

Teaching Elementary Choir in a Virtual Environment



A presentation for Virtual CASMEC 2021
February 20, 2021
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Sponsored by Peripole



Why teach choir without contact?

- Tradition/attempt to maintain normalcy
- Had already begun the process before the quarantine
- Instructional opportunities related to using technology — these included commercial music production that were part of the 5th grade curriculum

Specific challenges for public school elementary singers

- The kids did not read music
- Access to technology — for public school students not guaranteed
- Age of students meant parent involvement/assistance essential

Instructional Preliminaries

- Process foreshadowing - **online lessons** preceding weeks focused on the process
- Song selection — needed to include a **mp3 accompaniment track**. Purchased from **JW Pepper**: <https://www.jwpepper.com/Rainbow/11166321.item#/>
- Audition — attempting to educate students as to final **video production issues**
- Permission forms - don't proceed without them!

Technology Review

- **GarageBand** - used to mix audio submitted by students to prepare **the guide track**
- **iMovie** - used to **develop video tutorials** and song w/lyrics guide **video prompt**
- **Zoom/Vimeo/Adobe Premiere Pro** — already familiar with **Zoom instruction** and **video hosting** on **Vimeo**. Parent volunteer agreed to edit the final video.

Instructional Sequence

Instruction consisted of **four 45 minute Zoom sessions Tuesday-Friday** the week before Memorial Day Weekend and **one optional session** the following week, with the video “shoot” to take place over the long weekend.

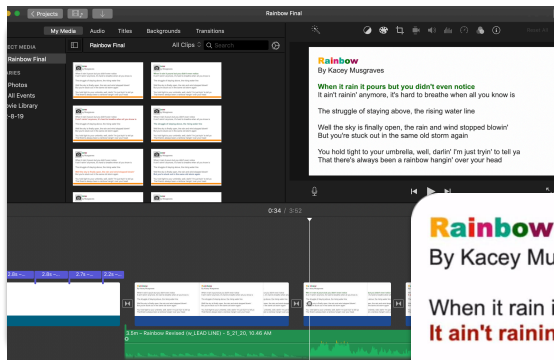
(Lesson Format - 5-10 minute discussion of technology related issues, followed by learning the song one verse at a time using echo imitation.)

Each lesson was accompanied by a **10 minute practice video**, posted on **Vimeo** the same day.



Corresponding Technology

Using **GarageBand** I created a **vocal guide track** by playing the melody on a midi keyboard and mixing with the accompaniment track. I used **Classic Ensemble** voice filter, a free download.



Rainbow

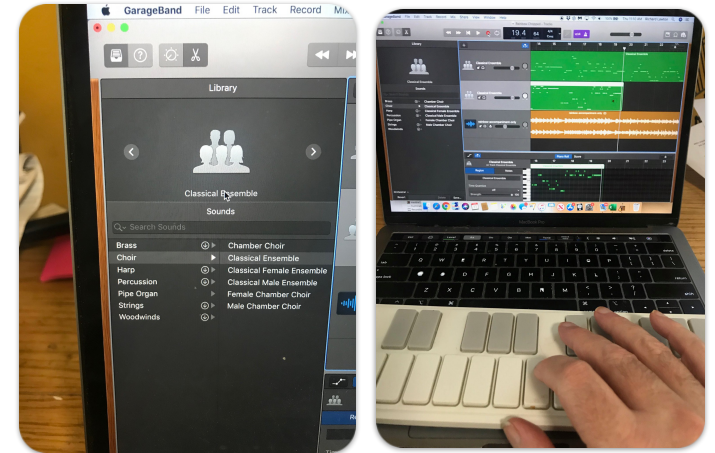
By Kacey Musgraves

When it rain it pours but you didn't even notice
It ain't rainin' anymore, it's hard to breathe when all you know is

The struggle of staying above, the rising water line

Well the sky is finally open, the rain and wind stopped blowin'
But you're stuck out in the same old storm again

You hold tight to your umbrella, well, darlin' I'm just tryin' to tell ya
That there's always been a rainbow hangin' over your head



At the same time I **developed a video prompt** using the mixed track, slides from **Keynote** (Apple's version of Powerpoint) and **iMovie**. Relevant sections of the prompt were cut into the individual daily practice videos.

