

# The Lasting Effects of Online Learning to In-Person Teaching: Observations from Southeast Asia

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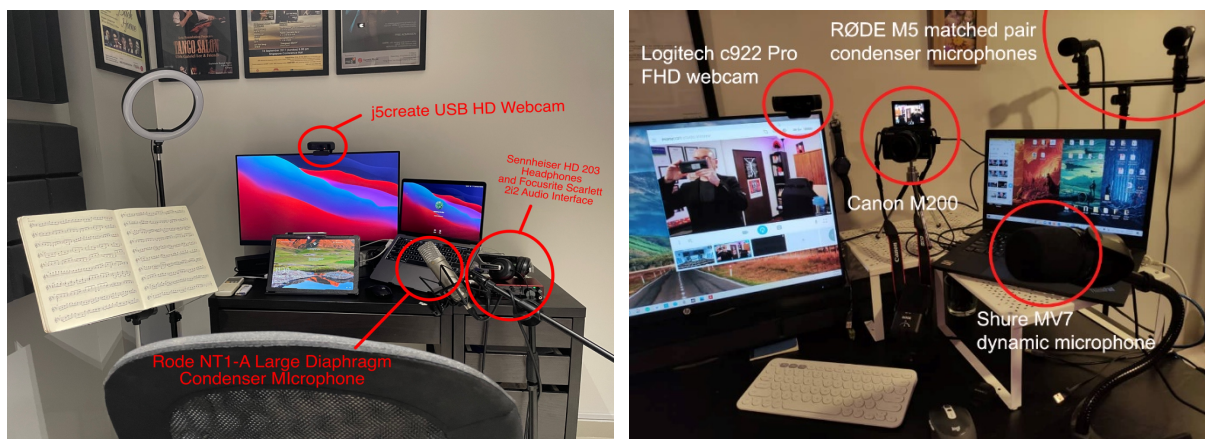
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## *Introduction*

The COVID-19 pandemic disruption to music instruction created two branches of development. For those in Australasia, teaching online became a stop-gap measure, while in Southeast Asia, the foray (now in its second year) has meant a greater development of online teaching. Those who have succeeded view it not simply as a substitute for in-person teaching, but rather a unique medium with new pedagogical approaches.

When the region fully recovers, it will be with a changed approach to music education as a whole, whether in some measure of hybrid learning, or in altered approaches to pedagogical strategies. The authors of this article taught online from before the pandemic, and used the past year to specialize in the field, founding the SEA Music Academy Online, with two conferences bringing together four hundred music teachers, musicians, and students from across the region.

Our discussion here will focus on instrumental teaching of string students, with three focus areas: the lasting effects of a renewed pedagogy, a blended approach to teaching, and a look to the future as certain programmes build permanent online avenues.



*Illustration 1: Online teaching setups of Gabriel Lee (left) and Andrew Filmer (right)*

# 1. Pedagogical impact to in-person teaching

## Summary recordings

Traditionally, it is common for music teachers to include summaries or tasks in a book, or within sheet music which becomes difficult when online. One strategy is to record a “summary recording” of a few minutes at the end of a lesson or a segment of a lesson. This is done even if the student is recording the entire online lesson, as it provides a short, concise reminder and reference for the student.

Over time, this can be developed into more than one-way communication. Here are two examples:

- Gamification can be added: with some role-playing the teacher plays a segment and asks the student to evaluate the performance, thus assessing whether the student has internalised the information.
- The student can be asked to summarise the lesson, and the teacher plays examples, asks leading questions in a Socratic approach.

While these can be incorporated into regular face-to-face formats, the very use of a recording may itself be useful, whether recorded by the teacher and placed in a shared cloud folder, or directly to a student’s mobile device. Interestingly, this observation came about not from one of the authors’ students, who asked to record a summary video in a return to in-person teaching.

## Pedagogy: the teacher as coach

One effect of extended online lessons is the realisation that what one thinks is being communicated through an online platform like Zoom is not necessarily received clearly on the other end. This applies to both teacher and student, depending on the quality of equipment and the internet connectivity and one adjusts accordingly. For example, if dynamic contrasts are diminished in an online connection, one is careful to judge a student, and when performed examples are needed, to employ larger contrasts. Over time, one has to train students to hear for themselves, and replace “There’s not enough of a *forte* there” to “Can you check if there’s a good *forte* there?” The teacher therefore takes on the role of coach rather than instructor, and this is a useful approach in the classroom, even if one can inform rather than query. Self-assessment is a necessity online, but remains a useful skill in in-person meetings.

