

TRANSITIONS: More Than Music: An Interview with Deanna Maio

Adaptability takes many different forms and we are all in this together but not the same. As the reality of the COVID-19 Crisis set in in March, some voice teachers turned to technology. Some turned to creating content—writing, researching, updating websites and resumes. Some voice teachers turned on the TV and baked sourdough bread to wait out the pandemic. (We're still waiting.) Some voice teachers turned into caregivers or turned to self-care. Sadly, some independent voice studio owners, turned the lights off and walked away. Still other voice teachers made a decision early on that they would find creative ways to thrive during a pandemic, not just survive. NATS Independent Voices editor Cynthia Vaughn recently interviewed Deanna Maio, owner and director of Confident Voice Studio in Portland, Oregon

Inter Nos: From the very beginning of this pandemic I have watched you. I have watched you lean into the possibilities and not run in a panic. You sent out a beacon that in a world turned upside down, your studio was a haven of safety and stability. How and why did you decide to go big instead of shut down?

Deanna Maio: Shutting down was not an option for me. I'm single and there's no one else in my household to contribute to the bills. On top of that I come from a family where "can't never did anything" and we don't give up. If there was a family motto, I think that would be it. I knew I wanted to serve the community and offer as much as we could for free or low cost when kids were stuck at home without school this Spring. And my thought was that if we did, it would come back around when the community was ready to invest.

Confident Voice Studio & Portland Musical Theater Company Present...



Inter Nos: So, you weren't new to online lessons?

Deanna Maio: I had been teaching online for a long time (since before online existed . . . I've taught teleclasses and done business coaching by phone since 2007) so making the switch was easy for me. And as for my clients, I just said online was what we were going to do so they could have consistency and

not lose their momentum. I focused on the benefits of live-streaming music lessons [see sidebar]

Inter Nos: I noticed that a lot of your focus, even from the beginning, was on the parents of your school age students.

"The main challenge was educating people that online music lessons work. In March doing online things was new to so many people. I didn't expect the pushback. I had been doing business and teaching online for so long it just never occurred to me how new it was to some people. In March we saw very very few inquires for lessons. I think people are now starting to see it can work online and in August things started changing and we are signing up new clients."

Deanna Maio: Yes. During this time of increased isolation, many parents are finding that music lessons are vital to helping their children maintain a positive outlook. Music is a great form of stress relief and provides a positive emotional outlet. Live

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Short articles on relevant topics are being accepted for inclusion in the independent teacher section of future issues of *Inter Nos*. Submissions should be sent by email to CynthiaVaughn@mac.com.

streaming with the teacher and fellow students add to the feeling of community while they are stuck at home.

Inter Nos: You were also one of the first producers to present an all online musical very early in the pandemic. Tell me about that and how well did it work?

Deanna Maio: It worked great. Artistically, you do have to think about theatre a bit differently but I knew I wanted to be an innovator. I like being first. My theatre company has done several Portland premieres, Oregon premieres and world premieres. Business wise, the tuition we received covered the loss we experienced as students quit because of the pandemic, either because parents/clients were worried about the tuition because they lost their source of income or because they assumed that online lessons wouldn't work for them.

Inter Nos: Would you do it again?

Deanna Maio: I have already done it again. We produced two productions (one adult, one youth) of our second virtual musical this summer—four total so far. And I expect we'll do more. It's not the same as live theatre and it's a great opportunity to learn and continue your performing while we're waiting. Plus you learn new skills like self-taping and on-camera confidence.

Inter Nos: What have been your most outstanding moments since March?

Deanna Maio: So many wonderful moments. Producing four virtual musicals stands out. We've hosted two Zoom performance parties, one with live performances, one where we had clients self-tape and we watched the videos together. Seeing my team grow their skills teaching online has been a joy. We started working with a new intern at the beginning on March. We hired her during the pandemic part-time to support our marketing and operations. She's become a key member of the team who I count on and I can't imagine going through all of this without her. We were awarded the Best of Portland 2020 Music and Performing Arts school, our second year in a row. And while we're not back to where we were client-wise since the end of March, we're on our way to having more revenue this year than last and we lowered our expenses.

Inter Nos: What are some of the challenges? Then (March) and now (September)?

Deanna Maio: The main challenge was educating people that online music lessons work. In March doing online things was new to so many people. I didn't expect the pushback. I had been doing business and teaching online for so long it just never occurred to me how new it was to some people. In

5 Benefits of Live-Streaming Music Lessons

- Confidence—Being on camera is now a way of life and can help with future presentations, performances and more
- Convenience—Not having to leave your home and being in your same "practice" space.
- Connectivity—Face to face interaction with the teacher and fellow students
- Consistency—Regardless of weather conditions . . . or quarantines
- Creativity—Learning to utilize all aspects of technology to have the best learning experience

March we saw very very few inquiries for lessons. I think people are now starting to see it can work online and in August things started changing and we are signing up new clients. Helping my teachers to make the switch was also challenging. They were used to teaching in person. We got all the kinks worked out in the first two months and now everyone's a pro at it.

Inter Nos: You recently took on another bold mission—to teach a small group of local students (limited to 9) in-person academic subjects, as well as arts. What inspired you to think even more outside the box of what a music teacher is expected to do? Tell me about this project? Did you devise the curriculum? What is the age group? How do music and art fit into this program? Will you be assisting students with assignments from their school district distance learning and home schooling homework?

Deanna Maio: I was inspired by another music school owner creating a program to support kids as they navigate online school this fall.

Inter Nos: Let me understand. The students are taking their school lessons online, but meeting in person at your studio in very small groups as allowed by law?

Deanna Maio: Yes. I have lots of space. We can do it safely and within guidelines, so why not give it a try? The Confident Learning Lab allows students in public, private or homeschool programs, ages 6–12, to have a place to come and get support from a trained classroom teacher, socialize, have music and growth mindset class each week, daily outdoor time and more. We're helping them with assignments and creating a space where they can be their best.

Inter Nos: One of the most compelling things about the program is that in addition to spelling out the educational and social benefits to the child, you are really and truly targeting the concerned parents. There were certainly a lot of stressed and confused parents in August when you launched your Creative Learning Lab. Many were wondering how they could continue to work remotely while supervising their children's online schooling.

Deanna Maio: Exactly! As I wrote in my ad copy: "This is for the parent who has had enough of the anxiety and confusion, is overwhelmed by all of the change, wants normalcy and consistency for their child, and finally, desires peace of mind knowing their child is having a great experience while in a learning environment."

Inter Nos: This is one of the most creative and caring ideas I have seen in this time. Where do you go from here? As you look to the future, will you incorporate some of your COVID-inspired projects longterm.

Deanna Maio: Thank you. Oh yes. We'll definitely keep doing the virtual musicals. They are far less time investment for the

performer than an in-person full show. I will likely offer the Confident Learning Lab again if our local schools aren't cleared to open in November. I expect we'll keep teaching online and grow that part of our roster even after the shelter in place orders have been lifted. And who knows what the future holds? The only thing I know is that our clients and students and our world needs music more than ever before and I'm going to do all that I can do to see that they get the benefits it provides so they can be better musicians and more peaceful and resilient people.



NATS member Deanna Maio is a voice teacher and performance coach in Portland, Oregon. She also coaches music businesses around the world to build and lead a team they can trust to grow their impact through her business coaching and training company, Delegated to Done.

She is the founder and director of Confidence Voice Studio and Portland Musical Theatre Company.



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