NCCO Webinars

Part 2

Series 1, Webinar 1 - 24 Mar 2020: Running Choir Online

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Elise, what are you adding to your choral community using virtual tools?

EH: Some of the things that we're adding synchronously are guest speakers. Also, we're doing some synchronous guided meditation and awareness exercises. Providing opportunities for people to breathe and realize "I am safe" because the choral community is about having safety and being in a safe place. It is so important, as we have domestic and international tours cancelled, to remember that we are alive and safe.

Elise, you have mentioned a book, *Practical Meditation for Beginners: Ten Days to a Happier, Calmer You*. Can you tell us a little about that book?**

EH: It's a step-by-step introduction to meditation, body scan, and ways to focus as you move through a meditative process.

You use a four-minute guided meditation in rehearsal. Talk about that.

EH: It's a script to be read---it tells you exactly when to pause, how long to pause---it's a great opportunity to introduce this kind of exercise to your students. I've found that students who have a difficult time coming into rehearsal focused, and this immediately improved my students' ability to retain and focus.

KFG: Some of these things we are listing as synchronous ideas can all be recorded for students who are in different time zones. Recordings can also be watched multiple times, so this is an opportunity in that respect, too.

MÁF: This also helps to address different types of learning and learners. With asynchronous events, the student doesn't need to feel guilty about stopping the class, they can just rewind. It's helpful in that regard.

Marie, you have done some less obvious activities that can contribute to shared mental health. What are you doing with that?

MBC: I've taken the opportunity to develop a "virtual coffee hour," because we all have time that we didn't have before. I've told my students, "bring your favorite mug, we'll meet at 10:00a if you want to." Everyone shared their favorite mug, and then we changed it up by having Zoom meetings with guests (UA's Virtual Café). I'm asking choral composer and conductor friends to come together and allow the students to have an opportunity that we didn't have before.

Michael, the school year resembles the liturgical year, with high points, preparations, and cycle of traditions and rituals. Is there some way these cycles can continue in the virtual learning environment?

MM: Some of the cycles are gone, but not all of them. College students' lives are based on ritual and routine. Our work as choral musicians is like that too. Our students rely on that desperately because they need the structure. Since the arc of our year has been cut off, we're left with "now what?"

Consider your choir's traditions. I'm turning at least one Zoom session entirely over to my seniors, so they can perform some of the traditions that seniors have traditionally done, and reflect on what their participation has meant to them over their years. I've encouraged our seniors to record those and share internally (google drive) and externally (social media).

Have a discussion with your student leaders. Get specific about what are your traditions approaching Commencement, and then get creative about maintaining them using technology. The seniors transfer their energy to the underclassmen -- if we lose this time, that energy is going to be different when we come back.

KFG: Also, our freshmen haven't been through a full cycle yet, and it is helpful for the seniors to "narrate" the things that would be going on at this point in the academic rhythm of the year for those who haven't experienced it yet.