

# Flickering back to bright: a survey of Fresno-area arts organizations

Your feedback and comments may be included in an upcoming article.

What is your name and the name of your arts organization?

Lianna Elmore - The Tower Quartet

How do you categorize your organization?

- Theater company
- Orchestra / Classical music ensemble
- Museum / gallery
- Dance company
- Literary organization
- Producing organization
- Other: .....

Thinking back to the start of the pandemic, what was the last date your organization offered something "live" (a non-virtual performance, exhibition, festival, reading, etc.)? What was the event?

February 1, 2020 was the date of our last live performance. We played Beethoven's "Serioso" quartet at the Yehudi Menuhin Festival at San Francisco State University where we were honored to be on the same program as the Alexander String Quartet. They gave us some fantastic coaching and we're lucky to still be in touch with them.

Do you have an anecdote or memory of the pandemic related to your arts organization that stands out for you? Can you share it?

The memory that stands out the most for our organization would have to be the "Over the Rainbow" video that we recorded remotely and released during the summer in the early stages of the pandemic. We weren't meeting in person out of an abundance of caution so we tried what many musicians were experimenting with--recording each part separately and having an editor piece them together digitally. It was an unfamiliar and difficult process for us but we felt compelled to continue playing however we could and wanted to show our audiences we're still active. It turned out to be one of our most viewed and well received videos we've ever released. I think everyone was so emotional and anxious during that time and hearing the hopeful, soaring melody of a classic like "Over the Rainbow" really struck a chord. We were really emotional when we recorded it too, we missed playing together so much so it was nice to have anything close to that experience again.

Do you have an upcoming public live event scheduled with a specific date?

Yes

No

If so, what is it and when is it?

N/A

What are you planning for the fall season? If you haven't yet made a public announcement, when will you do so?

We are hoping to give a live concert with an in-person audience this Fall that may include works by Shostakovich, Brahms, and local composer, Dr. Bryce Cannell, who has written a commissioned work for us. We just started rehearsing together again after we all received our Covid vaccinations so we don't have a specific date yet but you can expect an announcement some time in July on our social media (Facebook, Instagram), and on our website, [thetowerquartet.com](http://thetowerquartet.com)

What sort of social-distancing and virus-mitigation options are you planning or considering for your organization's return to public life? (Realizing that regulations and recommendations can change.)

If regulations and recommendations ask that we don't have live audiences we will plan on releasing pre-recorded videos and/or live-streamed concerts. If we can have in person audiences we will enforce social distancing guidelines and ask concert-goers to wear masks. We might also try to offer outdoor concerts if the weather is kind.

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most severe, how has your organization been impacted financially by the pandemic?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Regarding the above question: Would you care to comment?

Our organization is small and we were primarily receiving income from the donations we received at our concerts so our financial gains were always modest. But that income dropped to zero since the performance videos we've been offering online have all been free with no pay wall. Thankfully we have been able to make up that income through grants and a few private donors. We were especially grateful to receive sizable grants through Fresno Arts Council and Fresno Musical Club.

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being extremely important, how important was government assistance (grants, loans, other financial incentives) to keeping your arts organization alive during the pandemic?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Regarding the above question: Would you care to comment?

As stated in the previous answer, we were thrilled to receive grants through local arts organizations. That really helped all of our individual finances as we struggled to get any kind of work as musicians both individually and as an ensemble. That assistance allowed us to continue giving attention to our our work as a quartet. And receiving those grants and donations just further proved to us that we have something positive to offer and it's valued by the community. That has really driven us to stay motivated.

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most difficult, how hard do you think it will be to convince audiences/visitors/supporters to return to your organization?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Regarding the above question: Would you care to comment?

This will undoubtedly be informed by the state of the pandemic at any given time but what we do know is that people are hungry to see live music again. It seems that being deprived of it for a year has given people an even deeper sense of appreciation for the concert experience. However many people are still worried about the pandemic, and rightfully so. If we dive right back into normal concerts with full, unmasked audiences we will take two steps backward after taking one step forward. So all performing arts organizations will have to stay constantly vigilant about checking up on safety standards and guidelines to ensure they keep the trust of audiences. It will mean twice the amount of work, but it's worth it to keep audiences safe.

Did your organization try a digital strategy during the pandemic? If so, what do you think your most effective offering was? And will you continue any digital components when you return to live performance/exhibition?

Our digital strategy consisted of releasing videos. We experimented with recording remotely when we did "Over the Rainbow" and that was definitely our most successful offering. However I think that kind of video might not be such a hit now since many people seem to be fatigued by the oversaturation of remote videos. We also recorded a program that included a Mozart string quartet and a couple of pop tunes as part of the "Six Feet Apart Virtual Concert Series" at University Presbyterian Church of Fresno where we played together, wearing masks. And we generally just tried to keep in touch with audiences via social media, showing pictures of us playing at Poverello House on Thanksgiving, or playing outside for an Easter service. We even recorded an "Ask Me Anything" interview where we answered questions from friends about what it's like to be in our quartet so people could get to know us better. Anything to stay connected.

What do you think is the biggest challenge that arts organizations now face in the greater Fresno area?

I think it will be a challenge for arts organizations to take the necessary innovative and creative steps to make safe performances a reality. Our streams of income have been greatly reduced and yet we have to spend more money to make sure everyone's safe. Cleaning supplies, safety monitors, time to air out spaces, offering paid sick leave, video editors, and sound engineers are just some of the new expenses organizations are dealing with. Perhaps the silver lining is that we will see artists take this challenge and turn it into something previously unimaginable, shaking the foundation we used to stand on and making room for something new.

Anything you'd like to add?

We're just so grateful to still be playing music together. This break from our rigorous schedules and the pain this past year has wrought has given us all reason to reflect on what's really important and all of us in The Tower Quartet can agree that music and community are at the forefront. We can't wait to continue reconnecting with those two things that we hold so dear.

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