

Fresh Arts Facebook Live Conversation Series:

Public Arts Engagement in a Time of Quarantine Transcript

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Reyes: Good afternoon, everyone! This is Reyes Ramirez with Fresh Arts. If this is your first time tuning in, Fresh Arts is a nonprofit arts organization based out of Houston, Texas, and what we do to provide resources to artists in many different ways. In kind of adjusting to the coronavirus crisis, what we're doing is every Tuesday-Thursday, we're doing Facebook Live to feature some resources or highlight things that are going on in our community, that we are a Houston-based, we hope that a lot of the things that we offer go beyond Houston. And hopefully if you're listening from out of Houston, you'll get something out of our Facebook Live sessions. So again, thank you for tuning in. If you're a fan of Fresh Arts and you've known us for a while, thank you for coming back. So, today we have a really really great lineup. Today's discussion will be how arts organizations are adjusting to the current crisis, and how maybe they're shifting some of their programs or presenting them in new ways. And so, hopefully we'll have a good discussion on how you can maybe apply those things or maybe learn some things from them and maybe one day share yours, maybe develop your own digital presence if you haven't already.

So again, thank you so much for tuning in, we'll get started. So, first I want to introduced- introduce Eepi Chaad, who is the director of Community Engagement for Art League Houston. Say hi Eepi... [Eepi waves] And then up next, we have up next we have Alecia Lawyer who is the Artistic Director and Founder for River Oaks Chamber Orchestra, also known as ROCO. Hi Alecia...

Alecia: Hi there, ROCO for sure.

Reyes: Awesome, and so we're gonna start off this discussion, kind of just basically. So, starting with Eepi, if you could please maybe give an overview of your organization what your usual practices and programs are.

Eepi: Sure! Alright, Art League Houston is one of the oldest small arts nonprofits in Houston. We are over 70 years old currently, and we have an exhibitions program that highlights local artists, as well as state national and international artists making contemporary art. We have a visual art school on our campus that provides continuing education and instruction for adults. And then we have variety of community programming, including in-school residences and programs that are held on the Art League campus as well.

Reyes: Awesome, and I mean do you want to go and tell like some of the other programs y'all offer? I know you offer an amazing Healing Arts program and a youth program.

Eepi: Yeah so, our Healing Arts program is actually hitting its 30th year. Healing Art provides sequential arts instruction for adults in Houston living with chronic illnesses and physical disability. We also have our Art Bound program, which works with schools in HISD and in the HISD region that have little or no arts instruction on their campuses. And in the summers we have a summer teen intensive that is slated to start in June, we will see. And recently, we've started a series of creative aging programs around the city as well, working with older adults 55 and up.

Reyes: Awesome! Thank you. And Alecia, if you could please answer the question, being if you can give an overview of your organization and what your usual practices and programs are.

Alecia: Absolutely. ROCO is in our 15th season, and we started out performing as a chamber orchestra. We have 40 members, half of them are from all over the US and fly in. Conductors are from all over, we don't have a named one, so really the core is the orchestra. And we've done four concerts like that at Miller outdoor theatre and St. John the Divine, but also, we do chamber concerts as well. So, this particular year, we had 26 concerts in 12 different venues

and we have been live streaming for the past three years. And have about 15 years of online content, which I think that's really a great thing to talk about, and we play in so many different venues and collaborate and we have three different series. But one of the things were most known for is creation of new work. So, we have actually, by the end of this season, will premiered and commissioned over 100 works, and that is really exciting. We're also number one in women composers programming that in the nation, and number two and composers of color. So, it's really important to us, the word access, which is the reason we started live stream. And access and far as even ticket prices are low, or they're free, just to give people the way to get into what we do and be in relationship with us.

Reyes: Awesome, and that actually like perfectly segues into my next question. So, Alecia, on that line of thought, if you could kind of maybe respond to the question of at what point did you decide to move forward digitally, and what factors came into play in continuing or doing your programs digitally or that way?

Alecia: Well, we discussed it about six years ago. We started talking about the concept, again, our whole organization, one of the biggest values is access. Instead of outreach, it's really access and bringing people together and dialogue with our language of music, And so, when we started talking about it six years ago, while they were definitely platforms for the concept, it was not really the audience was not there I guess. About three years ago we really started doing the big concerts, and we do have a YouTube channel and all of our music on our all streaming channels available for free listening and watching. But really, it's just funny how when people started talking about it six years ago, they were worried that if people could have access at home, it wouldn't come engage live or buy a ticket. And since our business model is not really based on ticket sales, it's really based on donations, and if you like what we do, I take in coffee and ask you for money. And right now it's virtual coffee! But right now, it's just really putting out there all the content that we had. But when we started talking about it, and really doing it three years ago, finding the audience was an interesting concept too. But the idea behind it was really just access to what we do and we found that, I always say um access makes the heart grow fonder. That is actually a quote from Terri Golis who used to work with ROCO for years, and still

is engaged in many ways. But really, we found that it increased our live attendance, and people wanted to see the deep personal engagement that they saw on the screen.

Reyes: Great, great point. Eepi, if you could also kind of answer that question as well. What point did she Art League decide to move forward digitally, and yeah, what factors came into play in continuing programs or doing presenting programs that way?

