

Pianist records Mozart to help with pandemic stress

By Ken Kostik

Soon after the pandemic hit full stride this spring, pianist Alan Murray of Hastings wanted to relieve some of the stress infecting society.

"I was looking for something to do," the 58-year-old said. "I needed something to help deal with what we were all going through and I thought that this could reach a lot of people."

Murray had planned, at some point, to record all 21 of Mozart's piano concertos. In March, he decided to go ahead with that plan through a series of videos. The "labor of love," as he described it, took almost 4 1/2 months.

"The scores for all 21 concertos ran over 1,000 pages of music," Murray said. "I had to learn all of that music, and that took a lot of time. Over the last 2 1/2 months or so, I was spending time in my studio doing the recording... It was hard work, but worth it."

Twenty of the videos incorporate pre-recorded audio from the English Chamber Orchestra. In the one video, he performs with the Westchester Chamber Soloists, a classical chamber orchestra he founded before the pandemic.

"Mozart wrote the concertos to have the piano acting almost as a soloist," Murray said. "Mozart transformed this type of ensemble — he made the solo instrument of the piano into almost a singer with a very distinct voice. Over the course of the 21 concertos, every kind of human emotion is expressed. It is a fascinating piece of work."

Murray began playing the piano when he was 11. He graduated from Hastings High School in 1980, and then from Cornell University, where he majored in

physics and languages.

"I actually did my first public performance as a soloist with the Hastings High School Orchestra at age 15, with Lawrence Hayden conducting," he recalled, "and my first complete solo recitals at Cornell when I was a sophomore and junior there."

After college, he went to work in the finance and insurance field. He was an actuary at AIG in New York City, and then at Moody's until he was downsized in 2019. He then decided to indulge his musical interests. In March 2019, backed by Arista International, he toured the Ukraine, Russia, and China.

"But my real serious push as a solo and chamber music performer started in 2010 with the Sunrise Series concerts [at the First Unitarian Society in Hastings]," he recalled, "followed by many years performing as soloist with symphony orchestras in this area, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and in Europe, and in a series of all-day chamber music programs with other local musicians in the annual RiverArts Music Tours, especially 2018 and 2019, where I met many of those who are now members of Westchester Chamber Soloists."

On March 8, that ensemble performed for the first time, at Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville, which turned out to be their only concert so far due to the pandemic. That event included Mozart's Piano Concerto #19, which Murray included in his video series.

Each concerto consists of three movements. In all, there are 63 videos, which "took a while to put all together," Murray said. "There was a lot of editing and splicing and posting."

Murray, and his wife, Amada, who he married in 1991, have a 24-year-old daughter, Ella, who graduated from Hastings High School and then from Hofstra University in 2018. Amada owns Galapagos Books on Main Street in Hastings, where the couple first met.

While Murray wants to get back into the finance and insurance world, his next project will be Beethoven's five piano concertos and Choral Fantasia, the first of which will be broadcast this Sunday, Aug. 9. To view the recordings, visit www.studio-hollywood.com.