

Dear LAB Friends and Angels—

I am sitting here on another lovely wonderful sunny Southern California summer afternoon, writing with a heart full of gratitude as I reflect on the past 2020-21 season with Los Angeles Baroque. In a year full of uncertainty, fear, anxiety and darkness, the courtyard at St. James' Episcopal Church in South Pasadena has been filled with community, support, laughter and music.

For the last four seasons as we rehearsed on Monday evenings, although we didn't know it, there was a gift waiting for us just behind a locked door: the large, spacious courtyard of St. James'. The courtyard enabled us to have an outdoor space to musick in small groups in CDC-approved setups: changing and adapting the configuration of players to rediscover playing together as the pandemic has waxed and waned.

Our motto of 2020-21 quickly became "Keep Calm and Telemann," which was adopted not only because the music of George Philip Telemann has become an essential part of LAB's musical journey together, but because Telemann himself managed to evoke joy, resilience and humor in his music even through the darkest periods of his life.

The pandemic has given all of us a universe-mandated pause from the previous pace and patterns of our lives and careers, and here at LAB it has certainly been the same. For me, I returned back to why we started this merry band back in 2016: to provide a safe and welcoming home for players of all backgrounds and experience levels to discover the joys of playing music of times long past *together*.

This year for me has not been about big moments, or big events, but celebrating all the small ones. I will share just a few:

- Members generously sharing their extra lemons, grapefruit and even jars of strawberry jam with each other.
- Two members conquering the pandemic-induced fear of playing the flute in front of others after over a year away.
- Our harpsichordist proudly brandishing an alto recorder that he had started learning over the Quaren-Times.
- String players loaning bows to new members so they could explore and learn with historical equipment.
- Members sending cards to each other when they were injured or just to tell home-bound members that we were thinking about them.
- The clever Hallowe'en costumes worn by all as we gathered for our first LAB After Hours on November 1st: from clown noses to plague doctor masks... creativity abounded!
- Unbridled joy as LAB's first Consort Club made it through a Jenkins Fantasia that didn't have bar lines, during our non-cert.

And yet, all those small moments added up together into quite a big season! We welcomed *nine* new members and were able to offer five players scholarship support, in addition to offering:

- The Courtyard Sessions 1.0 (Fall) and 2.0 (Spring): multi-week process-based learning projects in which members were placed into “pods” of eight, meeting outdoors, spending time together getting back to the basics of baroque musicking and zero-latency community.
- Three “After Hours” Special Events: The first was Hallowe’en themed with masks and costumes, featuring Carlo Farina’s *Capriccio Stravagante* and Biber’s “Night Watchman” Serenade. For the second, we were able to put the entire, fully vaccinated, band back together in the courtyard for a celebratory evening of big band music culminating in a suite from Lully’s *Proserpine*, with swinging *inégalé* style that would make even Muffat blush.
- LAB’s First Chamber Music Course: Four weeks of music *al fresco* in June, culminating in a celebratory non-cert (not a concert!) sharing what we had learned with each other.
- Online Adventures with Alexa: Zoom lectures on early music topics that went far beyond what we ever had time for in rehearsals, and providing reach beyond SoCal.
- The Happy/Distracted Hour: Online freewheeling conversations about practicing honestly, intersections between cooking and musicking, and a Redditt-style “ask me anything” with me. Cocktails and laughter abounded.
- Our first LAB Flute Class: While oboe and recorder player Aki Nishiguchi has been a stalwart wind coach with LAB since practically the beginning, we were lucky to get Seattle-based baroque flute specialist Joshua Romatowski via the wonders of Zoom to work with our winds.
- Good Friday at St. James’: Our annual tradition of giving back to LAB’s home continued this year as we played Byrd, Ferrabosco and more, collaborating with St. James’ Music Director Sarah Gonzalez and members of the choir.
- LAB’s Music Video Debut: Members met up on the only rainy morning in March to make a video for Jouyissance’s “A Lieta Vita” Early Music Month montage project. Another wonderful example of LAB making lemonade from lemons as the LAB Garage Band was born amidst the falling droplets. I will forever remember Artistic Associate Mishkar Nunez-Fredell gamely playing Gastoldi on his violin while peddling away on an exercise bike. (It’s posted on our homepage: losangelesbaroque.org)

All of this was made possible by your generous support of LA Baroque’s mission to foster community through early music here in Southern California. The saying in Italian is *grazie mille* (a thousand thanks) which even in its hyperbole seems inadequate. Thank you so much for helping us through this pandemic season. You helped foster the connection that is only possible through being in the courtyard where it happens, and created opportunities for growth, learning and healing through music. For many, we saw our fellow LAB members

before we were able to see our other family and friends. Being able to keep safely playing music with others has been a lifeline through the isolation of the pandemic.

As we look toward our 2021-22 season, we are moving forward with the same caution and care for the health and well-being of our LAB community, and will continue to facilitate new educational experiences and opportunities. We will continue to practice our mission of being welcoming to players of all levels of experience and develop suitable opportunities to learn and have fun at every stage. We hope to offer more financial support to members in need. While the pandemic continues its meandering course, we at LAB will continue to practice resilience, humor and creativity; and most importantly, we'll keep calm and Telemann.

Lindsey Strand-Polyak
Artistic Director