Eepi: Yeah, for us, the transition to offering both our exhibitions and classes online was very much in reaction to the current situation in Houston, and around the country. Beginning of this year, we had started talking about compiling online resources and other ways that we could create more availability to the community here in Houston and beyond. And it was, you know, in the process of developing. Well, a couple of weeks ago things got weirder in Houston, and we had an exhibition opening scheduled for that Friday. And we had a lot of internal dialogue the week, week and a half prior to the opening on, you know, what we should do, what would be best for our community, what would be best for the artists that were being celebrated during this opening. And today it was probably about three days prior to the opening, we decided that it would be for the best to avoid having a public gathering in our space.

We have three gallery spaces: a front, a hall, and a main gallery. Our hallway space specifically is fairly narrow, and that became part of the conversation, whether it was responsible for us to host an open event where people would have to be in somewhat close proximity to one another to navigate the space. So, we started looking at different options. It's really important for us as an organization to make sure that we're providing a platform for the artists that show with us. So, we wanted to celebrate the immense amount of work that had gone into each of these exhibitions, the installation of these exhibitions. We had two visiting artists in town that were there for the installation and opening, and we wanted to be able to share the experience the artists had with the community. So, we started looking at the option of doing a live feed through Facebook Live for the exhibition, but we wanted to offer something a little bit more in-depth as well. So, we engaged a videographer pretty last-minute to come in and do interviews with each

of the artists that would be of a, you know, more professional, edited, high quality content that we could then share with the community at a later date once it's edited and pretty and perfect. So, the night of the opening, we did a Facebook Live event where we actually walked through the galleries with the artists. And usually during our openings, we do have artist talks. And it's kind of a real highlight for the openings, you get a chance to interact with the artists, to ask great questions, weird questions, just have a real face-to-face. So, we didn't want to lose that. So, we walked through the galleries with each artist, let them share what they felt was important, but then also were keeping an eye on any comments or questions that came up during the live feed. It was interesting, we probably had pretty close to the same number of people watching the Facebook Live feed as we would have had in person in the building. And if we had had those that many people in the building, we would have been pretty tight. So, we felt like that was a pretty big success. The videos are in the works right now and we should be sharing them with the community pretty soon. And then post event, we hosted a very small dinner for the artists, as just a sign of appreciation. We have since then decided that we are going to extend this front of exhibitions, in hopes that everything kind of normalizes in Houston and that people are actually able to come and visit the space and really exist in the space with the art. But in the meantime, all of the arts actually available online as well.

Reyes: Oh, that's a great, yeah. So y'all both kind of talked about how a lot of these conversations happen before the crisis, right, in terms of like a digital presence, outreach, connecting with audiences, and not just one way. And so, kind of want to get into next is discussing particularly what challenges you run into regarding your particular craft, in terms of like the needs and presentations. Alecia, I know you discuss a little bit about you know fear of like, if it's digital well why would they come in person? But also, I imagine other challenges of like equipment, or like sound quality. I'm sure all that stuff so if you could first please answer that or respond to that question.

Alecia: Sure, I would say that when we first started it, especially when I first started, and we were recording and just getting the live content recorded, a lot of it has to do with art and music to do with rights, and paying for the right to do it. I think that's the biggest piece of this, it's just

you know we're a professional group we have to pay for it. So, just paying a musicians for limited pressing, for video/audio, for publishers for rights, for copyright, for mechanical license, I mean on and on. The amount of team that's behind that is insane. And then also, just having the livestream equipment that is available and in your space is another way. I mean, now we can do it a little bit more flexibly. Six years ago, when we first started talking about it, really it wasn't that great of quality, now we're at a different place with multiple cameras, things like that. I will say that, we have used technology as a way to further our own mission of shaping the future of classical music. Modernizing is one of the pieces of that, and we have an app that we use and we have people turn on their phones during a concert so that they can receive commentary by musicians during pieces, written out obviously not listening to it, they're listening to the music. But we've really tried to find ways to integrate technology, so this isn't just a one-off, here let me just kind of throw spaghetti on the wall art so please come look at it, it's, or listen to it, it's truly as a way to find multiple ways of meeting people where they are.

And so, the engagement of like you're saying how do you do it, even just building the app, which we found on another platform, Live Note, experimenting with that. Having ways of trying to even introduce an educator audience of how to download an app sometimes, or how to make it work. I mean, there are so many levels on any of those platforms that I'm happy to, if someone wants to email me at "alecia at roco dot org", I'd be happy to walk them through any of their problems they might have. Also, just, you know, what platforms, how do you get it on like, Orchard is what hosts all of our streaming, and how do you pay for that. There's just so many layers to this, you know, we have a six full-time staff, and and a big team of library rights and things like that. I think, i think it's just a multiple layers. As long as you're, the first and foremost point of all this, as long as it's a connection and sharing your art to try to get it more connected, I think is the goal. I don't think it's something that it should be a trick or it should be, um, something extra. I think it should just be a part of the effort of the art itself. And if that's got that behind it, then you're gonna flow correctly and pay well and... So, I mean, I think that's a full in there. I'd love to know what other questions you have. I mean, like I said, in a moment we have all the ways of engaging, and then afterward as well and we're rebroadcasting our live streams on Facebook Live and on our website. One of the challenges, just musically, that I would like to warn people

about is that if you're playing standard pieces, and I'll just go ahead and say it, if you're playing a lot of white dead male pieces, um, then you might get shut down on Facebook if you're live streaming. Because sometimes it can sound like a CD, and may shut you down. So, you have to kind of have it be in touch on Facebook with certain people to say, hey, stop that. There's so many little details that can interrupt your attempt to jump online.

