



Notes from VCA's Leadership Listening Session for Arts Organization Leaders October 23, 2020

There were 79 participants, including VCA staff.

Katy Brown, Artistic Director of [Barter Theatre](#) shared some of the results of [Barter Theatre's Moonlite Drive-In Series](#) which took place over the summer, and continues into the fall. The program has proven to be a strong demonstration of community partnership, with support from local and state funders.

Ashley Hawkins, of [Studio Two Three](#) in Richmond shared how the organization has connected to community since the pandemic and BLM movements. Ashley also shared information about the development of the [Southern Arts and Culture Coalition](#)—a growing group made up of organization (leaders) and community organizers working to leverage more funding support and accountability for the inclusion of grassroots arts communities. More information can be found at <https://www.southernartsandculture.org/>.

Tracy Straight from Wayne Theatre Alliance in Waynesboro shared their current efforts, virtual programming of films they are creating, which has helped cultivate new partnerships.

Ginger Poole, from Mill Mountain Theatre in Roanoke, shared the organization's pivot to the virtual realm—from education classes, to a podcast series and more.

"One other thing to add to the revenue piece of our story, we were able to save all of the grant monies that we had received to move forward with Polkadots. This show is always free of charge to the public with the help of grants and sponsorships. This was able to stay in place for this year too."

Brett Bonda, from Richmond Ballet, shared their programming efforts which have seen success both virtually (in the School of Richmond Ballet) and in-person (again, with the School, which has enacted a good process for safe, social distancing, masks, etc., for students and teachers). The Ballet also is in the midst of their second Studio Series, where they have cut patron seating from 250 to 65 +/- to meet social distancing requirements, dancers, patrons, and staff wear masks, and all efforts have been made in consultation with a Medical Task Force.

Bob Wood, from UrbanArias in Arlington, shared they are also creating films. They have commissioned a new opera which they filmed, and is now online. Other projects are coming in the next months. They have also been lucky to add a key staff person. As Bob said, *"We're hanging in, finding opportunities, and counting our blessings."*

Emily Hartka from Charlottesville Ballet shared:

"The education programs have been the catalyst for getting things running virtually for us at the Charlottesville Ballet as well- and implementing/revising our COVID-19 procedures."

As participants asked follow-up questions regarding attendance numbers for both the Barter Drive-In Theatre experience and virtual programming...

Amy Wratchford from American Shakespeare Center shared:

"American Shakespeare Center has seen an average of ~800-1,000 tickets per streaming title. That has held true for the productions we've streamed on Vimeo as well as those we've streamed on Marquee TV. For the in-person performances, we averaged 65/performance in the Playhouse and sold out the 63 spots (140-200 people) outdoors. Approx 5K people over the summer."

Katy Brown from Barter Theatre shared:

"Attendance for Barter at the Moonlite is over 15,000 as of this week, and we project approximately 20,000 by year end."

Jane Franklin from Jane Franklin Dance shared:

We've had good attendance for free virtual real-time performances. These performances are by donation; and in that way, we have not found a way to generate donations. We are also doing weekly interview/video shows on Facebook live through Streamyard. We are trying here in Arlington at Jane Franklin Dance; with live performance virtual events, online classes. But we don't have a space so each event is a matter of finding a specific site; which has been pushing us to operate differently.

Laura Connors Hull from Creative Cauldron in Falls Church, VA shared:

We took all of our educational programs online. Turned our original Learning Theater production with 20 young people into a movie which will premiere outdoors this weekend. We did our summer cabaret and concert series outdoors at a park working with the City of Falls Church. 18 performances were offered. We are currently transforming our small black box theater into a live streaming studio and will be offering one-person, two-person performances, socially-distanced.

Deirdre Love from Teens with Purpose in Norfolk shared:

Have done small group gathering summer programs and fall, and after school with mentor tutors, teaching artists and Art breaks. Have been presenting virtual programs since March and will resume school-based arts virtual programs in November. Worked with VCA's Poetry Out Loud to record virtual content.

A follow-up question was asked for organizations who are doing in-person live events:
are you actually breaking even on these events?

Resounding response: NO, but still good work and community-building happening.

