

LAB REPORT: 2020-21

Everything changed....in a moment.

March 7-8, 2020. Rich and wonderful collaboration! On this weekend LAB joined forces with its sister organization, Kensington Baroque, to play concerts in both bands' hometowns of San Diego and Los Angeles.

On **March 16**, California shut down due to an ominous pandemic, and with it came the cancellation of LAB's May concert plans. We went dark and mulled our options over the summer months. An "aha" moment arrived in late summer when Artistic Director Lindsey Strand-Polyak realized we had an opportunity to make use of the splendid courtyard at our home church, St. James' Episcopal in South Pasadena.

Looking back, LAB may have been the only community or professional performing group in Southern California that found a way to continue to play together right through the terrible storm of COVID. The formula was simple: outside, masked, social distanced, winds separated from strings, no performances with audience, no food or beverages (until the last night) and voluntary participation.

Here's what we pulled off:

Fall 2020. We fired up again! Live with Lindsey consisted of a set of three Saturday classes running for seven weeks. We were outside in the courtyard, we were masked, we were playing six feet apart and we were playing in small groups of eight players each, separating winds and strings for obvious reasons. Our musician crew, eager to experience playing with others after a long, isolated summer, filled up all 24 spots. Hand sanitizer was made available and I spent breaks between classes wiping down chairs with sanitizer.

The courtyard sessions were not without their challenges. We battled extreme heat, wind and poor air quality due to regional wildfires. Lindsey and I spent every day during each week studying the air quality "needle" on maps and deciding what our threshold was. At times it hit 150, and on one occasion we made the decision to cancel a Saturday session. We made up for that session with the addition of what would become a regular component of all sets going forward: LAB After Hours to take place on the Sunday following the classes. In the fall we were able to invite only strings to participate as it was determined that strings were not yet ready to feel safe playing with winds. The early evening event felt like a party, without food or drink, but with twinkly lights in the courtyard trees, citronella candles, a bit of dressing up and

playing as one big string ensemble. Just like the Before-Times, sort of! The event brought forth great emotion for all, ranging from sheer joy to a sober reminder of just how serious a time we were enduring and navigating.

To complement the live sessions, co-Artistic Director Alexa Haynes-Pilon, from her new home in Virginia, created a seven-week Zoom class covering a number of topics related to Baroque performance practices. In December of 2020 the difficult decision was made to pare down to one Artistic Director, given that Alexa now lived 3,000 miles away.

Spring 2021. Let's do this again! We soldiered on at the height of the pandemic, planning and executing another set of three Saturday classes, now with a little more mixing of winds and strings. The weather cooperated, and in fact was perfect throughout the seven weeks. All slots filled up immediately. LAB After Hours, this time around, included strings and winds together. All 21 participants attended and played. It was the first time in over a year that the big band reunited, and it was a joyous moment for all of us to be together again.

Summer 2021. How about something new? Lindsey widened the artistic lens and decided to conduct four Saturday classes with Baroque chamber music as the focus, for the first time in LAB's five-year history. Six class sessions were announced and filled up immediately. Repertoire selection was an arduous task for Lindsey, given the large number of classes, and the variety of instrument combinations. Through the fog of planning, a Consort Club emerged, consisting of seven viol players, in addition to five other classes mixing winds and strings. All sessions launched on June 5 and again, through four weeks and perfect weather, the groups excelled and absolutely loved the challenge, new for most of them. On June 27, all played for each other at LAB After Hours, followed by a drinks-and-snacks party that no one seemed to want to leave, as it was going to be goodbye for three months until October of 2021.

LAB has shown its mettle through what Lindsey aptly calls the Quaran-Times. We all look ahead to what we hope can be forever referred to as the After-Times. Maybe a big band again? Maybe concerts with audiences? Stay tuned!... always a mantra for the intrepid musicians of Los Angeles Baroque.

Joan Lounsbery, Managing Director
Los Angeles Baroque