Reyes: Those are great things to consider, yeah, those are things obviously I would not think of, but good to know. Eepi, same question, you know, what challenges of y'all run into regarding your particular crafts needs and present in presenting that work? Yeah, what challenges have you run into, especially because I know y'all have a Healing Arts program that you just mentioned and talked about and especially in the, this current context so, please yeah.

Eepi: On the exhibitions end everything was pretty seamless transitioning. For our community programming, Healing Arts, Art Bound our in-school residency's kind of stopped us in our tracks for a moment. Healing Art specifically has participants that have a variety of health issues that would preclude them from being in close quarters anyway, outside of this current crisis. So, we decided to go online, we had our first online Healing Art class last Friday. And we are using the same platform, mainly because I've always found it fairly user friendly. But Art League has a Pro Zoom account, and as we were transitioning and moving, you know, very very quickly, we decided to, you you know, leverage the technology that we already had available to us. And so, there is a little bit of onboarding, some quick creation of documents, best practices that we were able to share with the participants. So, it basically sent out a quick email that said "here is a link to a video webinar on the basics of how to use zoom, but also here's a PDF that has step-by-step instructions on how to access the platform", because they're different people have different learning modalities, and we just wanted to make sure that we were touching base for everyone. And then offered one-on-ones with anyone who didn't feel completely comfortable hopping on to the platform. Some people need to walk through it and have that conversation. Healing Art went great last Friday. We had quite a few participants come on. We are navigating what that means for the sessions right now, because Healing Arts definitely very studio practice oriented. So, we're talking to our participants on what they can do to set up a space in their home, especially

if they hadn't been painting or creating at home. And we've kind of shifted the way that the classes work. When there might be a 30-45 minute stretch in class in person where everyone's just working, online it requires a little bit more engagement. So, there was a lot more conversation, a lot more back and forth.

For our Art Bound program, we currently can't provide programming in schools, of course, HISD and all of the surrounding districts are closed. So, we started having conversations with our funder, first and foremost, to keep that open line of communication on any adoptions that we make to the program, moving forward. One of Art League's big focuses is supporting the arts community, and part of that means creating income streams for artists. So, but both with our Healing Art and our Art Bound programs, we're pretty dedicated to the idea of finding a way forward so that we could continue to ensure some economic stability for the teaching artists that work with us. Because they're part of the Art League family, for lack of a better way of putting it. So, with Art Bound, we decided that we would work with the teaching artists to figure out a way forward, and whether that means developing possible online content that can be shared with our students through the district at some point in the future when some of that groundwork has been laid, or that means shifting gears and creating some sort of manual that we can then share with other teaching artists in the community.

The, the goal is definitely to keep everyone working and busy and sane while we're all stuck in our homes. We also started transitioning the on, the school at Art League to an online platform and that was interesting. There are some classes that in the short period of time that we've had to make these changes didn't quite adapt. Things that were very tactile, hand-building ceramics doesn't immediately translate to an online platform. There were lots of other classes that did translate very well, painting classes, drawing classes, and we've started facilitating those on Zoom this week and held a series of meetings with instructors with students to go through the nuances of using the platform. And then also, just offering the ability to reach out to Art League staff at any time if any issues come up. I think for a lot of the people in our community, using online platforms may be new in this modality, so we are just trying to be as open with communication lines so that we can work through things with people as we move forward.

Reyes: Kind of follow up with both of you, some of our viewers are artists, like independent working artists. Could y'all maybe, and Alecia you can start, maybe... Awesome, addressing like what like a best practice would be for an artist, like an individual artist, who's maybe working with an organization or maybe that's something they should brush up on something, or to kind of facilitate maybe working with online or digital platforms, in your experience.

Alecia: Yes, definitely. Um so, we have been meeting often online. Our musicians, half the musicians are not from Houston so they you know how do we improve our art when we're just together five times a year, maybe. And that was really part of what we've started Google Hangouts.

I agree Zoom is my favorite, it's the easiest best most stable platform for quick use on cellular. So, we've definitely had our meetings on our staff, but I say with artists, um you know, it... I didn't, there's a really great article that just came out The Chronicle about ROCO and it said "getting ahead of the curve", which is means a whole 'nother thing now, right? Um, but I would say that just getting people used to understanding now that music is on the same platform now as art visual arts. I've always felt that when you're trying to work with visual arts that are difficult to observe or understand, people can just walk past and not not engage. But when you're stuck in a concert hall and representing a work that may be challenging to you, you're kind of stuck there. And now, music has entered the realm of visual arts in my opinion, and we are there and you can just pass on by or click for five seconds and leave it. So, to me, with music, I think what's interesting. I've discovered over these years that there was no professional development in our field, other than just practicing. And I think online, you're gonna have to start having more conscience, conscientiousness about your visual image compared to just what you sound like. And I think that's an important next step is... Just, I mean, even me! I found the best Wi-Fi in my bedroom which is super awkward but just how do you make it look the best it is even though I think my older son, younger son is not in that photo behind me. But just trying to find even how what you wear knowing, things like wear solid colors. I think there's these guidelines that if you've been on TV and radio, which I had a career in, that at one point you don't, as an artist that's independent, may not have had the training. That wasn't a real sentence... But I'm just saying that if you could find things online that show you when you're gonna go be on TV some