The Long Weekend - Parent Assisted Video Production

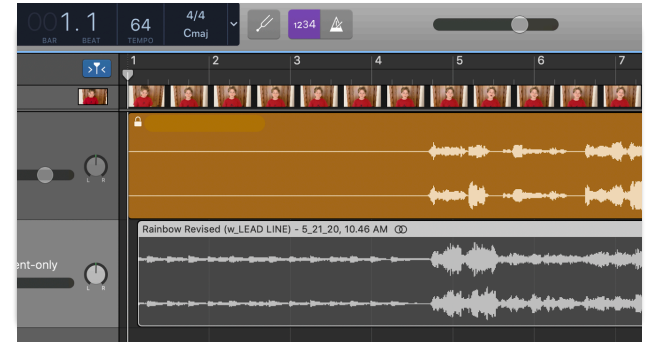
A final video of the complete song with guide track was posted. A link was sent to all students and their parents, along with printable lyrics and an m4a (mp3) recording. Instructions regarding **camera orientation**, **use of headphones** (required), **lighting**, **deportment**, and **ambient sound** were also sent.

Videos were submitted using **Dropbox and/or Google Classroom**. Of 14 singers, 6 completed the assignment successfully and 8 videos had to be redone. The reasons were invariably related to technical issues, not vocal.



Editing/Mixing Audio

- Dragging the video onto **GarageBand** strips off the audio
- **Sharing to iTunes** creates an m4a solo vocal track
- Tracks are combined and edited against accompaniment (minus vocal guide)



Rainbow

CODA/Verse 3

LISTEN:

That there's always been a rainbow hangin over...
your head....

REPEAT:

That there's always been a rainbow hangin over...
your head....

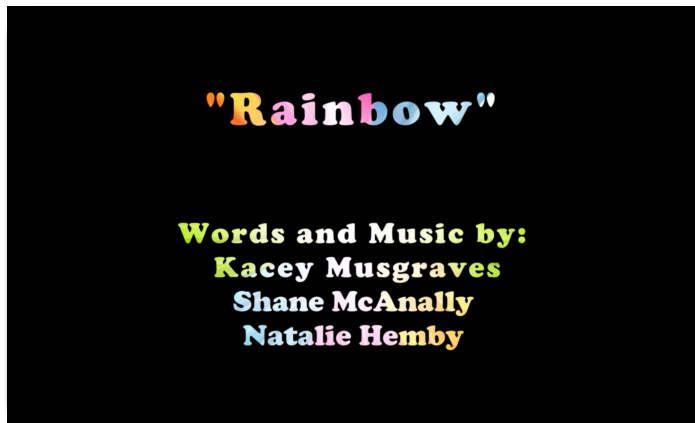
Reshooting/Looping

Students reshooting were given notes. Those who had been successful were invited to provide the **second vocal line** to be **looped into the existing picture**. When our final **Zoom meeting** was cancelled, this all had to be explained in a **final tutorial video**.

Locking Mix/Cutting Picture to Sound

Parent volunteer editing the picture to the final mixed track using **AVID Media Composer**. Other video editing options include **Adobe Premiere Pro** (recommended) and **Final Cut Pro**. All use a process of stacking the video track and resizing the images. Process is very memory intensive.

Note — at this point there is no longer a genuine “**sync**” between picture and sound.



The Pandemic Continues...

Over the summer I changed schools. Since September I have been teaching 120 K-6 students entirely on Zoom. I have never met them in person.

In November, I was asked to put together a holiday show. The program included a vocal performance of North Winds Blow by Group One, my kinders and pre K's.



