

LIFTING VOICES AND SPIRITS

Show Choir & COVID-19

by Cassidy Clevenger

Normally when I cover a story for *Productions*, I will focus on just one school. For this piece, however, I will be breaking my normal protocol. Since the rest of the world is going off script, I might as well too.



We are living in strange days, and many schools are making a concerted effort to keep life as streamlined as possible for their students. Due to COVID-19, many shows had to be canceled; competitions had to be canceled.

Instead of focusing on what was lost—especially for seniors in these groups—the show choir world did what it always does: It rallied.

Many show choirs and schools took this disappointment, and fear, and decided to focus even harder on doing what they do: spreading light and hope.

Through this, we have all been reminded of the strength and perseverance in the show choir world, which comes from the power of the individuals in each group, and the power of the group being one united force.

Not only did they find ways to share the shows they had worked on, but they are even finding ways around other hurdles, like auditions for the upcoming year.

Lags and Leaps: Video Conference Auditions

Several schools across the country have had to consider alternative options regarding how to hold auditions for the upcoming season. A



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solution for many schools has been holding live auditions via Zoom.

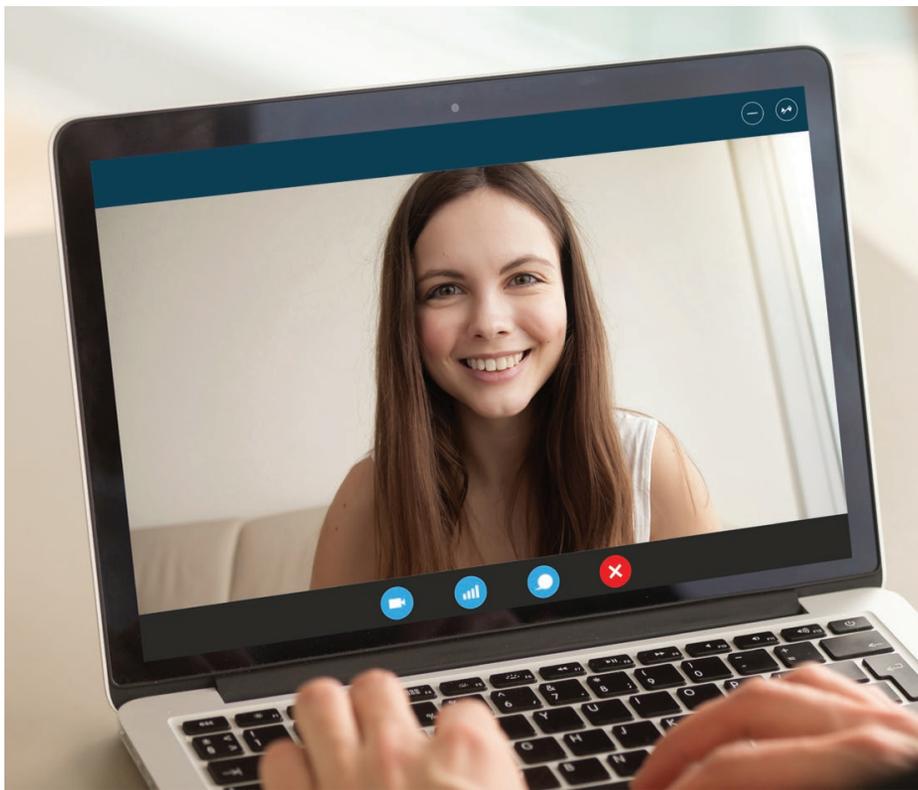
Prior to the Zoom audition, the students are sent a recording of the choreography and expected to perform the dance during the Zoom call. One common complaint noted by several directors, however, was how “laggy” most video conference apps can be. Trying to synchronize multiple singers, well, forget about it...

Other schools are using Google Classroom and Google Drive as a means to share videos and files for auditions. Using these tools, students and directors are able to communicate in real time, as well as review recordings as often as they want.

This option can benefit students who have questions, as well as directors who wish to review audition “tapes” more than once.

Many directors are choosing to break up auditions into two days. As long as the individual auditions are kept brief, they report that the process can be pretty simple.

Let’s face it, auditions are never that fast or easy; however, assuming there are minimal technical issues to sort out, this process shouldn’t be much more time consuming than a traditional audition process.



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Photo courtesy Camden Catholic High School

Considerations When Auditioning in Quarantine

One major concern that has arisen is how to handle situations where students lack the necessary technology to submit an audition.

Some directors are opting to judge students based on their performances from the previous year, and bypass 2020 auditions completely.

Other schools are confronting the issue of technology access by providing students with laptops or tablets; however, even this accommodation can't address the potential issue of reliable WiFi.

Furthermore, not all students are living in an environment they feel comfortable sharing with their peers or directors. Home lives for students can be chaotic or embarrassing, and they would prefer not to broadcast their personal lives. When requiring video conferencing for auditions, directors may want to take these concerns into consideration.

Charting a Path Forward

There is a lot of uncertainty in the world right now, and COVID-19 certainly rocked the competition scene. Many competitions were postponed or completely canceled. They are still discussing hosting and prepping for upcoming competitions

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We are living in a world that is thirsty for encouragement and empowerment, and some show choirs are responding to this social isolation with web-based performances. Students are sharing videos, working hard to get people smiling again, and many of those virtual performances that they have shared quickly went viral.

and even discussing camps as far out as Spring 2021. Show choirs know how to plan ahead.

For many, losing the chance to compete was initially heartbreaking. Prepping for these trips requires countless hours of practice as well as a financial commitment. When faced with adversity, there are a few ways to respond: get angry, get discouraged, or get motivated.

Inspiring Hope

This spring, many of us are turning to the arts for comfort. While some have been binge-watching YouTube and Netflix for more than

a month, others are expressing themselves through music or crafts.

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I have to mention here, too, that it's not just show choir—other choirs are also staying upbeat and positive, finding ways to share their voices, even from isolation. Chicago's Camden Catholic High has been

featured on *Access Hollywood* and NPR due to its wholesome message and the choir's incredible talent. Cleveland's Wadsworth High is another school that was recently featured on a local news station for its uplifting message of hope in their rendition of "Sun is Gonna Shine Again."

These schools, and so many others, have been able to turn a tragedy into something inspirational. Even in dark days, we find solace in performing and enjoying music. It is no coincidence that so many songs featured on these virtual concerts are ballads and hymns.

Right now, more than ever, it is important to inundate ourselves with joyful music that soothes and uplifts—and to surround ourselves with people who persist, create, and never stop shining.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Cassidy Clevenger is a Samford University alum. She is currently in graduate school at Samford in the MSW program, while working as a staff writer for Flaherty Media.

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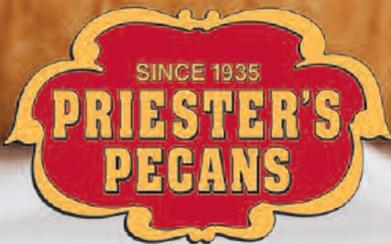
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