advice on what to wear, how to speak, I think that's helpful. And things we're not trained in as a musician, a lot of times unless you're a soloist. So, if you're an independent artist trying to present your art, now you're gonna have to catch people visually, almost before they're going to hear you or even see your work. And so, that's that's a challenge in and of itself, is how do you keep exploring challenging music and art and things that really are important in the dialogue today, but at the same time keep people there. So, it's up, to me that's the biggest challenges, is not just the technology part, which is its own first step, but how how are you presenting yourself online visually as well as orally.

Reyes: Amazing, yeah. Eepi, yeah, if you could kind of like also speak to that, in terms of, like, the what recommendations or what kind of like tips would you have for, like, independent artists, who you know may be working with an Art League, who may be a teaching artist, you know any tips or recommendations on that front.

Eepi: I definitely think we're all transitioning on to this world of living online. And one of the things that I've had conversations with instructors about this week is, you know, how do you get prepared for being in a Zoom class meeting, or on a live stream. And one thing I keep mentioning is we're all kind of already ready for this in a way. Who doesn't go on to YouTube to figure out how to cook dinner, or fix the leg on their table, or fix a quick plumbing issue? I mean we're used to accessing video instructions. So, I've been telling instructors to think about like what YouTube channels you like what works. Think about what's in the background, think about what sound quality works, and think about what doesn't work and what makes you tune out. Especially with visual, or I mean we're visual artists, most of the people that we work with at Art League are at least visual artists, oftentimes there many other hats as well. So, I I think it's a little bit of studying what works around you and practicing what works for you. I think the doing test runs if you're going to be on screen is a great idea, and we've been doing that a lot with our instructors, doing test calls for classes to make sure that the sound is right, the background looks right. I've been suggesting the instructors tried their setup at different times of day, especially if it's a daylight accessible room. Because what you might look like at 7:30 in one

space will look completely different at 3:30. So, being ready to adapt to the different times of day and when you might be called on to hop online I think is really important right now too.

Reyes: Great! So, we actually have a question from the audience, or from a viewer. Would y'all recommend kind of any tips, in terms of touching on that topic of visually presenting yourself on a digital platform. Do you have any tips, and like regarding colors or lighting, or maybe point to an article or resource? You can start, Alecia.

Alecia: I'm happy to send some links for sure. Like when we did some TV spots, they had just a really great list. Also, we're doing some interesting online collaborations across the nation with musicians, and that's another great thing I can send, I can send it after this. But basically, it's just pick solid colors, do not have patterns if you can help it. I need to go buy online some more solid colors, but just solid colors, brighter colors, not white. Look at your background, make sure you're not melting into the background, make sure that just look at yourself. But yes, I can definitely point to some resources after this that can have a lot more tips. And also, is it better to do, you know, right now we're doing more landscape than portrait, in a lot of ways that helps almost a frame it. It's just like an artist. I think frankly I think our whole field will be better at this and other groups, you know, just taking into account the positioning. Like, I didn't position myself, you know backwards sorry, I'm in position myself right here so all you could see with the things on the wall. Hmm, not that the rest of its not interesting. But anyway, I just, I feel like that there's there's so much resources. I'll do it afterward, is there a way we can follow up afterward online?

Reyes: Absolutely, I will be more than happy to post anything else y'all send on a resource page, and even in the comments of this video. So just...

Alecia: I'll look it up right now.

Reyes: Oh wow, yeah! Meanwhile, Eepi, if you could please address that, kind of tips for visually presenting yourself, maybe regarding colors, lighting, or maybe how you did that exhibition walkthrough... yeah?

Eepi: Sure, um comfort comfort comfort! If you are ever doing any form of public speaking, the best thing you can do is be comfortable in your own skin, first and foremost. So, put on something that makes you feel good, makes you feel comfortable. Solid colors are ideal, and then test the shot out. If you're gonna be online, just go ahead and do a test run and see what that space looks like. Soft lighting is great, there's a lot of resources out there for DIY versions of building soft boxes for lighting. Professional, professional soft boxes can be fairly expensive but I can share some links to some like DIY options, as well. I recommend getting a daylight bulb or two, it helps a lot with color correction. And then, being flexible with that space and the way that you're working with those lights. So, if you are coming up with something quickly like, clamp lights are great because they can be moved around throughout the day. As far as backgrounds, it kind of depends on your audience and you know who you're trying to engage. If you're talking about your art or doing some form of instruction, having a working space is great. If you're having a really really professional meeting, perhaps find a more neutral solid background. Just think about who your audience is in each moment, and and what you're presenting to them. I think that always helps.

