

James Baumgartner

Production Director

How can you practice theater when you can't be in the same room? How do you make art together when you can't share a space? How do you have a violin lesson over a Zoom call? Three after-school arts groups in Providence are finding creative answers to those questions.

by James Baumgartner



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of our coronavirus coverage, including community resources and personal stories.

and become leaders and become creative minds that will guide the city forward. It requires all of us to kind of stay open and have a sense of inquiry while we’re going through this and of course while there is so much suffering and hardship right now.

SULLIVAN:
It’s important I think to know that creativity never stops, we just find new ways to do it.

Meg Sullivan says it’s important, because art heals in times of crisis.

SULLIVAN:
We can’t not do it. Especially during a crisis like this in which a lot of people are under enormous stress. And we’re going to get through this because the young people we work with are so amazing and they deserve it.

The groups are all planning to continue their efforts through the summer. Community Music Works will still have lessons over video and they’ll hold a virtual gala performance on June 2nd via YouTube. New Urban Arts will have a virtual art show in late June. And Manton Avenue Project is modifying their summer camp program for July so they can meet mostly outside and only in small groups.



The Manton Avenue Project put their plays together online
VIA MANTON AVENUE PROJECT'S YOUTUBE CHANNEL

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RUTH:

In a funny, ironic way, this is a time when students have to take charge of their own learning. While normally, showing up at the lesson is their... that’s the big accomplishment that day and then the teacher kind of directs the rest of the activity. But now, two people are showing up equally on this digital platform and having to share responsibility for how it works.

Here's violin student Marieme Diallo during a recent lesson with Sebastian.

DIALLO:

I can definitely get the whole thing done and play around with it a little bit. I don't even know what I'm doing.

RUTH:

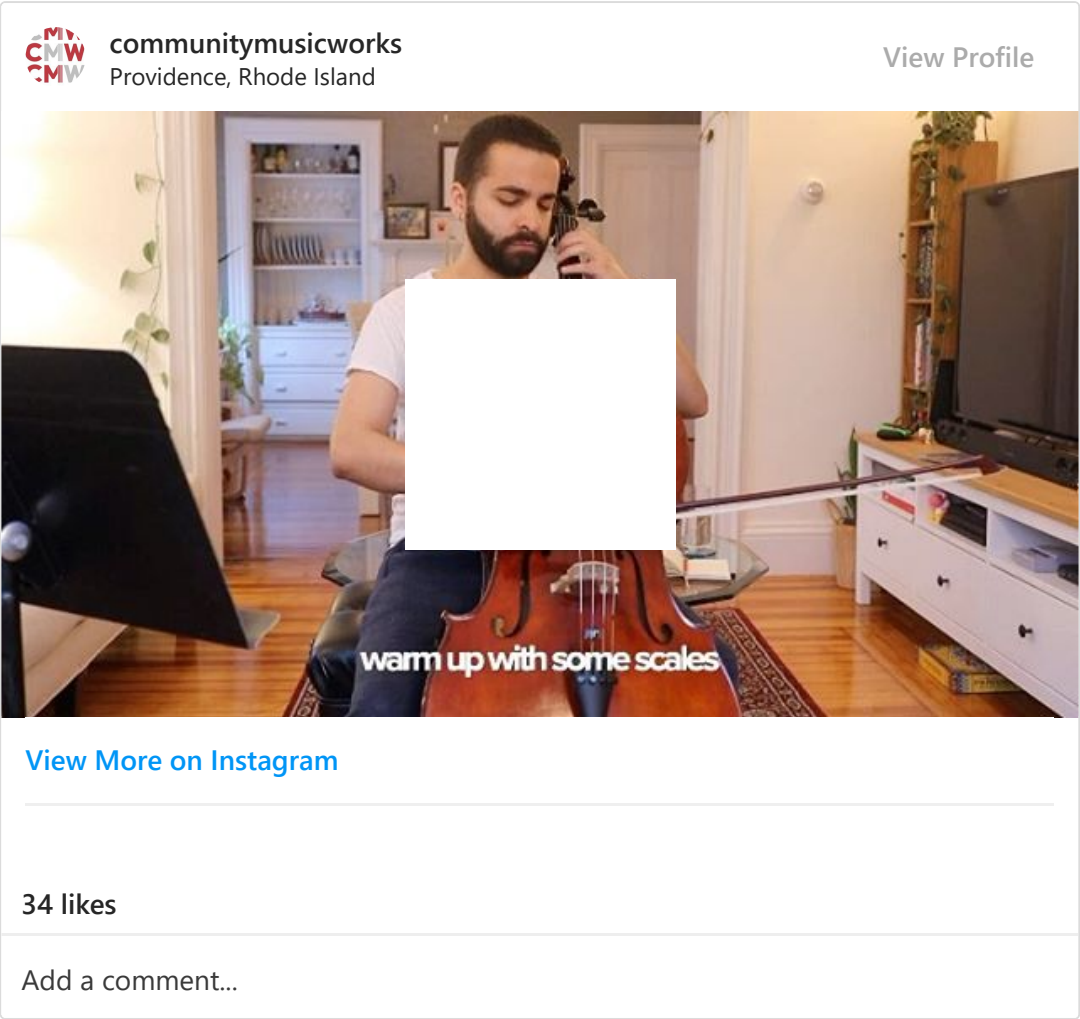
That's alright! It's all good.