## Visual cues and peripheral vision

The skill of using visual cues to communicate while a student is playing online reduces the need to stop and helps make the lesson more efficient. This includes using hand signs to tune intonation up or down, conducting the music with gestures and serving reminders on

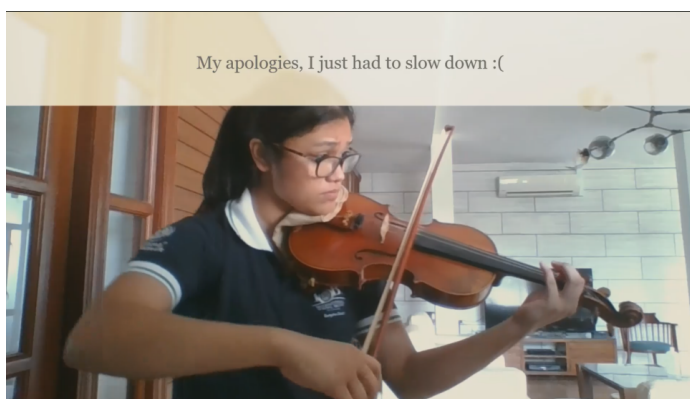
technical aspects. Applying this skill to in-person lessons will similarly result in a smoother teaching, with less stopping and talking needed to get a point across.

This also trains a student's peripheral vision. As one has more extended online lessons, the student will adjust to be able to read one's sheet music while having an eye on the teacher via the computer screen. Training peripheral vision in this way is something that does not get utilized in the classroom. This of course becomes particularly useful for students of orchestral instruments, not to mention chamber music. Helping students with the appropriate equipment setup (and the choice of having an occasional online lesson) therefore has the potential for long-term performance benefits.

## 2. Hybrid teaching

Online lessons provide a convenient option to save on travel time, such that students and teachers can arrange to alternate between the two each week, or customize a mixture that works for the needs as well as the attention span of the student. It may have been pedagogically more sound to have two short weekly lessons rather than one long one, but complications of travel or scheduling made that impractical – not so if one of those lessons is online. They also provide a good backup alternative, and reduce the need to cancel a lesson.

One useful component of online teaching to keep is either asynchronous or synchronous online "check-ups" in between lessons to check that progress is ongoing. Beyond the benefit of mid-week course corrections, student-recorded videos can have the benefit of self-assessment by the student. In-person lessons can incorporate a viewing of video submissions, and discussions of the playing – allowing the student to see him/herself from a different angle.



*Illustration 2: Asynchronous teaching by student video submission (left) and video reply (right)*

There is also the opportunity for having a select online audience for an in-person lesson: for example, another student covering the same repertoire or technique.

One aspect of performance that has faced quite a challenge is that of accompanying –the online format struggles in this regard. The use of recorded accompaniments provides an unusual teaching experience: the student has no choice but to follow the accompanist. This role reversal, while temporary, has the potential to boost listening skills and better collaboration eventually. This also provides for more time for a student to get to know the music as a whole, and can better prepared for in-person sessions.

Trading lessons with teacher colleagues has never been easier, which can now be done more regularly online, with teachers collaborating and providing one another with masterclasses or guest lessons for their students.

In online ensemble or sectional rehearsals, where only one person can be playing unmuted, opportunities to develop leadership skills have been presented. In order to make such sessions more interactive, students can be empowered to lead certain exercises or passages of music. This can be applied to in-person sectionals as well, encouraging more active student participation. It is worth exploring the continuation of some degree of online rehearsals to work on such strategies, while saving travel time and negating the need for a physical venue.

### 3. Online is ongoing

Some have noted that online education has been on the horizon for some time, and that this pandemic has simply fast forwarded us around five years. While certain changes may be stop-gap measures, major organisations are making long-term commitments, such as online examinations and competitions. The ABRSM and Trinity College London examinations have done so, and teachers who step up to the plate with regard to taking on technological challenges will have more options for their students. Beyond the issue of flexibility, the student leaves the exam with a recording of their playing, and unlike the live exam, parents can be part of an audience.

A second advantage is community events; the Internet allows people from all over the world to come together in a common online space, opening up possibilities for community building. With the possibility of engaging internationally renowned musicians while saving on airfare and hotel costs. Without having to rent large venues, online education is transforming the global musical landscape.



*Illustration 3: A virtual concert of the Music Society of Myanmar with artists from multiple countries (top), and ‘shining eyes’ after a keynote speech by Benjamin Zander (bottom)*

The continuing development and use of low-latency platforms for synchronous music-making like Jamkazam, Jamulus and Jacktrip provide possibilities for international collaboration despite border restrictions. Even for musicians who live in the same country, rehearsing on such online platforms saves the hassle of packing your instruments and gear, as well as travelling to a rehearsal.

The relief of getting back to in-person teaching should not overshadow opportunities to be gained from online teaching. The future is here, and its name is Technology.

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