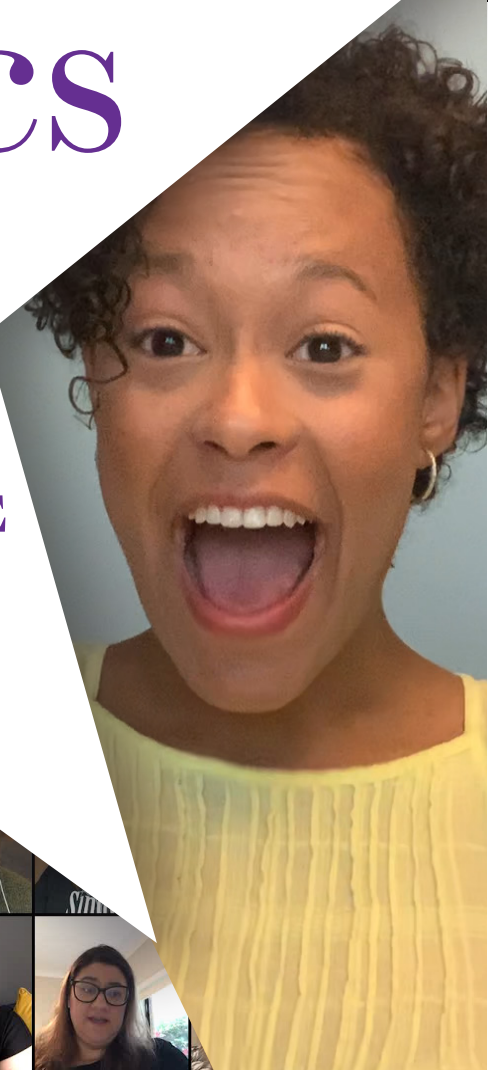




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REMOTE
PERFORMANCE GUIDE





Remote Performance Guide

Table of Contents

Welcome.....	3
Introduction	3
Before Rehearsals Begin.....	4
Computer Settings	5
Running Rehearsals & Tech.....	6

Welcome to the Remote Performance Guide!

We all know that rehearsing in the same room and performing in front of a live audience is the optimal way to experience musical theatre. But unfortunately, sometimes that just isn't possible. While a Remote Performance may seem like a slightly daunting task at first, we promise it can be done by anyone with the desire to make it happen. This Remote Performance Guide will give you specific information on how to get started, including basic online rehearsal and performance techniques. Once you are familiar with the contents of this guide and you want to take your online musical expertise a step further, come learn with iTheatrics! During this unprecedented time, iTheatrics is committed to holding online professional development workshops helping to inspire dedicated teachers and directors, thus ensuring that the show does indeed go on.

Best,
Marty Johnson
iTheatrics Director of Education

Introduction

What Is a Remote Performance?

A Remote Performance is a musical rehearsed and performed entirely online. In general for a Remote Performance, the actors, director, and creative team rehearse, direct, teach, and perform from their own spaces. The team at iTheatrics wanted to find a way to approximate the experience of rehearsing and presenting a musical without physically being in the same room. The Zoom meeting platform seemed to be the most promising, although it may be possible to use other internet-based platforms as well. Since these platforms were designed for meetings, not musicals, more than one person could not sing at the same time. iTheatrics met this challenge by using pre-recorded video for group numbers. Think of it like Disney's *The Little Mermaid Live!*, except in an online musical the scene work and solo numbers are live, and the splashy production numbers are pre-recorded.

For each pre-recorded group number, actors must record themselves singing their part of a song (along with the accompaniment track) and those recordings are edited together to create an audio track with everyone's vocals mixed as an ensemble. Then, that newly created recording is sent back to the actors so they can video themselves lip-syncing to the track, and performing the group number. The group track is edited together with everyone's individual performance

video, creating an exciting production number to be played back during the performance. This is a new medium for theatre, and there are challenges that we all discover as we go through the process. But the end result still feels very much like putting on a live musical. Watching actors, especially young people, overcome those challenges is not only exciting, it's heartwarming. Why? Because the show must go on, and go on it does!

What Does Your Remote Performance License Include?