Alecia: I would also say, I mean, there's so many places online I think I'll just send you some of them, but one of the things I should also say is... Last Thursday, I was in New York on the 12th, right there the whole week, doing a performance, and we had to livestream to an empty hall. And it was, I mean, they felt a little bit like you were doing a broadcast on television, but it was very intimate but very odd. And I think, right now, especially when you're a musician and you're trying to put your art out there, sometimes there's specters of judges of people that you don't necessarily, you'll come to terms with in your own mind of them not, I mean, I'll just say it, the imposter syndrome, thinking you're not good enough. I think is important for musicians to know that when you're representing online, and you're doing it to an anonymous audience, that really you need to imagine the person that you like the most to hear your music or do what you do,

and that's who you're speaking to performing for. But you have to do a little bit more pretending, which we're all good at as artists, to pretend who your audience is that gives you the most joy, so that there's this some sort of feeling of reciprocal-ness, which can be... I think, that's the hardest thing online, is it can feel stale and one-dimensional, instead of feeling like the person receiving the art is someone you actually like care for and that they value you as well. Also, I would just say when you're having an interview with your voice, and musicians are not good at this, and I would say most artists are not good at this: when you are talking, you have to think on radio, don't talk in a monotone. Don't do this, and constantly be doing this make sure, you're varying just like you would your music. If you play the same note all over and over and over again, I mean yes there are pieces like that, but we mostly want to have up and down. So, make sure your conversational in that tune. Sometimes need to practice! I don't know, it's like that I'm Stuart Smalley thing, "gosh darnit, I'm good enough when people like me" type thing in a mirror. I mean you, don't have- you can, you should do that! And don't feel like you're being silly.

Reyes: Thank you! Conversation stopper kind of, moving forward with that line of thought: what models did you, did y'all look at to inform your presentation method? I know for us at Fresh Arts, we had to kind of come up with their own model that works best for us, but we'll also look to other things to kind of inform what everyone else has been doing. So, if y'all could maybe discuss a little bit like what you looked at, what you used, or what other models that you've seen that you've liked and maybe you've helped form a basis for what you're doing. And we can start with Eepi on that one.

Eepi: YouTube! YouTube! Youtube! We, depending on the class that we were adapting, and I will say like I do probably go down YouTube wormholes more often than I should. But that's come in handy now! Started looking at how successful channels have created their setups for painters versus, and like an oil or acrylic painter that would be set up on an easel versus someone working in watercolor, and just kind of incorporating what other people are already doing for their setups. So that we weren't starting from scratch. So, we also, just in the nick of time, purchased a great couple of stands, so that we were able to create overhead horizontal shots looking down at work surfaces. And as far as within the classes that we're presenting right

now, what we're doing we're having the instructors focus on instruction, and we're having an Art League staff member in each class session so that we can take care of the backend, sharing screens, shifting models or directions in the middle of a session. I think that's been really helpful having additional staff, so if you're you know doing this completely on your own, perhaps engaging a friend or a colleague that might want to hop on and and help. Any artist who's sharing online, kind of, navigate that space and be an extra set of eyes, I think could be really helpful. For the exhibition walkthrough, we just kind of stuck to what we usually do. We really wanted it to be organic and natural, so it felt a little bit like just a regular visit to Art League, if you were walking around with the artist. And we kind of wanted to stick to that and that we wanted it to feel like an actual Art League event, not a wholly staged experience, but something that the community would find familiar in these weird times.

Reyes: Yeah Alecia, please, any models or maybe things that you looked at to kind of inform what y'all do, or how y'all carry out your, this presentation method of digital performance?

Alecia: I guess when we were starting, YouTube was there but there are other orchestras, just a handful, that do this single chamber orchestra: Zurich, Australian Chamber Orchestra, and some of the big guns, just a few though. And so, really, while we did look at that a little bit, we it's not that we don't look at best practices, we just kind of, again, I'll hammer home the point of just saying, we start from what is our purpose and what is our mission and how do we reach the people that are potentially audience, which is everyone. Everybody can be my bestie, and I feel that way very strongly. So, but, I really feel like that yes, you do look for those, and now especially like you said as YouTube... of course, I mean, my 17 year old stuck here has started to watch Gordon Ramsay who wants to cook all fancy and has never even make eggs before, it's cracking me up. But, I think the YouTube stuff is fantastic now. But, again, just go back to you what is your purpose in your art, who are you trying to reach, and how do you reach that? And that will inform more than just how it's done, if that makes any sense. And then, like you already said, the idea at the where where to put it and what to show, and I think all that's informed, that's that's not your, the starting place, right? It's what is the purpose, what's your art, and then going from there. I don't think that really

answered your question, but obviously there's a lot more resources out there right now. And I think, I have to say it too, sometimes it's best to find what you don't want to do than what you do want to do. So, going around and seeing the things that you dislike... I'm not a negative person, so I don't mean it that way, but I just mean the things you definitely don't want to do are really, I think, it's really helpful.

Reyes: Absolutely, yeah. I mean, like as far as, I was like I personally would have learned from, or a model and looked at as, like, HowlRound, how they did their panel discussions, and, like yeah, and it's kind of is looking like- okay Fresh Arts does this, does that. Maybe we do this differently, maybe we do that. And so, I-I ask that question because it is really important to, like, see what methods people are using. But also, yeah, understanding that, like, to a degree, it is really you figuring out what best works for you. Especially regarding, maybe, with what budget you have, or maybe what the purpose, is or what have you. And so, thank you! Kind of moving on, how have your constituents responded? I know y'all have mentioned measures of success, but as far as, like, you know, have you gotten like specific feedback, or like have people been like total supportive and you know and and being as big a fan as ever? Or did you notice some sort of, like, maybe thing you had to adjust. Eepi, please, if you can answer that.

