



# CHAMBER MUSIC

## Chamber Music Performance Pandemic Style

by Patty Ryan

In July 2020, my colleagues in the Artaria String Quartet and I began rehearsals together after staying at home for the initial lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic. We were in the middle of preparing a 250<sup>th</sup> celebration of Beethoven's birth year and had just completed performing half of his string quartets when everything shut down and we were forced apart, thinking at first that our separation would only last a month. Four months later, after many discussions of how to gather safely, we reunited on the patio of our violist's condo where there was plenty of space for us to sit masked six feet apart outdoors, watching small chipmunks scamper about and the turtles lazily climb in and out of the nearby pond. After staying indoors for so long, the rehearsals outdoors were very welcomed and refreshing, though there was one huge exception—the wind!

In unpredictable bursts, the wind would swipe our pages askew and even aggressively knock down music stands and cases that would halt our progress in rehearsals. Even though we were equipped with clothes pins and brought our most sturdy music stands, we all took turns juggling with our music, choreographing how we would creatively turn pages. If only there was a tool to turn pages for us and remove the clutter! How could we perform outdoors like this without stopping to clip down our music, interrupting the performance?

Realizing that live outdoor concerts were to become more common for us in light of the pandemic, we transitioned our sheet music to digitized, electronic tablets (iPads) with PageFlip <https://www.pageflip.com> foot pedals for page turns. Not only

did this alleviate our issues with the wind, but we also realized that there were many more perks to reading music electronically. Since the iPad lights up while in use, visibility is much clearer and allows for possibilities to perform in dimly lit rooms and environments without a stand light. The brightness and tint of the screen can be adjusted as well to reduce eye strain and fatigue as well as prevent any light distraction for the audience. If there's a glare from an overhead light source reflecting off the iPad, there are anti-glare screen protectors that can be applied to the face of the iPad, though tilting the music stand to avoid the glare is another easy solution. The music library app, forScore <https://forscore.co>, has a myriad of useful tools for editing, scanning, sharing files, and also some basic musician tools like a metronome and tuner. With a stylus (Apple Pencil), editing is quick, clean and simple. Since all our music is stored on the forScore app, we are also able to cross reference between our many parts and can connect to internet resources at the touch of our fingertips. Reading off of scores is also a possibility now that page turns are no longer an issue, which is especially useful for quickly learning contemporary music and pieces we are collectively unfamiliar with. Although we now have to make sure all our electronics are charged prior to rehearsals and performances, the battery life on both the iPad and PageFlip is very strong, lasting many hours and charges quickly. We even invested in K&M iPad stands <https://www.k-m.de/brand/us/all-ipad-smartphone-and-tablet-holder/> that keep the iPads sturdy against any gusts of wind while we are playing. They

also look very sharp on stage!

Now that we are preparing to complete our Beethoven String Quartet Cycle in 2022, we have all the quartets stored on our tablets, making it easily portable without fear of losing music along the way. With a legendary project like this, there is a comfort knowing that everything is all in one place, having incredible resources and tools to allow us the flexibility to perform in any situation. The anticipation of celebrating Beethoven's string quartet music has only intensified over the pandemic and our technological upgrade will allow us to reach more audiences in venues that were not feasible beforehand.

Artaria will be performing Part 2 of their Beethoven String Quartet Cycle in January, February and March 2022 in Sundin Music Hall at Hamline University in St. Paul, MN, Urness Recital Hall at St. Olaf College in Northfield, MN, and Nola Starling Recital Hall at Viterbo University in La Crosse, WI. For more information, visit [www.artariaquartet.com](http://www.artariaquartet.com)

*Patricia Ryan is the cellist of the Artaria String Quartet based in St. Paul, Minnesota and faculty of the Artaria Chamber Music School and Stringwood Chamber Music Festival. She is also a core member of the Houston-based ensemble KINETIC, 10<sup>th</sup> Wave Chamber Music Collective and the Delphia Cello Quartet based in the Twin Cities. Ms. Ryan is the host of the podcast Haydn Behind the Music Stand, where she interviews classical musicians on their careers and inspirations outside the field. [www.patriciaryancello.com](http://www.patriciaryancello.com) †*