After you have signed and returned your Streaming/Remote license, you then have the right to perform this musical exactly as provided in the materials. You may not make changes to the script and score, add material, or delete material as this version of the show has been approved by the show's authors. You have the right to live capture your production via Zoom or a similar platform. You also have the right to stream your performance via MTI's approved streaming platform hosted by SHOWTIX4U. If you have any questions about your license, please contact your Music Theatre International representative.

Before Rehearsals Begin

Your Creative Team

Just like any production, you will want to start your process by assembling a creative team. For your online musical, you will need a director, a music director, a choreographer, a designer, a stage manager, an audio engineer (to mix the actors vocals with the tracks), and a video director to create videos for group numbers. The majority of these positions will have the same responsibilities as they would in a traditional musical, albeit with some different teaching techniques, but we want to bring special attention to a few new requirements your stage manager will need to fulfill.

The stage manager should be your team's online platform expert. (Team iTheatrics used Zoom.) They will set up the room parameters, manage screen sharing, manage all rehearsals including break out rooms, and run all video and sound effects during the performance. They will also be communicating the most with your cast. So, beyond the typical organized, self-sufficient individual with excellent communication skills, you need someone who is tech savvy, or ready and willing to learn.

Casting

For a Remote Performance, we suggest a cast of no more than 22. This allows all actors and your creative team to be visible on the same screen at the same time for your rehearsals and performance. Of course, it is possible to involve more actors, but the video segments are the only time the entire cast would be seen onscreen during the performance.

While there is no age limit to who can be involved in the production, note that the performers must handle their performance duties (i.e., music, lines, and choreography) and a few of the technical duties that accompany performing in a musical online. These technical duties can be as simple as an actor muting and unmuting themselves during a scene, or as complicated as running sound from their computer while manipulating their video feed for a series of visual cues.

Technology and Space Needs

Every member of the cast and creative team will need a computer with secure and reliable internet access, and a device, such as a smart phone, computer, or tablet that allows actors to record themselves singing and dancing. While it is possible for ensemble members with no solo lines to use a tablet instead of a computer, they will not be able to see the entire cast on the screen at the same time and may miss out on the group camaraderie of the rehearsal process. For the rehearsals, cast members will need to be in a space that is relatively noise-free, where they can sing at full voice and perform any choreography full out. Pets, television shows, and other family members are all great, but sadly background noise and distractions hinder an effective rehearsal process.

Rehearsals

When you are creating your rehearsal schedule, remember to consider the time the actors will need outside of rehearsal to record themselves singing and dancing, or for the creative team to complete and prepare the vocal recordings and videos. Additionally, while you know your cast best, we have found that two hours is a good length for a typical online rehearsal. If you rehearse much longer than two hours, it is challenging to keep the actors engaged and focused since they are in different locations and looking at screens.

Computer Settings

At the first rehearsal, you want to make sure each actor adjusts their video and audio settings detailed below. iTheatrics has found these settings work best for this performance style if you are using Zoom as your online platform.

To access the video settings in Zoom, click the arrow next to the **Start Video Icon** and click **Video Settings**. Remember that different devices, such as computers versus tablets (and even different computer models) will have different access to these settings. While the following settings aren't 100% necessary, they do improve the quality of the theatrical experience. We recommend selecting the following:

Camera:

- Built-in camera for your device
- 16:9 (Widescreen)

My Video:

- Enable HD (this setting can be de-selected if a actor is having bandwidth issues)
- Mirror my video
- Touch up my appearance (slide all the way to the right)
- Adjust for low light: Auto (this setting can be adjusted manually if a actor's video looks too dark)
- Always display participant name on their videos
- Hide non-video participants

Advanced:

- Optimize video quality with de-noise
- Use hardware acceleration for receiving video

Pinning Video Squares:

At the time of writing, in order to “pin” video squares to certain locations on screen, you have to disable the Hide Non-Video Participants setting. This means if any actor is “offstage,” you will see a black square with their name in it the entire time. We find this to be more distracting than moving squares, so we do not recommend pinning videos at this time.

Zoom Updates:

As with any digital application, Zoom will continually issue updates. The above video and audio settings are accurate at the time of writing (Zoom version 5.2.3). We recommend updating Zoom with every application release and looking into the program's new developments.

