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Inspired in self-isolation: Jeff Ravitz

With Covid-19 lockdowns worldwide and health authorities urging people to self-isolate and practice social distancing on a massive scale as part of an enormous effort to #FlattenTheCurve of this global pandemic ... we are reaching out to industry friends, colleagues, associates, partners, etc., and asking them to share their #StayAtHome and #QuarantineAndChill activities with us during this extraordinary time.

Jeff has enjoyed a long and illustrious career as a working lighting designer for "several" decades during which time he's reinvented himself more than once, starting in theatre, moving to concerts in the early "Golden Age" of rock 'n roll touring, dabbling in architectural, and currently enjoying the world of televised live entertainment and events.

2020 began busily with a slew of awards shows (some naughty, some nice!) and a couple of stand-up comedy specials. He was on the verge of his annual desert foray at Coachella, where he's been the broadcast lighting consultant for five years when Covid-19 brought the live event and entertainment industry to a rapid halt.

Robe: Where are you right now?

Jeff: I'm bunkered at home in Los Angeles, specifically Studio City, CA.

Robe: How are you spending time whilst isolating / on lockdown?

Jeff: I've been working for a year, now, on a book about lighting for live entertainment TV and it is (almost) in final phases. (With Jim Moody, author of several books on concert design and the biz side of it.) I had planned on March being a productive month anyway, but not like this!

I did get knocked off-track a little by the distractions of the pandemic crisis, spending too much time reading and watching in order to try understand more about the health and economic effects, and judiciously donating to some good causes.

I make a point of differentiating between the "work week" and weekends, even though it now tends to all merge together. That helps the sanity quotient and creates a marker in the otherwise-disorienting

passage of time.

So, work, reading, films, webinars, one Zoom funeral, cooking like crazy, worrying, YouTube yoga (I recommend it) and long walks with the dog through deserted neighborhoods.

And, of course, virtual happy hours catching up with people I should be spending more time with in non-pandemic times.

Robe: What's the most creative thing you're able to do whilst in isolation?

Jeff: I have created over twenty graphic diagrams for our book and have edited scores of photos. It's a process, let me tell you!

That, and scouring my cookbook and recipe collections for fun dishes to try. I've learned to mix a few drinks, too! (who knew?)

Robe: Are you looking after anyone else during the Covid-19 crisis? Like neighbors or others in the family?

Jeff: Considering that I have travelled quite a bit over the course of my career, this might be the longest stretch of time my wife and I have spent together in our almost thirty years!

Fortunately, we are a great team and enjoy each other's company. She's a teacher, transforming her routine to online from in-person, and that has been an effort, too. So, helping out and being a shoulder for her when she gets frustrated.

But strictly speaking, I'm not looking after anyone in my immediate reach. We have family (some elderly) in other parts of the country and world, and helping them be stable, connected and maintaining safe lifestyles during these uncertain times has been a daily mission for us.

Robe: Has anyone particularly inspired you since this crisis started?

Jeff: Of course, the frontline healthcare community and first responders are awe-inspiring for their dedication to conquer the overwhelming in order to help us.

Right next to them are our local and state leaders and their staffs (shout out to Governors Newsom [CA] and Cuomo [NY] and Mayor Garcetti [LA], amongst many others), who are working round-the-clock to motivate us to stay safely at home to break the chain of transmission (this is an "air gap" we

actually want), soothe us when we get discouraged, and solve the enormous challenges of insufficient hospital beds, equipment and personnel, as well as job loss.

I am humbled by their efforts and accomplishments and can barely imagine the pressure they are under.

One friend is coordinating our neighborhood and nearby friends to make 1500 sandwiches a week that she then delivers to a local shelter. That moves me. We do what we can within our means.

Robe: What has been your favorite book / movie / Netflix or TV series / viral video

Games / music?

Jeff: I am losing myself in a Dan Brown book, Origin (2017 mystery thriller). It's great to take my mind off daily concerns. I've made time to read the newspaper almost every day. That's a craving that I rarely indulge as much as I would like. Plus, I'm able to catch up with our great industry trade magazines much more than I usually can.

We don't watch that much TV, but we found a really fun series on Netflix, Call My Agent. It's a French series about a talent agency in Paris. Again, we needed something non-pandemic to transport us outside our four walls.

Aside from those, this has been a good time to watch some classics and whittle through our list.

As I mentioned, there have been some great webinars with cinematographers (ARRI just started a series) and designers (I like the Live Design chats and Vectorworks case studies).

Robe: What is the first thing you would like to do when we are through this crisis?

Jeff: I miss restaurants, the gym, hanging with friends, and working on shows – with all the challenges, effort, pain, and joy that go into trying to make things look extraordinary with light.

Robe: Own question / answer / message of solidarity or something you would like to say?

Jeff: I am writing this on the fiftieth anniversary of Earth Day, which is an important reminder to all of us that we occupy one planet, and we have a responsibility – the responsibility – to care for it.

With that in mind, I am struck by the worldwide universality of the Covid-19 catastrophe.

People in parts of our Earth that we otherwise might be at odds with are suffering just as we are, and in many cases, even more severely. We often forget about the common thread that weaves us together as humanity.

Perhaps this is a reminder of the common ground on which we all stand, and how we, who encompass all races, nationalities and personal preferences, ought to lock arms, proud of our individuality but with a unified mission to become one people everywhere.