Eepi: For the the shift of the exhibition, we got nothing but positive feedback and support from the community, and have heard nothing but good things from the artists that are part of this round of exhibitions. And they were so lovely to kind of roll with the changes as they happened. With the transition for our online classes, and for the Healing Arts program, I think there is a little bit of trepidation, at first, about shifting to an online model and the possible, the possibility of like a lack of actual interaction. But now we're a little ways into this transition, and, for the most part, I think that we are getting nothing but positive. We've had you know a couple of people reach out with technical difficulties, and that keeps going back to the way that we approached working with our community. It's like one-on-one, so if someone's having technical difficulties, we'll work through it with you. So, there's been a couple of people that I've spoken with that's said, you know, "mmm I don't know about this" and after some one-on-one time, got really excited. I think that, as we transition our community onto you an online platform for Art League, that we are

also opening up possibilities for the future, and I think that our community's starting to see that as well. So, it's kind of an exciting time. This might just be me to see the positivity in all of this weirdness, but I think this is opening up the ability for us to reach further and reach deeper and reach more. And getting to see our our community get excited with us is like the fuel that we need right now to keep going.

Reyes: Awesome! Alecia, please yeah, same question: how have your constituents responded... I know you've been doing this for a while, but in... you know, maybe you've noticed no shift or something, but please.

Alecia: Yeah sure, I mean, when we first started obviously, again, we had some pushback. And I will say, one of the hallmarks of ROCO, which seems really small, is that we leave our house lights the whole concert no matter where we are. And while that may seem simple, it what it has done, and it wasn't my overarching global annihilation idea of it, but is that it made a shared space happen between audience and stage, made us be in the same space. And I say that to say that we experimented about four or five years ago with a particular app that we were going to start and help launch for, section of the audience that people could sit in that could use their phone, and then we had even high school kids with t-shirts on that said I am here to help, you know, help download it. So, there's been a massive shift in our audience acceptance of the idea of technology in the concert hall, just in the past five years. Um, when we first started live streaming, you know, our numbers were pretty okay, not great. But now I will tell you that being on Facebook live and leaving it up for listening; one of our concerts last year our 2,500 people, and that wouldn't have happened in our hall that holds about 500. And the idea that we're reaching people in Finland and Taiwan and across the globe is incredibly exciting to me. To be able to reach everyone, like you're saying, and so we've had a great response. We've only had a couple of people hesitant about the fact that the phones are in the, but because the houses are up you don't see the screen anymore. So, that first concert where we tried so hard to limit it, well I didn't want to try that but my team did, and then we just let it go and we have almost 75% of our audience uses their phones during the concert. And we asked them to take a picture and put it on Facebook.

I will say the first resistance that ever really happened was with the musicians themselves. I think we were in a time five years ago that is again severely shifted, and I think the best way, where you didn't want your live performance out there right away, you wanted it crafted and you wanted, you had to kind of step into a different mindset but also in a different virtuosity to be able to just be recorded live and just go with it. You know, accidents will happen, but just go and I think musicians are much more comfortable now putting out that raw part of what they do is an art, and I think that's a big shift in in the music world, as well. But as far as our audience, we've continued to grow and, again, this really great article just came out last night, and I'm just excited but at Houston almost being the epicenter to some of the things that we're seeing nationally. It can be... and Fresh Arts is one of the best things, that gathers all these incredible talents together for one united voice. So, I've been there since the beginning with David and all this it's just been an amazing growth for you guys too.

Reyes: Thank you! We're, you know, we're trying something we absolutely, you know, feel passionate about, so thank you thank you for that. Kind of moving back to the technical, what technology and software's are you using, or what would you recommend? I know y'all already mentioned Zoom. For this, what we're doing, we're using avmixcall.com, but to each their own. Everyone, you know, finds benefits and pros and cons to each kind of talk technology and software. So, are there any that you recommend or some that you just found good success with? Sorry my apologies, Eepi, please.

Eepi: So, we are using Zoom for the facilitation of most of our, you know, online classes. For our exhibition, we used Facebook Live. These are fairly accessible software apps and tools. The decision to use Facebook live for our exhibition was specific to that access point. A lot of people have Facebook accounts. I would say more people that I know have Facebook accounts than don't, or have access to someone who does. So, we wanted to make it as easy as possible, we didn't want to ask anyone to theoretically download anything new.