To access the audio settings, click the arrow next to the microphone and click on **Audio Settings**.

On the main audio settings page, update the following setting:

1. “Suppress background noise” – Choose low

Next, click on **Advanced** and update the following two settings:

1. “Echo Cancellation”
 - Choose aggressive
2. “Show In-Meeting option to enable original sound from microphone”
 - This setting should be checked, which gives you the ability to “enable original sound” at any time.
 - When you return to the main video screen, there will be an option on the screen to toggle back and forth. “Enable original sound” when singing a solo live.
 - This disables Zoom's echo cancellation and audio-enhancing settings, which allows the microphone to pick up singing more clearly rather than classifying it as background sound and muting it.

Note: In the Advanced tab, do not check “Disable echo cancellation” and “High fidelity music mode.” Both can be useful with headphones and when using a high-quality microphone but are unnecessary to achieve success using the regular microphone on your device.

Among the biggest challenges to producing an online musical are the dreaded “technical issues.” Please DO NOT contact your MTI Representatives for software issues or troubleshooting. The guidelines we've laid out above are specific to Zoom, but if you are experiencing a software issue in any platform, contact that platform's customer support team to resolve your issue. They are the experts on your platform and will have the expertise to solve your problem. If you have any questions regarding your license, please refer to your production contract.

Running Rehearsals & Tech

How to Teach Music

The process of teaching music over Zoom and other platforms is a new and exciting challenge because there is no way to hear what the ensemble sounds like until you get the mixed audio track from your audio engineer. There is a lot of responsibility placed on the actor to dig into each vocal part and feel confident with what they are singing. Not only do actors gain confidence from this process, but it also gives them a real sense of ownership over the material.

For ensemble songs, make sure the actors are familiar with how the whole song sounds. Teach ensemble songs in a call-and-response method breaking the song down into vocal phrases. The music director won't be able to hear the actors, so they should sing the echo with the actors as well. Use this technique until the actors learn the entire song. Once they are comfortable with the song, play the track from your computer and ask them to sing the song at full voice (while muted of course). After rehearsal, the music director should ask actors to send individual rehearsal audio files for assessment. That way, the music director can give notes before the actors record their audio files for the performance recording. This allows the music director to hear each actor's voice, help clarify any vocal parts, and give individual feedback.

To teach a solo, your actor can unmute themselves while doing the call-and-response method of learning the material so they can be assessed in real time. Just remember not to sing along with them or accompany them with the piano, as all sound must come from the same device. If the music is coming from more than one source, the sounds will cancel each other out and the music director won't be able to hear the actor.

For their final recordings, actors will listen to the track with earphones (so the recording only picks up their vocals) and then sing along to record their part. Smart phones are the most reliable tool for recording, and they provide great audio! Encourage the actors to record in a place with very little echo for best results.

How to Teach Dance

When teaching choreography on Zoom and other platforms it is best to use "right" and "left" instead of "stage left" and "stage right," as you would in a traditional theatre space. On Zoom, there is a mirroring effect applied to the camera, so when you raise your right hand, onscreen it looks like you are raising your left. Your cast must learn to trust that even though they may look wrong on their screen, if they perform according to the directions, their choreography will display correctly for the performance. Also, the choreographer will need to consider the playing space onscreen. You can keep the movement tight up to the camera, with actors sitting close to their computer screens. You can also move the actors further away to get full body shots. Establishing specific names for each position (extreme close-up, shoulders and head, upper body, and full body) will help create a common choreography language for the cast. Use these different positions to enhance the storytelling advantage and to also provide visual variety.

Finally, you and the director will need to choose if the choreography will be presented live or on video. You can play the music directly through Zoom and the actors can dance to what they hear live. There is the risk of internet glitching and delays, which could result in intricate choreography looking out of sync. You can also have the actors video themselves performing individually and then compile those individual videos into one production number. This requires much more frontloading of work but adds a polished look to the final performance.

