

## Iain Ledingham's Lockdown



We thought you would also be very interested to hear how Iain has been managing to continue to teach his Academy singers during lockdown. As well as being the Musical Director of the Festival, Iain is also a Vocal Coach at the Royal Academy of Music.

We asked Iain how lockdown has affected him and his students. Here's what he had to say.

### ***What is your role at The Royal Academy?***

I teach 28 individual students each week to deepen their knowledge of the music, while at the same time developing their individual style and voice. I also work regularly with students on the Opera Course and from 2009-2018 I was Musical Director of the Academy's Bach Cantata Series.

### ***How did lockdown start for you?***

Well, the Academy closed its buildings and we were all asked to teach online! At first I was very sceptical about this. The time lag makes it impossible to accompany the students as they sing, and unaccompanied singing isn't the same thing at all!

### ***So, what was the solution?***

My Head of Department suggested recording the accompaniments and sending them, so that they could sing to my recording. Since March, I've done over 200 recordings of different pieces and sent them to students.

### ***Wow! You must have been very busy!***

Yes! Some, mainly modern pieces, are harder to absorb, so they took longer, but most of the repertoire was familiar so didn't take too long. And the students were thrilled, because they could then get on and learn the pieces wherever they were. I was using a tablet on top of my piano, so the sound quality wasn't great, but in the end I quite enjoyed it, and I felt I was doing something useful.

### ***Were there any advantages?***

In a way, yes. I saw the students in a different setting – their London flat, or in their parents' home, whether here or abroad. They weren't so busy, so many were more relaxed, and I could let the lessons overrun a little. I could nurture and encourage them more than there's time for when

everyone's rushing about in London. And for me, it was jolly nice to be able to go and sit in the garden in between lessons!

Another thing was that I could spend more time in lessons on the text. I think it's really important for them to understand what they're singing, in whatever language, because that's the only way they can really bring out the meaning in their performance.

And now that finalists are back in the Academy for their exams, I've been given the largest rooms, to give the best opportunity for distancing. I've even worked in the Duke Hall. It's wonderful being able to play on those concert-sized Steinway pianos. After months of only hearing each other online it was quite an emotional experience for all concerned to be able to make music in the normal way, in spacious rooms with a fine acoustic.

### ***How did the students find lockdown?***

Mixed. It's very hard for young people to find so many doors suddenly closed to them. Five of my students had been offered work at Glyndebourne. Five months of well-paid work! They're likely to be able to take this up next year, but opportunities generally are sorely reduced. Some students felt very down, and didn't feel the urge to sing. But others really enjoyed having the extra time to work on their skills.

It depends also where they're living. Some are relaxing with their parents, but others are in crowded London flats, and some can't even sing at all because of disturbing the neighbours. There are technical issues for them too. A student in Lithuania was as clear online as if she was standing next to me, but with one in North Yorkshire, I couldn't hear anything but crackle!

### ***What about your Italian Summer School?***

Cancelled! This was a big disappointment for everybody. Every year I take 18 singers and two pianists. It's really popular now – I'd auditioned more than twice as many this year. Fortunately the flights were cancelled, so I got the money back, and I've told the students leaving the Academy this year that they can still come next year if they want to.

### ***Will all of this change the way you teach in future?***

Normally, I do sometimes ask students if they'd like to record the accompaniment on their phones. I'll definitely do more of this in the future.

### ***And what about your own music?***

I've learnt another Mozart piano concerto – number 24. This is a wonderful piece, and I hope I'll be able to offer it in a concert when we start up again.