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A Heads Up with Nicolas Fischtel

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.

Nicolas is a stage LD, working mainly in dance, theatre and opera.

Since March 2020, 10 projects in which he was involved have been cancelled or postponed, and he is lucky enough for some of them to be recovered.

Last October he had the chance to work on a BMW corporate event at Madrid Teatro Real, and in November he managed to travel to Bordeaux in France to work with the city Opera Ballet in a new production which was meant to open on November 5th. The day after he arrived to the city, France declared a new lockdown.

The Theatre was allowed to continue rehearsals and they managed to premiere without an audience, just a TV broadcast!

Last December after many difficulties and under strict health & safety measures we managed to open "La Traviata" at Liceu Opera Theatre in Barcelona. So, it's been challenging ... but we've managed.

Robe: Where are you right now?

Nicolas: Madrid (Spain), where I have lived since I was 9 years old. One of the most welcoming cities in the world.

Robe: How are things currently re. lockdown / restrictions in your region / country?

Nicolas: The pandemic situation is quickly rising again in numbers, so I am afraid we are going backwards in terms of restrictions.

Spain has different situations depending on the region, where different restrictions apply. In the Madrid region currently (January 2021) there is 70% audience capacity for indoor theatres, plus regular measures like social distancing, masks, hydroalcoholic gel, temperature control, etc.

This formula is proving quite successful, since no outbreaks have originated in theatres and audiences are coming to see shows and feel safe!

The other thing is the music sector (musical theatre and music gigs of all types and sizes) which is almost at a full stop.

Robe: What have you been doing since the pandemic started – March 2020?

Nicolas: Well, on 14th March 2020 a state of emergency and total shutdown was declared here in Spain.

That same day I started to feel pretty bad ... and it lasted for two weeks. I had all the COVID symptoms apart from breathing difficulties, so I stayed home during this period, controlled by phone from my doctor.

After my recovery I stayed home with my family, since all the shows I had scheduled (Pittsburgh, Moscow, Ibiza, London, Seville, etc) were cancelled.

The first project I worked after the confinement was the Madrid International dance Festival, for which I was the Technical Director. It took place mid June with local acts (of course no International guests were able to attend).

It was also the first time a theatre reopened in Spain since March, so it was a real test for everyone involved, since we had to learn and apply all the health safety measures for the first time for audiences, performers and technical crew.

It was a lot of work and pressure ... but luckily everything turned out OK. That helped to encourage and ease the way for others to start reopening performing spaces.

Robe: What are the most memorable moments / takeaways – for you – so far from the pandemic period?

Nicolas: Having the possibility of spending time with my family, which usually is not easy in our profession. And long talks to my friends and colleagues on the phone and via zoom ...

After, it was quite emotional to get back to stages. As with everything in life, we do not value things until we lose them. It was a beautiful feeling to be able to work again!

Robe: Do you have any thoughts / predictions about how and when live events and the industry will re-start?

Nicolas: I suppose until the vaccine has a real effect on contagion reduction it will be very difficult to regain activity as close as before.

Government-funded spaces (National Theaters, etc.) can afford to have a reduced audience, but in these circumstances the numbers do not add up for private companies.

International events (tours, festivals, etc.) are likely to be the last to recover, as safe travels and large public gatherings (essential to make them feasible) will still take time. This makes me very sad, since I have a lot of friends in the music industry and I am myself a big consumer of live music which is fundamental to my life! I am always eager to assist to a live concert.

Robe: Going forward, how do you think live events and the entertainment technology industry might change in a post-Covid 19 world – and with vaccines widely available?

Nicolas: I suppose the new formats (online events, webinars, etc) are here to stay, which seems positive to me.

But once COVID contagion is brought under control, I think live events will flourish again as people are so eager to attend them. There is nothing compared to the feeling of a live performance (music, theatre, opera, dance, circus...). No screen can replicate that! Meanwhile we'll have to cope with reduced audience events.

Robe: Do you have any projects on the horizon for 2021 that you can share / talk about right now?

Nicolas: In March, I shall be lighting a new production of Bellini's "Norma" for Madrid's Teatro Real. Both Teatro Real and Liceu Barcelona are among the few opera houses still performing in front of an audience in Europe.

I also have projects with a few dance companies, if everything goes well ... cross fingers!

Robe: Has anyone / anything particularly inspired or affected you since this crisis started?

Nicolas: I am former vice president of the AAI (Spanish association of lighting designers).

In confinement and without face to face activities, we are carrying out a series of online activities under the name “Dialogos de luz en la red” bringing together professionals from different fields of lighting to speak and share their experiences.

It was certainly very inspiring and I am proud to have been a part of it. I love to talk, hear and share knowledge about light. After a 30 year career in lighting I keep on learning every day and I'm very happy to do it from colleagues I admire!

Robe: What are your biggest hopes for 2021?

Nicolas: Despite the complicated situation, I feel privileged to have been able to work in this profession I love! I wish and hope this feeling will be shared by all my fellow colleagues soon. And of course I hope the vaccine will work and will stop this pandemic nightmare!

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

Nicolas: Let's resist! There is so much beauty to enjoy in life. Sooner or later the sun will shine again.