For Zoom, it's been really helpful to us because you can access it from so many different devices and in different ways. And one of the things that we really appreciate about it is that you

don't have to put an app on your device, you can use Zoom directly from your browser. If someone happens to be in a place where they can't hop onto a video call, you can use a phone number and call in. And depending on, you know, what the meeting is, you can fully engage. Or you know, if it's a class, in a visual arts class I still think it's better to engage in an auditory way than not at all. So, I think that it's worked pretty well for us. The other part of that, we are using literally every device at our disposal right now. We're using iPads, and we're using cell phones. There are certain sessions where we're using all three of those things in conjunction with one another, which has been interesting and really helpful. With the Zoom platform, you can log in with the same account onto the same call from multiple devices, and create different viewpoints. And so, we've been utilizing that a lot and shifting screens based on where we want the participants view to be. So, it's been a little bit make shift, in a perfect world we would have had time and space and funds to, you know, get set up properly. But I think with that platform, it's allowed us to use whatever we have at our disposal. One tip, if you do want to use a platform like zoom and use multiple devices in the same space, there is this magical thing that happens: if you have two devices on near each other, it's the most amazing sounding reverb loop. I would love to record these and share them in the future.

Alecia: Sounds like...

Eepi: But it's it's good stuff, it's the future of music, I'm pretty sure. But if you're trying to have a meeting, turn the audio off on at least on one of the devices and just choose audio on one. It'll make your life a lot a commission opportunity!

Alecia: That's funny, you know we live stream, live stream on Facebook Live as well as our website itself. So, we've done both of those which has been a godsend. Because, like I said, Facebook will shut it down sometimes with copyright issues. And we definitely are using Zoom. I, I would say there's multiple ways to engage in this realm. One of the things we're doing today is 4 o'clock, I'm doing a Chat with Alecia. So, the donors can just catch up with what we're doing, how we're handling this. And also, giving them hope for next season. We have a Color and Light is next season, and I want to show people the future in the hope and what's coming,

and just give some you know forward thinking to what people are thinking about right now. But also, yeah, Zoom is fantastic. I find I can do it on any any device whatsoever, instead of having to find my wifi place.

Reyes: So, thank you! So, we had maybe two more questions before we end up this discussion. But like to kind of think about the future, Eepi are these methods something you'll continue to use beyond this crisis? And by you, I mean Art League. And if so, how?

Eepi: I think we're developing a new set of skills and a set of tools that it would be foolish of us not to consider as part of our future. We have, of course, space limitations and, as any you know, physical brick-and-mortar arts organization has, and this is opening up a lot of possibilities for us outside of the barriers of that space and time. So, we have three studio spaces, so usually we only have three classes going at the same time. This opens up the possibility of like hosting an artist talk during the same time in the future, and having the space and the time to do that. And making it really accessible for our Healing Art program. We're really excited about continuing using the Zoom platform to create access for participants that may not feel well enough to you come in for their usual classes but still well enough to engage and the social engagement component of that program is huge, the social engagement component of any continued education I think is huge. So, we're really focused on how we can continue to create opportunities for social engagement.

Right now, we are not providing any creative aging programming, because we don't have access to the spaces that we would usually provide that programming in, so we're looking at the possibility of leveraging what we're learning during this time for the future, so that we can maybe provide more creative aging programming around the city than we would otherwise be able to, you know, because of physical distance and time and limitations. With our in-school residences, we're kind of really excited about the idea of possibly creating online content that the students can then refer back to in the future. I think that there's room for in-person and online to exist separately, but there's also this great convergence of the two that can happen as we get back to

whatever our new normal is after all of this kind of subsidies a little bit. So, I think we're really optimistic about this being the beginning of something great for us in the future.

Reyes: Thank you! Alecia I know, again, y'all have been doing this for a while, but is there kind of anything in this particular context of the crisis that maybe you'll learn from maybe take from to use beyond this context? And if so, how? Nope, alright. So sorry.. seems like Alecia has been witness, is witnessing some technical difficulty, which kind of goes to show, I was gonna mention this later, but for viewers, I think one thing to really consider, or take into account, is that, yeah, a lot of these technologies, maybe they've been here for a minute but maybe now a lot of new spaces are thinking new ways to engage with these technologies, with these softwares, and you're gonna see a lot of kind of like hiccups, and you're gonna see some mistakes happening. And I think that's kind of the normal the new normal, as Eepi said, like the new normal if like those mistakes those hiccups and particularly in patience...

Alecia: Am I?

Reyes: Yeah yeah, and so like moving forward like, again, like taking that into account in like how people are adjusting how people are learning, and that's really just as important as well. And so Alecia, I don't know if you heard my question, but as I said before, I know as you've mentioned you, ROCO has been doing this for a while, but in the context of the coronavirus crisis, is there something y'all are using that's different than before, that maybe you'll continue to use beyond this context? And if so, how?

Alecia: I'm definitely and I will just say that you know my computer just was low on battery so I tried to connect it and it kicked me off, so there you go technology. Um so yes, I, we are putting together a, you know, a piece where we play across the nation in our own phones and put it all together and knit it together. And we've always talked about how a musician, since they don't all live in Houston, can engage electronically and do more with their art. Half on platforms just over that... But I think moving forward even more, and really just realizing how much content we have already, not have to keep saying "oh, concerts coming up, concerts coming up", but trying to

find ways for musicians to create our, where it is available all the time, and they can have almost a little more independence in their creation. Even though we do give them opportunities to curate a new chamber concert. But other than that, I would say just even engaging on your phone, you're stopping and finding ways to be a little more in in the moment, and new music I think is fun. I just, like you said, that sound that comes from the Zoom that happens, it's quite hilarious the sound that happens. So yes, actually, as soon as we get off this call, I'm going to text a couple of composers and see if they could do something really quick to make that happen. But I think new music is gonna be even more engaging, because you will be knowing the person you're seeing is living and live, versus a picture of a sketch of someone who is it, and I think that's exciting to me, that we might even be moving into a much more opportunity, for a much bigger opportunity for artists.