Group One
North Winds Blow

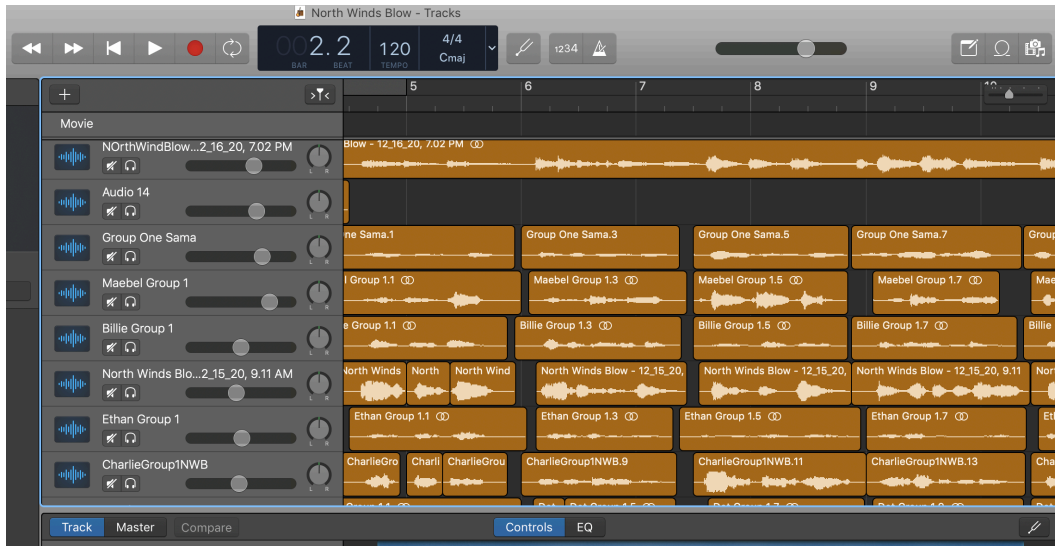
Instructional Sequence

This time instruction consisted of twice weekly instruction on to sing the song, with an emphasis on echo imitation.

As the presentation date drew near, families were provided with a sing along video which followed the same echo imitation pattern

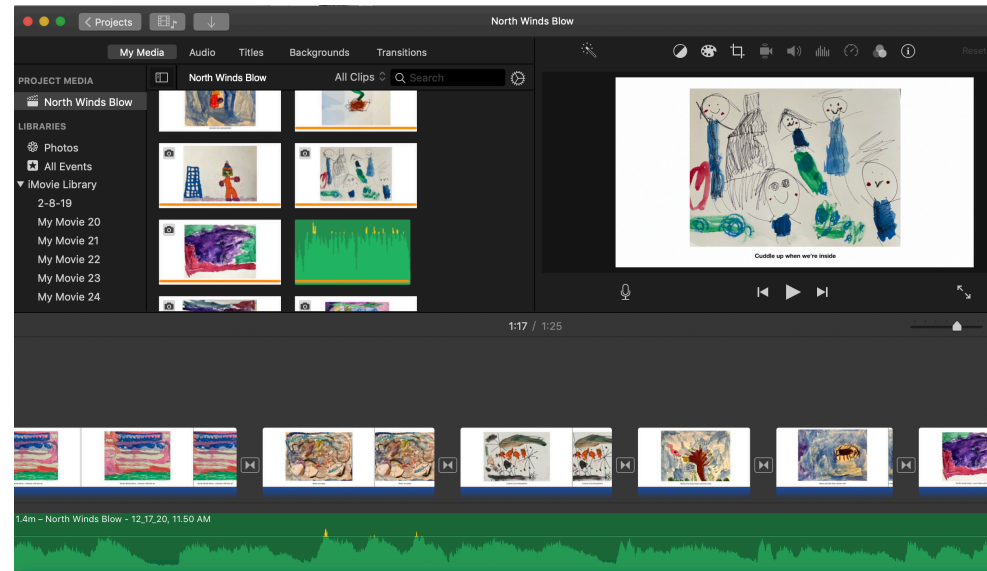
Parents were asked to submit audio with or without video.





Once a mixed track was generated it was added to iMovie along with hi resolution slides of the children's art.

Since the decision had been made to accompany the students singing with slide show of the art work, it was an easy task to consolidate the singing on **Garageband** and eliminate the gaps in the vocal track.



The result:



North winds blow...soon there will be snow

To view video click on <https://vimeo.com/492482141>

Final Thoughts

- Authenticity of Performance and Experience – the “tweaking” of the performance raising questions about authenticity – is this a problem?
- Instructional Goals – my conclusion was that while the kids missed out on the community aspects of music making, the individual performances and focus were better, as was differentiated instruction
- Professional Development – I learned how to integrate technology into my teaching and curriculum

Resources

GarageBand, iMovie, Keynote come preloaded on most Apple devices. **Vimeo, Google Docs, Dropbox,** and **Zoom** available for download in free versions.

More information about **Adobe Premiere Pro** at

<https://www.adobe.com/products/premiere.html?promoid=PQ7SQBYQ&mv=other>

For more information about **Final Cut Pro** go to <https://www.apple.com/final-cut-pro/>

To view **Rainbow Guide Track/Video Prompt** go to <https://vimeo.com/421313735>

For additional information on making virtual performances go to: <https://www.peripole.com/posts/1855>

Richard Lawton teaches kindergarten through Grade 6 general music at The Westland School, an independent elementary school in Los Angeles and is a (virtual) adjunct faculty member at California State University, East Bay in Hayward, California. Richard is an AOSA teacher educator certified in recorder and basic pedagogy and currently teaches recorder in the Los Angeles Orff Course. He is a frequent presenter at state and national conferences and a member of the *General Music Today* editorial board.



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Check out our Los Angeles Orff Summer Levels course - online for 2021
<https://www.laorff.org/summer-levels-training1.html>