DIALLO:

I got lost.

RUTH:

It's actually great because you're letting yourself get lost. Do it again.



Despite the need to keep a distance, the young people are still engaged with the organizations. Dan Schleifler is the executive director of New Urban Arts. It’s a community art studio for high schoolers, across the street from Classical and Central High Schools in Providence. But he says it’s more than just a place with resources for making art.

SCHLEIFER:

For a lot of our students, New Urban Arts is really one of their primary community spaces and I know for a fact that they're really missing that right now. This is what we’re hearing from students. New Urban Arts is the place where a lot of them get to see their friends in a space that feels like it’s on their own terms, in a space where they feel like they have ownership of. And I think they’re really missing the social experience of the space.



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The Public's Radio

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After-school arts programs find creative ways to make art at a distance

The Public's Radio production director James Baumgartner talked with the leaders of three after-school arts organizations: Meg Sullivan from

[The Manton Avenue Project](#)

, Sebastian Ruth from

[Community Music Works](#)

and Dan Schleifer from

[New Urban Arts](#)

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From Manton Avenue Project's

[YouTube channel](#)

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"Scene 5, the next day after school... Will holds on to Dan and Ogie pops out. "He is going to beat me up." "I swear, I'm not going to beat you up. I never had friends before, so I wanted to make others feel as bad as I felt."

The Manton Avenue Project does theater work with kids from 3rd grade through high school in the Olneyville neighborhood of Providence. Meg Sullivan is the executive artistic director of Manton Avenue Project. She told me that they weren't able to get together for their April play festival, so the actors performed from their living rooms, with everyone getting together virtually, which is how they've been doing all of their group activities these days.

SULLIVAN:

My initial feeling was I was hesitant because I knew that our young people were in school all day online and I wasn't sure they would be up for more zoom. But it turned out that we had a lot of interest from our students to stay connected.

In Providence, there are several arts organizations that provide tuition-free programs for school-age children outside of school. Sebastian Ruth is the founder and artistic director of Community Music Works which (among other things) provides music lessons to young people, most of whom live on the south side of Providence.


[violin]

RUTH (in lesson video):

Alright. So now try that bridge one more time. Don't think about "violin sounds" for a second. Just like, see what's in your heart and just play the bridge with that feeling. I don't know, I feel like Beyonce would do something like that, y'know? Just like "ahhh" just open it all out.

The one-on-one lessons are now on video calls.

New Urban Arts, Community Music Works and The Manton Avenue Project all work with students in low-income families. And they’re going far beyond art instruction right now, helping the kids and their families with more basic needs. Community Music Works provides a take-home meal once a week, New Urban Arts is delivering art supplies to their students and working with them on applying to colleges. Here’s Meg Sullivan from Manton Avenue Project.



newurbanarts
Providence, Rhode Island

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SULLIVAN:

And one of the things we’ve been doing is giving masks to families. A lot of families didn’t have enough masks. And so Trinity costume designer Lizzy Pegler and one of our MAP friends and wonderful actor and director Wendy Overly both donated a bunch of really beautifully sewn masks - fabric masks. And so I’ve been driving masks around town. We have had some families impacted by the virus. And so our focus has shifted also to just making sure those families have what they need at home. So we are bringing groceries and bringing medicine and things that they need.

Although it’s been disruptive and difficult for these organizations, they’ve found that they are learning things that they hope to continue when they are able to meet face to face with their students. Again, Sebastian Ruth.

RUTH:

There’s too much that’s different right now for us to assume we just need to wait it out and go back to the normal. I think this is just raising big questions about how organizations like ours can best meet our mission. How we can best support young artists in the city to grow