



Dear All,

RE: COVID-19 UPDATE

As I am sure you are aware, the school closures announced on Wednesday, for an indefinite amount of time, meant we needed to announce the cancellation of sessions for tomorrow, and continued throughout the Easter period, until at least Saturday 18th April.

Whilst everything at present is speculation in regards to timing, it does appear given exam cancellations, and other comments made this week, there is a possibility of long-term school closures until June, and possibly even until the end of Summer Term.

Although we don't have all the answers... by any stretch on the imagination... we have put together an FAQ below to try and answer some of your questions. If you have anything else you would like to know, please do reach out to us and we'll do our best to answer.

Are the shows cancelled or postponed?

This is really difficult question to answer. One of the most important things over the coming weeks and months will be hope, but at the same time, we also have to be realistic.

Firstly, I think it's inevitable the shows won't take place as planned at the beginning of May. I think we need to be realistic about that, and yesterday we refunded all the tickets that had been purchased.

In terms of cancelling or postponing the show. At the moment, we don't know postponing the show will be possible. Not only are things so uncertain in terms of new dates and when it could happen, but also the tickets sales for the May shows were fairly poor (although we appreciate some of this was due to the uncertainty over this outbreak). The shows cost £2000+ to stage, and we need huge support from our members and their families to cover this cost. By postponing the shows, to a new date potentially at shorter notice, ticket sales are likely to be even lower.

Add to this, the difficulty of when to try and restage them. Based on current information, it would be late June at the earliest before we could try to rearrange them, but given we'd need a few weeks to recap the shows before staging them, we'd probably be well in to July, when if schools are re-open, they'd be finishing. If we postpone until next school year, again we'd need September to re-rehearse, and the shows would be October. As you know we cast our next years shows in September, and this would therefore have a serious impact on both those shows, and the pantomime. We did also discuss another open of putting these shows next May – but as we've already cast them, and taught all the songs and dances, it would be too difficult to 'tred water' for a year whilst not teaching anything new.

There are still two other options of postponement we are looking at – so please don't think anything has been decided at this point, and we will do everything possible to reschedule, however cancellation is something that is an unfortunate possibility.



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What are we suggesting if we cancel?

Our young people worked SO hard over the 8 months of rehearsals to stage a show that is amazing that we simply cannot just cancel the shows and move on. Our young people deserve better than that, at we need to make it work for them. After consultation with my team, I am pleased to announce we have a back-up plan that is ready to run if needed.

Based on us not being able to stage the shows in May as planned, and also us not being able to rearrange public performances, we will instead arrange for a whole day session for each group (e.g. Saturday for the Children's Group, Sunday for the Junior Group).

During that day, we will run the show at least once, and film this on our three new High Definition cameras. Removing the audience element will not only mean we can reschedule much more quickly (as we don't need to give audiences notice of the new dates to buy tickets), but will mean if mistakes are made due to the long break we may need to have before we restart we can go back and refilm bits, so all students can be seen at their best. This will enable us to still allow our young people to see the fruits of their labour, and allow all their hard word to be rewarded, whilst keeping them and our audiences as safe as possible and not having a huge impact on future shows.

When will sessions be back on?

We really can't tell you. I would love to say we'll be back on from Saturday 18th April, but I think it's unlikely (even though that's our currently cancellation date). Last night I handed the keys back to Notre Dame, and they will contact us when they are in a position to reopen to us.

Originally we had decided to stick to DfE guidelines, however, it has become clear that the DfE seem to have ever changing messages, that lack some consistency – so following their advice explicitly is no longer our plan moving forward.

What that means in practice, is if schools are closed for example until September, that wont automatically mean we will.

We of course need to be very careful, and ensure we uphold our duty of care to our young people and keep them safe. Yesterday the government enforced a closure on bars, clubs, theatre and leisure centres – they announced they will revue this monthly. No firm decision has been made, but if the situation were to improve, and the government announced it was safe for these social spaces to reopen whilst for some reason also keeping schools closed, we would look closely at the reasons and will then after consulting with all of you, decide whether to reopen or not.

Today, we have spent the day on a 'dry run' of the space that is created by temporarily moving the costumes from our costume store, and using this as a teaching area if needed. I'm pleased to say the space is huge, and bigger then the stage at Tor Bridge – so if we need a space to use temporarily, we have one.

What about Summer School?

We would really, really hope that things will have improved dramatically by the summer, to allow us to enable this week to run. This is again dependant on being given the all clear from Notre Dame that we can start using the school again.

Once we have a clearer idea on this, we will confirm everything for you. You can still book for Summer School, but no money will be taken until we are more secure in where we are.



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What about Theatre Royal Shows?

Theatre Royal have currently cancelled all shows until the beginning of May, which at present does not affect any shows we have booked. All money will be refunded if they cancel shows, so if you are interested in booking a show, please still do – although we are no longer taking money for the Theatre Royal Shows, we will take the money when we know the shows are taking place. Anyone who has already paid us for a Theatre Show will obviously get a refund should they be cancelled.

What will happen going forward?

This is going to be an incredibly difficult and trying time for all our students. Not only, by default, are lots of the students that attend Stage Stars social, but the social distancing we are about to travel through will change their way of life.

We want to make this as bearable as possible – and quite honestly, we love our students. Stage Stars is non-profit making, and if we didn't love what we did and spending time with them, we'd stop.

Fortunately, since it was conceived, Stage Stars has always been at the forefront of embracing technology. At the beginning of this school year, we issued all students with login details for our Office 365 cloud. This area is only accessible to our students and staff, making it safe and secure.

This gives our student not only access to a notice board and messaging service, but crucially "Skype for Business". This is available free to all our students, and means we can hold video chats for up to 50 people.

We are therefore planning to use this to continue some of our teaching including learning new songs as a group, and new dances.

The staff are currently organising tests of the service, and we are hoping by next weekend we may be in a position to hold our first session. If your child/children would like to join our virtual classes, please download the Skype for Business app on either Android, iPhone, or PC. For those that have lost their login details and passwords, we will ensure we get these to you over the coming week in preparation.

We are also planning on running some competitions and activities to keep our young people busy and engaged over the coming weeks.

What else are we doing?

Netflix can only be interesting for so long – at some point it's time for a change! Stage Stars has a huge catalogue of DVDs, and we are currently working of getting our copying facilities here so we can copy any DVDs you may want to order and watch whilst stuck inside. A full catalogue of our DVD's will be available on our web store by Sunday, and by using the code STAGESTARSSTUCKIN you will get 20% off the order – and we'll get them posted to you free of charge.

We are looking at the possibility of offering a streaming service temporarily, but we aren't sure the practicalities of this.

Stage Stars®

Monday, 16th March 2020



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Will Stage Stars close?

We certainly hope not! This is very much a pause, and even then, wherever and whenever possible we will be keeping in touch, and running things virtually.

Financially, over the last three years we have been able to move from loss making, to covering our costs (and being able to put away a little bit) so we have already refunded ticket sales, and been able to cover the props, posters and other show costs from our emergency fund.

Fortunately whilst we aren't rehearsing we don't have a large amount of outgoings, so we should remain cost neutral until we can restart again.

This may be a difficult time for us all, but our Stage Stars family will get through this, and be even stronger for it. We are here for anyone that needs us, and remember Stage Stars staff are training in ASIST and Mental Health First Aid – so if you need any support, please reach out to us. Further information will be released on our Facebook page, and we will also continue to stay in contact very regularly!

With Love, and we will see you before you know it.

Scott, Sophie, Brianna, Megan, Amber and Katie x