Tammy Scruggs-Duncan from Alleghany Highlands Arts Council shared:

"Arts organizations in the Alleghany Highlands have adopted a "stronger together" theme. AH Arts Council and Historic Masonic Theatre presented a joint event (in a barn, everyone distanced and masked through entire performance - free admission). We will be doing Giving Tuesday as a joint venture as well."

Grace Parkinson from Virginia Children's Chorus shared:

“VCC is having online rehearsals - we learned a lot with classes ending the spring season. The Directors practiced some new teaching techniques over the summer and we started again with our 4 choirs in September. Our enrollment is down about a third. We will have our first of four virtual choir videos premiere in early November. Looking into what will allow us to meet in person sometime in the spring season!”

Rights, Royalties

Michelle Isabelle Stark, from Arlington Cultural Affairs, asked about rights in virtual programming, and the challenges she's heard.

Erin Harms, from Signature Theatre shared:

Signature was able to get the rights to a couple of musicals for our virtual season. We are getting ready to sign a contract with MarqueeTV to host the streams.

Elizabeth Bracey shared:

“With music, the restrictions lie in recording it and playing later. If you livestream, most of the feed sources (like YouTube) have a blanket license with music publishers. But if you record and then plan to play it later, you must get permission from each song publisher.”

Anne Williford, from Greater Richmond Children's Choir asked:

Has anyone found software that overcomes the inherent latency problems. i.e. something that allows the group to really rehearse together virtually? I've read about a software program currently in testing but just wondering if anyone has found something that is up and running now? And wouldn't break the bank...

Grace Parkinson, from Virginia Children's Chorus shared:

Sync license for virtual choir videos - we had 3 copyright holders give us permission for no charge. One large copyright house charged \$35 to put up the video for a year. Pleasantly surprised that sync licenses were not a big expense.

Gavin Harper from The Suffolk Center for Cultural Arts shared:

In March, we took our educational outreach workshops and created a Youtube "Virtual Art Education" reaching more than 10,000 people engaging online. We also created "Together On Stage" where we invite local artists to perform on our stage and streaming it LIVE on facebook with reaching over 30,000 people. We also created a virtual art gallery tour. It looks like we will continue our "Together on Stage" series until May 2021 with opening our 500 seat theater to about 100 people socially distanced.

Tracy Straight (of Wayne Theatre) shared:

For those that show film, the film companies have been giving HUGE discounts on the royalties. For Music theatre International - they are show specific. Roanoke Symphony Orchestra will reemerge with live performance on a small scale in November.

As conversation turned to technical aspects of virtual programming:

Dean Rust from Alexandria Harmonizers chorus shared:

[AH] is also doing Zoom "rehearsals" with about 80% participation compared to pre-COVID. Sessions include singing (i.e. duetting with singing leadership), trivia, member interviews and other fun stuff. New music and on-line learning tracks have been distributed to keep moving forward. Planning virtual Christmas show for Dec. 20 and Youth Festival for March. On recent Chorus America event I heard about new software for virtual rehearsals, but have not investigated.

Grace Parkinson from Virginia Children's Chorus shared:

Every software that has promised to remove the latency in a virtual rehearsal has also required some important hardware - they require each participant to hardwire a microphone into their home router! Not really a great solution for a children's chorus where the parents see this as a very temporary situation.

Resources for mental health for arts organizations and their staffs:

<https://www.vamuseums.org/mental-health-and-wellness-for-cultural-organizations>

Other areas the group suggested would like to discuss (in future forums):

Donor fatigue

Other programming/community engagement efforts shared:

Wayne Theatre and Arts Herndon each shared that they have prepared and disseminated senior activity bags, including to their volunteers. [At Wayne Theatre], all supplies were donated.

Joanna Ormesher from Arts Herndon shared:

We have had huge success with Plein Air painting classes and they have now decided to carry them through to November - folks don't want to be inside. Im currently asking the town if they will allow me to put up- and keep up - a large tent for classes ...has anyone else come up with other ideas for that ?

As further questions about the use of tents were posed, Ryan Ripperton from SPARC (Richmond) shared that his organization recently purchased a large carport and have otherwise set up an outdoor classroom (with artificial turf and using social distancing measures.)

Katy Brown from Barter Theatre shared:

If anyone is seeking a large tent, we are selling a ballroom sized tent. Feel free to email our managing director, Ross Egan, at regan@bartertheatre.com .

AS OF 11/6/2020, the tent is still available.