

## Adapting and Succeeding in the Virtual Classroom

By OrchKids Fellow, Autumn England



Ms. Autumn and Ms. Judith leading a virtual Musicianship class.

Ten months ago, OrchKids staff, teachers, students, and families found themselves at home, sheltering from a brand-new virus; COVID-19 had arrived in the United States. So much was unknown then, but it was clear that music lessons would be online to prioritize everyone's health. A new initiative was launched and OrchKids held virtual classes for the first time.

Like all learning curves, it was uncomfortable and difficult at times. Everyone worked to become familiar with new devices, programs, and apps. OrchKids staff coordinated with families to safely deliver instruments, books, music stands, and supplies, and assisted families in gaining access to internet service. Students and families became experts at setting up computers, iPads, and phones for Zoom, and students learned to arrive prepared for their online classes. They became skilled at caring for their instruments, and many string students learned to tune their violins and cellos- which is no easy feat!




In the first weeks of the lockdown, OrchKids offered online classes, allowing students to see familiar faces and keep routines in the midst of the chaos. Keeping some elements the same provided everyone with comfort in the early days, and teachers found that many of the musical goals were achievable online. Judith Sarah, one of OrchKids' Early

Childhood Musicianship teachers, observed that not much of her curriculum needed to change. She explained, "We've had to be creative and flexible in how we go about our activities, but we can still sing, dance, create our own music, and work on all the key skills that we'd be exploring in person."

Megan Natoli, a flute teacher at OrchKids, has been keeping her classroom routine the same, using the same motivation charts and practice incentives in order to preserve classroom culture. Many of our students have faced not only the challenges of Covid-19, but have experienced heavy grief. To offer more holistic support, Ms. Megan's flute students have benefited from practicing meditation in class, and even wrote their own guided meditations.

The switch to virtual learning has encouraged students and teachers to utilize ever-expanding online resources and technologies. Students use music apps to supplement their courses and have learned how to record themselves, sound edit, and notate music. With countless choices, each teacher has been able to find their own ways to incorporate technology into their virtual classrooms, a practice that many teachers say they will continue even after classes resume in person. Some favorites are YouTube for video and audio, Google Slides as a classroom visual aid.



► **Adapting and Succeeding...**continued on page 2.

Take a Moment Tuesday

**Question:** When you need to take a moment, what helps you to calm down?

**Response:** When I need to take a moment, \_\_\_\_\_ helps me calm down.

What helps you calm down? Ms. Megan starts every class with a guided meditation to check-in with her students.

## Coming Soon!



Part of what makes OrchKids so special are the connections built within and around the communities we serve. Due to the hurdles of the past year, the OrchKids staff and families have missed out on casual, passing conversations that keep us all connected. Though weekly Community Times have allowed students to keep in touch, it is not the same as the one-on-one engagement they had during in-person program.

OrchKids Fellow, Samantha Flores, and SWCOS intern, Meredith Snow, have teamed up to tell the stories of our brave families as they themselves navigate this unique time. Inspired by WYNPR's On the Blocks, Samantha and Meredith have visited and recorded the stories of our students and their families, hoping to offer a sense of connection, comfort, and companionship to anyone who will hear their stories.

Follow us on Facebook at BSO OrchKids for more information!

# Adapting and Succeeding in the Virtual Classroom cont.



The ingredients to have a successful day in lessons are just like making a Krabby Patty!

The hard work and struggles of converting to virtual learning have paid off in many ways. Students' classrooms are now their homes, which means the whole family is in the periphery of the music lesson and practicing sessions. Early childhood musicianship teacher Tatevik Khoja-Eynatyan says that the home environment can be more comfortable for young

children: "Very young students seem more confident trying new things and taking risks since they are usually in their own space." Untethered by the physical limitations or peer pressures of a school classroom, students have become more independent learners. They explore their own interests, take initiative for their own learning, and can practice on their own time.

At the end of fall semester in 2020, students presented a virtual recital, featuring solo performances and over an hour of music. Organized by staff members Danielle Williams and Sharniece Adams, the recital was a triumph. Each performance was a showcase of students' individual talents and hard work, and a tribute to long hours spent on Zoom during months of great hardship.

Looking back, we can see so clearly what music can provide for children. The OrchKids community rose to the occasion, using creativity and relying on a steadfast

commitment to music, and to each other, to persevere through some of the most challenging moments that any of us may face in our lifetime. Music advocates often speak on the benefits of music education: perseverance, focus, creativity, critical thinking, long-term planning, communication, and so many more. We can see these benefits reflected exponentially in the last 10 months, as everyone made huge adjustments to continue in their dedication to music.