How to Stage Scenes

There are three key items to keep in mind when staging your Remote Performance:

First, turn on the "Hide Non-Video Participants" feature. When a character exits the stage, they stop their video, and when they enter, they start their video again. This shows the audience where to focus when a new character pops onto the screen. It also keeps the audience from being distracted by the 22 characters onscreen when they should be focused on the one or two who are actively telling the story.

Second, during scene work, make sure the actors treat their camera as if it is their scene partner(s).

If everyone consistently looks directly at the camera during dialogue, the audience understands the theatrical convention and follows the storytelling. It may be tempting to try to create moments where characters interact spatially with each other through the boxes, but this proved ineffective in our exploration of the platform. As of this writing, Zoom does not have a feature where the host of a meeting can assign an order to the video windows (those Brady Bunch boxes that frame each actor) onscreen, so everyone's position will vary on each individual screen.

Third, the actors should understand the framing in their screen and how to best use it. The most effective way to learn this is through play and experimentation. Extreme close-ups, appearing or disappearing from the corners, leaning backward, or leaning forward are techniques the actors can use to help tell their story throughout the production. There are some fun “tricks” you can use to amp up the visual storytelling, such as passing props: Actor A passes a prop to Actor B by moving the prop out of the boundaries of their own screen, while at the same time, Actor B reaches their hand outside of their screen and pulls in a similar-looking prop.

And remember, at the end of the day, even with all the new features your platform base (i.e., Zoom) will allow you to explore, the most important part is the acting itself. Actors who focus on clear storytelling will have the most successful performance.

A Note About Costumes, Scenery, and Props

Costumes, scenery, and props for your production will likely be 100% actor-created and based on items they have readily accessible in their homes. As these items will vary from cast member to cast member, we suggest keeping these elements to a minimum.

For costumes, a specific color plot can help clarify relationships. Additionally, simple accessories such as hats, scarves, or sweaters can be used if cast members are playing more than one character.

For scenery, note that each actor's “rehearsal room” will vary, so we suggest encouraging the cast to declutter the space within the view of the camera. This ensures the performers are the focal point onscreen. There are virtual backgrounds available on Zoom, but those tend to cause visual problems when there is too

much movement or when turning the camera on and off.

For props, it's important to remember if multiple actors use the same prop, each actor will be charged with constructing or sourcing their own prop. This is easy for something generic like a business card but can prove more difficult when the prop is more involved, like hand-made party invitations. Trust that your audience will forgive any discrepancies as long as the storytelling is clear.

Sound for Performance

Actors with solos are responsible for playing their own accompaniment track. This can be done directly from their computer (probably the easiest method), or the actor can play the music from an external speaker placed behind them. Make sure to schedule plenty of time to work with these individual actors to find the perfect balance. Actors should use the same computer, the same program to play the music, and the same speakers throughout the rehearsals and performances. This will ensure the sound balance is correct.

For actors with solos, make sure they have the tracks organized in a playlist. It's important that the program does not shuffle or segue directly into the next song.

For group numbers, once you receive all the recordings from the actors, it's time for the audio engineer to start mixing. There are plenty of audio manipulation programs accessible for free online. Choose a program with resources like an online forum, so you have a community to lean on for troubleshooting or technical issues. There are also professional programs available to purchase for more advanced options, but for the most part the free programs will have everything you need to create a great sounding track of your actors' voices.

Videos for Performance

If you are using pre-recorded dance or singing videos from the actors, they will need to be combined to create the video that will be played during the performance. This is possible to do in a program such as iMovie. Additionally, if someone from your team has more advanced video skills they can use a more complex program that offers different features than iMovie.

Final Presentation

Although Zoom and other video platforms may be used in the rehearsal process, the final edited Remote Performance may only be distributed on SHOWTIX4U.COM. It is possible to stream a Zoom performance through SHOWTIX4U.COM, but the Zoom performance cannot be distributed directly to an audience through Zoom, nor can the Remote Performance be streamed on any other audiovisual platform (YouTube, Vimeo, etc.).

As the director, feel free to give a “curtain speech” at the top of the performance whether it’s prerecorded or streamed live on SHOWTIX4U. This way you can give your audience specific insights on all the work that went into your production, make any necessary announcements, and say thanks to the folks who were invaluable during the process.

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