



Liz O'Connor BSc. Comp App. P2P ATCL
Musical Director ~ Conductor ~ Singer ~ Pianist ~ Teaching ~ Typesetting ~ Ministry
www.lizoconnormusic.ie

COVID-19 Response Plan Return to Lessons Safely

Liz O'Connor
15th July 2020

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed many things for us all. As we cautiously re-open, we need to continue with the new way of living and working. We have to find new ways of doing things, while still achieving the same results.

This document describes how I am adjusting my teaching facilities and practice to implement these new ways. In writing it, I have drawn on the “Return To Work Safely Protocol” document (published by the Departments of Health and of Business, Enterprise and Innovation) and on the latest updates of the advice from NPHE (from www.gov.ie). As the situation continues to evolve, I will monitor changes in the advice from NPHE and the Government and adjust accordingly.

How the Virus Spreads

It is useful to remind ourselves of what we’re dealing with. The following is an extract from “Return to Work Safely Protocol”:

The virus that causes COVID-19 is spread from people in fluid and in droplets scattered from the nose or mouth of an infected person when the person with COVID-19 coughs, sneezes or speaks. The fluid or droplets land on objects and surfaces around the infected person. Other people contaminate their hands by touching these objects or surfaces and then bring the virus into contact with their eyes, nose or mouth by touching them with their contaminated hands. COVID-19 can also spread if droplets from an infected person land directly on the mucous membranes of the eye, nose or mouth of a person standing close to them.

It is still not known how long the virus survives on surfaces in different conditions. The period of survival may vary under different conditions (e.g. type of surface, temperature or humidity of the environment). Studies indicate that it can persist on surfaces for hours and up to several days in the absence of effective cleaning. Thorough and regular cleaning of frequently touched surfaces is essential. If disinfection is required it must be performed in addition to cleaning, never as a substitute for cleaning.

While people are most likely to pass on the infection when they have symptoms, current information suggests that some infected people spread the virus to others prior to developing or displaying symptoms themselves.

What happens at the moment?

I provide regular 30-minute one-on-one lessons in piano and/or voice (singing).

For the student, this means direct contact with me for 30 minutes each week, at my premises and using my piano and/or other equipment.

For me, this means direct contact with a series of students, between 4 and 8 in any given day, 6 days a week.

Piano Lessons

Throughout the lesson, the student sits at the piano. Traditionally, I sit at the same piano – to one side of the student or the other. This enables me to read the same copy of the music that the student is playing, to watch exactly how the student is using his/her hands and how the student

is following the score, including (and especially) fingering. It enables me to demonstrate correct movement or technique when needed, and to help the student to read the music correctly. This is particularly important for students at the early stages of learning.

Singing

The student and myself stand about 2 metres apart, facing each other. This allows the student to project their voice towards me – which is an essential part of their learning – while also allowing me to watch the student’s breathing and physical techniques.

I sometimes use the piano to support exercises, but otherwise use backing tracks played on an iPad when working on songs. The only equipment that the student may need is a music stand for their sheet music or lyric sheets and their own bottle of water (singing is thirsty work!).

Singing lessons and practice involve breathing exercises and vocal exercises through which the student learns to control their use of air. Singing means *projecting* the voice, which essentially means *blowing* rather than normal breathing out. Thus, when singing, the moisture expelled travels further.

The Timetable

Back to Back Lessons

Lessons are typically 30 minutes long. In order to maximise the number of lessons available in a teaching day, lessons have been back-to-back, that is, without a gap between the end of one lesson and the start of the next. This has also meant easily remembered lesson times – on the hour or the half-hour.

With back-to-back lessons, students will meet briefly, with one student leaving as the next one arrives. Students arriving early may be waiting outside the teaching room.

Teacher breaks

Because one-on-one teaching is quite intensive for the teacher, regular breaks are very important. Each lesson is a separate conversation, with potentially a change of instrument, age group, music style or standard. Thus, I have needed a significant break after a maximum of 4 lessons. Typically, this has been a 30-minute slot, to keep with the half-hour pattern of the timetable.

What needs to happen

From “Return to Work Safely Protocol”:

The best way to prevent person-to-person spread of COVID-19 is to use proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette and to practice physical distancing.