Reyes: Thank you! So, kind of last question before we do the the shout outs, and you know... You'll get a chance to allow people to see ways that they can find y'all. But, uh Eepi, you first: what's been your biggest takeaway from this experience as an administrator or as an organization?

Eepi: The biggest takeaway, I think that our resilience as an organization comes from our ability to adapt, and that's not a new thought for me and my role in the organization by any means. it's a feeling that's just been further solidified by this experience. And the the importance of communication and social engagement, I mean that for our communities, for smaller circles. I mean that for organizational staff at this time, for all of the people that are working from home finding those new modes of communication. So, that we can stay on the same page and feel like we're doing the work together has been really interesting and has felt like a really positive experience.

Reyes: Alecia, same thing: what's been your biggest takeaway is either administrator and/or an organization from this experience?

Alecia: That everybody's human, everything's personal. And it's been a big part of ROCO anyway, that everything's personal, everything's about relationships. And I think the more technology we acquire and do and use, the more we're creating the connection and the more we're forced to not be together, the more we're creating that. And I think the human side is what's being revealed. And, to me, that's quite beautiful. I mean, I'm a big sci-fi person and Star Wars nut, but the Star Trek hologram world. I still think you wanna engage with real people, and I just find this it to be a tool and not a means to an end. I mean it is, I mean it's a tool that helps us continue to connect, so to me that's exciting. I would also just encourage everyone who is in arts administrator to just check in personally with everybody that is doing the job. Everyone's struggling in a way that we may not know about, and probably no one's comfortable talking about on the phone. And sometimes it's good just to do a one on one Zoom or FaceTime just to really connect, eye to eye, and see how they're doing. That's pretty important.

Reyes: Great! So, final thing... Starting with you, Alecia, please, if you can, mention any social media, website, digital presence for people can find you at.

Alecia: That's what I do best. I've got ROCO plates on my Navigator but I'm not driving around right now. ROCO.org, and it is we do go by ROCO because we're not in River Oaks, but four times out of the 26 concerts and but ROCO.org and ROCOHouston, all the hashtag ROCOHouston's on all the platforms. The blue stream and Facebook and YouTube especially, and we really hope to engage with you and just come check us out and keep connected!

Reyes: Thank you. Eepi, please, social media handles, digital presence, websites, yeah.

Eepi: Art League Houston, physically we are on Montrose Boulevard between West Westheimer and Fairview, it's 1953 Montrose. We are all over the internet, artleaguehouston.com. Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, you can find us @artleaguehouston.

Reyes: Thank you! And I know you both are independent artists, and so it's been great to kind of hear your particular viewpoints and contexts of what you're working in, Alecia with music, Eepi with visual arts and petting, pedagogy teaching. And so, you've been great, the conversation has ran a little long, but I think that's just a sign that we've been having a really great discussion. And so, thank you both again! Good luck with everything, and yeah. thanks for being here.

Eepi: Thank you.

Alecia: Thank you for having us.

Reyes: All right. So, before we head out, just some shout outs. So, a quick shout out for Society for the Performing Arts. They're, they recently have launched an online program where, called Spa Creative Connection, where they're taking submissions of videos of artists creating performing work while in isolation. They can, you can use submit either iPhone or webcam videos. Kind of artist is doing artsy stuff or what have you. You can visit them SPA, spa, Houston.org to submit, and to see some examples of that they have so far. They've already posted one video.

And then in that, on that note, please let us know, Fresh Arts, what digital events what, if you have a patreon, IndieGoGo, Kickstarter, what have you. If you have a digital presence, if you're doing videos, if you're doing live performances, please let us know! Submit to a form we'll be posting in the comments so that we can share, so you can still kind of continue our regular programming, in particular arts on, Art on Tap in newsletters,

And, again, we just want people to know what's going on. And so, please submit that to us and we'll be happy to let everyone, as many people as we can, know about those, what you're doing. So as far as next week, next Tuesday please stay tuned, check back tomorrow, and we can let you know what's going on Tuesday.

But next Thursday... Today we focused on arts administrators and professionals working with organizations and how they're working in this current context, but next Thursday we're having a two guests who will be speaking who are artists as well who are, in this particular context, helping artists with this crisis. And so, it'll be a really great discussion on how artists are helping other artists.

And if you have any ideas for topics, if you want to see something addressed or you just want to let us know what's going on, please don't hesitate to let us know. We're more than happy to take recommendations and see what we can do to address some things that are going on in the community.

So, thanks for tuning in, good luck with everything, and, again, let us know how we can help you. Thank you.

And just a quick shout out to our media sponsor, Glasstire and also a big big thank you to Ben Doyle of Bend Productions, who is making all this look nice and sleek and pretty. Also, thank you to Fresh Arts, the rest of the staff. Particularly thank you - double a, Amazing Angela, who's checking the comments on Facebook letting me know your questions.

So again, thank you and I'll see you next time.