



What I did in lockdown

New Digital Recital Series:
Fantasy & Design

Anna Stegmann

And then there was nothing. A calendar filled with wonderful teaching appointments and performance opportunities emptied quicker than it could ever fill. Starting in March, nearly every email that arrived contained a cancellation or postponement of a concert and soon it became clear that all my teaching in the UK and elsewhere had to move online. I wouldn't be able to see most of my students until at least September. Simply sad.

Like so many, I felt anxious and defeated at this stage. And nothing is more killing for creativity and learning than fear. I retreated to my safe haven – practising and running – both excellent strategies to stay “fit” and escape reality for the time being. However, my “old normal” wasn't going to return as quickly as I had hoped. Spending time with other musicians and students, learning from their ideas and creativity, are the aspects of my work I enjoy most ... and (for me) are not replaceable by any digital platform in the long term, as much as a blessing and saviour they have been during the pandemic. It proved they could neither be substituted by a run through the fields or trying to nail that Vivaldi solo day in, day out.

What now? How to be creative and keep one's spirits up in times of being deprived of what usually keeps one going? It took me another few weeks to come up with what has eventually turned into a lock-down project which provided me with enough reasons to keep on

practising, feel creative and challenged, distract my mind from that ever worsening news-circle.

Early on I already noticed that I wouldn't feel inclined to contribute to the stream of live online content. I'm not comfortable with inviting an anonymous online audience into my living-room. And neither do I own the equipment nor do I have enough helping hands around to cater for live recitals, which would exceed mediocre audio-visual quality. Eventually, after two months of refusing to be part of the digital concert crowd, I woke up one morning in May with the idea to initiate my own digital solo recital series: “Fantasy & Design”, featuring recorder classics (and some unknown gems) spanning nearly a thousand years of music.

The basic concept for this project came from what I missed in some streams passing by on my social-media timeline: close proximity between performer and audience and a programme that is tailored to be consumed on a screen from home. Especially the latter has influenced my programming approach hugely. Sitting in a concert hall, listening to a recital scheduled at a fixed time, has become a sanctuary in times where we are otherwise constantly available. Watching performances from home doesn't necessarily find us listening with the same mindset.

I concluded that my own recitals shouldn't exceed 20 minutes and elaborate thinking about ways of shooting



footage, choosing contrasting repertoire, and deciding on an overall aesthetic concept was required. I'd also rather share my work with a dedicated and committed audience, than having the full recital being handed around between lots of viewers, of which many will just zap through. Having a paying audience and a personal video platform on my website seemed to be the answer to that.

Clearly my modest DIY video-editing and recording skills wouldn't be sufficient to realise my ideas at desirable technical level. The videos I envisioned needed to be produced, the audio pre-recorded to enable independent camera movement and editing, and I imagined a series of three episodes, with a trailer each, a jingle, and here and there some special effects and creative footage; all aspects that would make the project coexist next to real performances rather than being a bleak reminder of what we can't have for the moment.

This is where my colleague Andrea Friggi (better known as harpsichordist of my baroque group Ensemble Odyssee) came in. Andrea has a second life as a professional sound technician and recently had started experimenting with shooting music videos as well. He was able to channel my ideas to a tangible result. If it



hadn't have been for his support and tireless efforts with all things video, "Fantasy & Design" simply wouldn't exist.

Despite my initial hesitation to step on the online stage, I admit that the process of creating my very own series has been hugely rewarding. I have never felt as creative and in control of my own performance. Shooting and producing this series has shown me new ways of sharing my love for the recorder, which I otherwise wouldn't have embarked on. Still, I can't say I got used to a life in which making music with and for others is reduced to a bare minimum.

Who knows? – There might be a second season later this year in which I intend to include appropriately socially distanced chamber music. Meanwhile, I'm treating this as a pleasant but temporary experiment, rather than the oh-so-often forecast "new normal".

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