Hand Hygiene

Regular hand washing with soap and water is effective for the removal of COVID-19. Where soap and water are not available, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer may be used instead.

Both teacher and students should sanitize their hands at the start and end of the lesson.

Surface cleaning

The teaching room should be properly cleaned before use, including all surfaces which will be touched by the teacher or the students in the course of the day.

All surfaces touched by student or teacher in the course of a lesson should be cleaned/wiped after the student has left, and before the next student arrives. This includes the piano, piano stool, music stand (if used), door handles etc.

After the final lesson of the day, all surfaces touched by both student and teacher should be similarly cleaned and the room left ready to start again the next day.

Distancing & PPE

Physical distancing is recommended to reduce the spread of infection. The current recommended distance to be maintained between people to minimise risk of transmission is 2 metres.

For piano, a distance of 2 metres is fine, with brief closer interaction. The teacher should wear a face mask. The student may wear face mask or visor, as they wish.

The recommendation for singing is that the distance should be *at least* 2 metres, and where possible more. Face masks cannot be worn while singing, as they inhibit the act of singing. However, visors are a good alternative, as they protect the sensitive areas of the wearer's face (eyes, nose, mouth) from the droplets expelled by an infected person.

From "Return to Work Safely Protocol":

Wearing of masks is not a substitute for other measures. If masks are worn, they should be clean and should not be shared or handled by others.

Students are responsible for providing and maintaining their own face masks and/or visors.

Contact management & tracing

In the event of infection, fast and accurate contact tracing is important. A record of students attending is maintained. The contact tracing app helps with this. It is recommended that the teacher and all students over the age of 16 download and activate the app on their phones.

How will music lessons change?

The Teaching Room

In Wicklow, the piano has been moved into a self-contained room and out of the main front/entrance room of the house. Students will pass through the entrance room into the music room.

This makes it possible for me to control contact with the piano and other teaching equipment and to managing the cleaning of the room and all equipment as required.

Hand sanitizer will be available in the music room, for students' use on arrival and before leaving.

Within the music room, the piano is at an angle away from the wall, and the teacher's chair is just over 2 metres away from the piano stool, slightly behind the student. From here, I can clearly see the student's playing. I will need to move to the piano on occasion, to demonstrate, or make notes on the student's music, but this will be only as needed. It will be strange at first, but we'll get used to it.

The size of the room is sufficient for a singing student to stand at one end, with myself at the other, maintaining more than 2 metre distance. Because the piano is near the student, I can use a keyboard app on the iPad for exercises instead of the piano.

For piano lessons, I will wear a face mask, while for singing lessons, I will wear a visor.

The teaching room in Dublin will be set up in the same way, using the digital piano as before. I am working with the school to minimise contact between my students coming and going, and any other groups who may be in other rooms at the same time.

The Timetable

A new 5-minute interval will be introduced between lessons. This will mean that one student will have left before the next one arrives, so they will not come in contact with each other. During this 5-minutes, I will clean all surfaces touched by the student.

There will be no facility for students to wait if they arrive early, or after their lesson if they are being collected. It is important that students arrive at their lesson time and leave, or are collected, promptly.

As a result of this extra 5 minutes through the day, lesson times will no longer be on the hour or half-hour, although some will. Some lesson start and end times will be odd – like 5-past or 10-to the hour. Students (and parents) are asked to respect those odd times and to be exact, especially at first when it will be strange.

Capacity and Fees

The introduction of this 5-minute interval will result in the loss of one lesson slot in each day. The capacity of the timetable will reduce by approximately 15%. It is also difficult at the moment to predict the impact on people seeking music lessons, certainly the usual summer enquiries and plans for September are gone.

It is possible that I will need to increase the price of lessons, however, I will hold off on this for the first few months until the picture is clearer. I will give plenty of notice of any change in rate and I will keep it to a minimum. This will be my first rate increase since 2013 and I hate doing it!

Payment of Fees

The practice of payment each month in advance will continue, unchanged. As before, I will text a reminder to all students on the Sunday prior to the first week in the new payment period.

Previously, most students paid in cash or cheque at the first lesson of each payment month, although some had started to pay by bank transfer in advance of that first lesson.

Cash/cheque payment will continue.

Payment can now also be made by bank transfer or via Paypal – details on request - and will be receipted by email or text. These payments should be timed to arrive no later than the first lesson.