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### **Musicians and Actors Adjust to COVID-19 Safety Protocols**

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PERFORMING ARTS

# Musicians and Actors Adjust to COVID-19 Safety Protocols

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON OCTOBER 22, 2020



## Students and Faculty Grateful for Opportunity to Practice and Perform

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—Adjusting to COVID-19 safety protocols has created several challenges for Gardner-Webb University’s music and theatre arts students. Masks hide facial expressions and limit sound. Social distancing makes it harder to hear, and performances are in a larger room or on an outdoor stage. Audiences have been scaled back to comply with crowd-size limits.

Yet, faculty and students prefer these inconveniences to the alternative. “We are incredibly blessed that we are able to practice and perform,” observed Dr. Joshua Cheney, visiting assistant professor of music. “I have a friend who is teaching in New York, and he can’t leave the house.”



▲ Dr. Chris Nelson speaks to the cast and crew before the group presented the first play of the season. Photo by Lisa Martinat Price / GWU Student Photo Team



▲ The Gardner-Webb Department of Theatre Arts put on a production of “All In The Timing” Oct. 7-11, 2020. Photo by Lisa Martinat Price / GWU Student Photo Team

Dr. Chris Nelson, assistant professor of theatre arts, has also taken precautions to get students back on stage this semester. “We were masking and distancing for the show, and that was quite an adjustment,” he related. “Because it was an evening of short plays, each one had a small cast, so there was not a need to bunch up. It allowed us to do theatre even under the circumstances and that was good for our students. They need to be practicing their various crafts.”

First-year theatre students, Anna Sample, Brittany Polburn and Danielle Billups, were grateful to have the opportunity. “I love making people feel something more than our everyday emotions,” elaborated Sample, of Fremont, Calif. “Often, people need an escape, a chance to laugh or cry about something other than themselves.”

“Being able to get back into the art I love has made it feel just a little more normal,” added Polburn, of Charlotte, N.C.

Billups, of Dacula, Ga., said, “It feels so amazing to get to do one of the things that makes me happy again.”

Markus Byrd, another first-year student of Kannapolis, N.C., said adjusting to social distancing and wearing a mask was worth the effort. “A stage is a stage and I’m there to perform, whatever the circumstances,” he asserted. “We worked our way through it. We managed to put together a show despite students being placed in and out of quarantine and constant delays, and that makes me proud.”



▲ Gardner-Webb sophomore Gabrielle Martin listens to her voice instructor, Jondra Harmon, during her lesson held in the Blanton Auditorium.



▲ Jondra Harmon coaches sophomore Gabrielle Martin from more than 6 feet away.

Various groups and soloists in the Department of Music have also continued to present concerts while adhering to COVID-19 protocols. Instructors, like Jondra Harmon, have changed their teaching styles and moved into a recital hall for individual lessons. She and her student dissect each piece, and Harmon focuses on their tone and stance. Normally hands-on when she works with a student, now she’s at least 6 feet away. “She used to adjust my posture,” explained Gabrielle Martin, a sophomore worship leadership major from Statesville, N.C. “Now, I have to listen and watch her for cues. However, it’s been quite an experience hearing my voice in this big room.”

Cheney, who is also adjusting to his first semester at Gardner-Webb, serves as director of Choral Activities and coordinator of Worship Leadership. He said music students have become stronger, because singing behind a mask requires them to breathe deeper and exert more energy. “It’s not impossible,” Cheney affirmed. “You get tired faster, but they are more used to that activity now.”



▲ Dr. Joshua Cheney

Madeline Bame, a senior from Gastonia, N.C., is president of the concert choir and has performed with the group since her first year at GWU. “The hardest adjustment for me has been singing with a mask on,” Bame noted. “Singers’ masks and face shields are important, but I look forward to the day that we can sing freely again. Our location change has been smooth. We have done a few outdoor rehearsals when weather permits and have rehearsed socially distanced in the chapel. Overall, I am glad that we have found creative ways to keep singing, because music is connected with better emotional health, and with improved academic performance. Singing brings me joy and helps me to gather my thoughts and

decompress.”

Heather Deibler, a Physician Assistant (PA) and assistant professor in the GWU PA Studies program, is a first-time member of the Chorale, the singing group that is open to non-music majors and others on campus. “The most difficult adjustment has been the distance between members of the chorus,” she stated. “It feels a bit like singing on an island sometimes, and it makes it tricky to pick up on cues from other singers. Because sound travels slowly compared to what we see, sometimes we don’t hear the result of a phrase until a split-second after it is sung. We can’t trust what we hear from a different part of the room, we must keep our eyes glued to the conductor, or we can delay the next phrase.”

Deibler said Cheney encouraged them to listen to the music reverberating from the ceiling and that made a difference. “When we were letting the music resonate in our heads, we could hear the sound come back to us from the echo,” she explained. “This helped us learn how to blend with each other and make more pleasing sounds. Singing is an important outlet for me. Worship particularly is vital to my spiritual and emotional health and it’s a priority for me. So when I got the email that the campus Chorale was open to faculty as well, I was thrilled. I was impressed that mask wearing and social distancing would be enforced, because I would not have participated otherwise, knowing how easily COVID-19 can spread while singing.”

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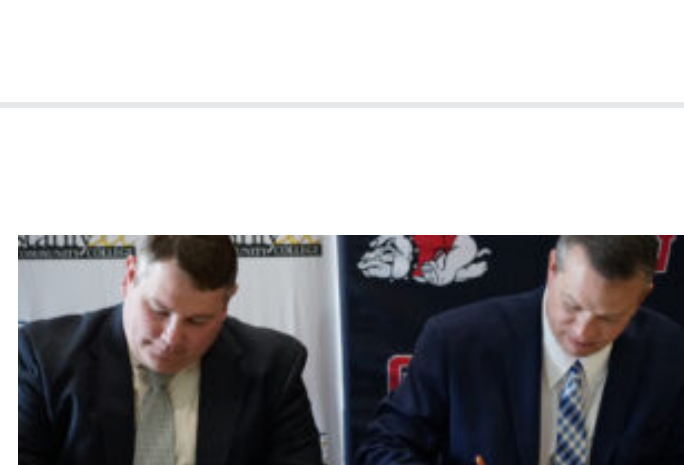


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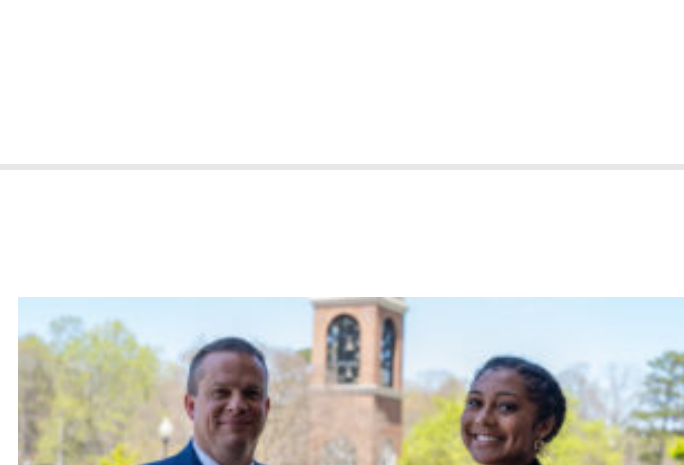


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