Ms. Megan puts it best: "OrchKids is a wonderful and inspiring community of creativity. I am constantly inspired by my Teaching Artist colleagues and staff members that I work closely with at Mary Ann Winterling Elementary School. But at the heart of the organization, are our incredibly courageous, dedicated, and talented students that provide me with as much inspiration as I would hope to provide them!"

## And, They're Off...

Each year, as OrchKids grows, we graduate a larger number of seniors from our program. Watching our students graduate is incredibly bittersweet; we miss their consistent presences at our program but are



Keyona Carrington, clarinet

excited to watch them take the world by storm. Two of our seniors in the class of 2021 have expressed interest in pursuing music in some way at the collegiate level, and we are thrilled to report the results of their college application processes thus far. Keyona Carrington, clarinet, will graduate from the Baltimore School for the Arts this spring as one of top students in her class and will be choosing from an impressive list of colleges/universities to attend! Keyona has been accepted to the following schools: Towson University, Louisiana State University, University of Michigan, Temple University, Penn State University, St. Mary's College of Maryland, Spelman College, and University of Maryland – College Park. Keyona is planning to major in the sciences with a minor in music. Nema Robinson, violin, will graduate from Patapsco School for the Arts and is planning to pursue a degree in music education. She has been accepted to Towson University, and is waiting for the results of other applications and auditions. Congratulations to Keyona and Nema!



Nema Robinson, violin

## Get Connected!

Transitioning to an all virtual classroom or meeting space has not been easy for anyone, especially those with limited or no access to needed technology. While OrchKids has been able to provide students with free loaner laptops to use for lessons, we have not always been able to ensure that students have a stable internet connection – an equally important tool to be successful in the online classroom.

While we remain dedicated to serving our families and doing our best to make sure students have the best program experience possible, we cannot do it alone. Connected Nation, a national nonprofit working toward expanding internet access and use to all families, partnered with AT&T K-12 Homework Gap Program, to provide free Wi-Fi Hotspots for under-resourced students all over the country. Out of nearly 400 applicants, OrchKids was one of the first seven programs selected to receive 100 hot-spots!

"Our team was impressed with how OrchKids also tackles the environmental and social trauma many of these children have endured – allowing kids space to move past their difficult experiences and learn to express themselves and flourish through music," said Brent Legg, Executive Vice President of Government Affairs at Connected Nation.

We are so grateful to AT&T and Connected Nation and we are excited to give our students yet another opportunity to stay connected to OrchKids!





## Helping Hands



OrchKids Artistic and Programs Operations Manager Milos Totic with 22 donated string instruments!

Over the years, OrchKids has built strong connections and support throughout the Baltimore region, and beyond. Well beyond!

The D'Addario Foundation, located in Brooklyn, New York, provides grants to high quality music programs from around the country to continue the advancement of music education, and they have been a dedicated partner to OrchKids for years.

In addition to programmatic funds, they

also provide direct grants to students through their College Scholarship Fund, which has already been awarded to two college-bound OrchKids students, supports growing musicians in their transition to higher education.

But that's not all! They regularly donate music supplies and through their efforts have built relationships with over 100 music programs and organizations across the country—connecting programs, people and vital resources.

When Jeff Campbell of D.C.'s Hungry for Music was looking for a new home for a few instruments, The D'Addario Foundation's Danielle Hall quickly recommended OrchKids and set up the connection. Thanks to Danielle and Jeff, we received a donation of 22 string instruments!

It truly takes a village to continue the growth of OrchKids and its students. We thank each and every member of these two organizations for their contributions and continuous efforts to support us in our mission!

## D'Addario Foundation



**hungry for music**  
established 1994



## In Case You Missed It...

In commemoration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage of the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment, OrchKids partnered with Johns Hopkins University to explore and raise awareness about this momentous occasion.

Using the writings of Elaine Weiss and Dr. Martha Jones, and lectures from special guests such as Senator Barbara Mikulski, students learned the intricate and contentious element of racism throughout the suffrage movement.

OrchKids students created an original composition, centered around three distinct themes of the suffrage movement: representation, voting, and the future of democracy. While OrchKids were busy composing, a group of film students from John Hopkins University gathered imagery to complement the composition, creating a special audio/visual presentation to inform – and at times challenge – our understanding of the history of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment and its effect on woman empowerment today.

Originally broadcasted live with students and families with help of The Parkway Theater, you can view the full composition [here](#).