francis Proulx's *Spencer Stays Inside* features an "inquisitive young blue fellow just doing his best to cope with the weird time we're all having right now. Focusing on staying entertained, positive and mentally healthy." The show premiered new three-minute(ish) episodes on thelawn.orlandofringe.org during the Orlando Fringe Festival dates.