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Dancing With Myself: How Artists Stay in Shape Without a Stage

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For most performing artists, the daily routine is roughly the same: rehearse, perform, rinse and repeat. But with the coronavirus shuttering live shows around the world, musicians, dancers, actors and others have had to adapt to a new reality — without an audience to prepare for. We talked to some about how they're staying in shape and honing their craft while working from home.

'You can't sit still for long.' – Constance Stamatiou, dancer, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

Constance Stamatiou's workday as an Alvin Ailey dancer would sometimes stretch 12 hours, between morning ballet classes, seven-hour rehearsals and evening performances. More recently, Ms. Stamatiou has had to find new spaces for dance, in and around her New Jersey home — the parking lot outside, her daughters' playroom, the kitchen — where she can improvise new pieces and follow along with virtual ballet classes broadcast on Instagram. A high-top table in the kitchen has become a home ballet barre; a broomstick and water jugs, a new way to lift weights. Ms. Stamatiou is also learning new choreography with her daughters on TikTok. (She has yet to master the Renegade, which she finds a bit intimidating.)



Ctrl + Click to watch video.

'My relationship with the instrument can really go back to square one.' – Max Zeugner, associate principal bass, New York Philharmonic

Before the New York Philharmonic canceled its season, Max Zeugner's practice time was filled with short-term scrambles to learn the right notes for the next concert. Now, he's found a silver lining in getting to do something he hasn't done since high school: playing music just for fun. Mr. Zeugner has opted for warming up with Bach phrases rather than scales or arpeggios — a meditative routine, he said, that comes close to prayer. (And the nine-person Philharmonic bass section now has a group chat: "Just trying to keep it light for the end of the world. A few jokes here and there. I'll leave it at that.")

'I'm using this time to get back to singing just for fun.' – Lauren Patten, actor, 'Jagged Little Pill' on Broadway

Lauren Patten has heard complaints about singing too loud in her New York apartment. After all, she's had to practice the heavy rock score of Alanis Morissette's music in "Jagged Little Pill." But after Broadway shut down, Ms. Patten retreated to an Airbnb in a small Vermont town surrounded by farmland — with plenty of open space and distance from neighbors. She is taking the time away from the city to sing for fun and keep her repertoire diverse with "more legit musical theater stuff."

'This is one time where I do get to just say, "Hey, you know what? I don't want to practice today."' – Angel Blue, opera singer
Angel Blue usually rehearses in transit from one performance to another: She learned her title role in "Porgy and Bess" on an airplane, flying home from a concert in Kazakhstan, and "Faust" en route from Singapore. With her performances across the country canceled, she has time to learn two new Verdi roles at home in New Jersey, at her own pace: Leonora in "Il Trovatore" and the title character in "Aida." At home, she's equipped with a thick sound-absorbing rug and a piano — and her family has space downstairs to retreat.

'If a miracle were to happen, I want to make sure that I'm ready to go.' – Zachary Noah Piser, actor, 'Dear Evan Hansen' on Broadway

Zachary Noah Piser learned his lesson the hard way. In the three-month hiatus he had between performing in an international production of "Dear Evan Hansen" and joining the show's Broadway cast, he figured he would remember Evan's extensive dialogue without having to run lines on his break. But with this unexpectedly large gap in performances, Mr. Piser is reciting his lines to himself on (social-distanced) runs and walks outdoors, and on video chats with other cast members. He is also trying to stick to his usual warm-up regimen in his apartment by using a vocal steamer, doing exercises at his piano and singing through a song or two from the show.

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