



## 2021 Cellospeak Studio Chronicles



After the highly successful 2020 debut of our virtual Cellospeak Studio events, the 2021 Studios brought double the musical instruction, enjoyment, and camaraderie. This past July, Cellospeak presented two different three-day virtual workshop events via Zoom. This year's two virtual workshops provided a parallel to the traditional Cellospeak summer Skill Builder and Ensemble workshops. The **Technique Studio**, which took place on the weekend of July 16 – 18 was followed by the **Performance Studio** two weeks later, July 30 - August 1. A total of 43 people registered for the first weekend and 31 registered for the second, with several people attending both events. Many of the participants were long-time attendees of the annual Cellospeak summer workshops, but several first-time attendees also participated. The convenience of attending the Cellospeak Studio events via Zoom from home made it possible for cello enthusiasts from every region of the U.S. to participate.

Both Studios were organized and hosted by Artistic Director **Bomin Collins** and President **Aileen Pisciotta** with the assistance of the Cellospeak Board.



The technique and practice sessions, special presentations and virtual recital performances for both Studios were led by seasoned Cellospeak faculty members **Marion Baker**, **Bob Battey**, **Nancy Baun**, **Amy Butler**, **Louise Butler**, **Jihea Choi**, **Katlyn DeGraw**, **Carl Donakowski**, **Kristin Gilbert**, **Ismar Gomes**, **Bob Jesselson**, **Ken Law**, **Devree Lewis**, **Susanna Mendlow**, **Camilo Perez-Mejia**, **Alan Saucedo Estrada**, **Dan Shomper**, and **Natalie Spehar**, as well as Artist-in-Residence **James Jacobs**. See the full bios of each faculty member at <https://www.cellospeak.org/our-faculty/>.



## Technique Studio



The **Technique Studio** emphasized improving individual skills. Over the three days, nine different technique sessions were offered, focusing on developing and refining good cello technique. These instructional sessions addressed both right and left hand technique including articulated bowings, thumb position, working with bass, tenor and treble clefs, fingerboard geography and playing harmonics, cello care, variations in pedagogy, tone production, techniques to express musical style, and chordal elements of music theory.



Special evening discussions addressed the progression of repertoire for cello study and how maximize efficiency of practice time by building productive habits.

An additional daily session was devoted to learning a piece of music compatible with each participant's level of proficiency, including **Webster's Scherzo** (easy), **Schumann's Traumerei** (elementary); **Fauré's Après un rêve** (intermediate) and **Cassado's Frescobaldi Toccata** (advanced). Beginning of the day casual conversations and end of the day "hangouts" over the Zoom link provided an opportunity to socialize with old friends and to meet new participants.

## Performance Studio



The centerpiece of the **Performance Studio** was learning and performing a special five-part all-cello arrangement by **Gary Fitzgerald** of the "Jig" from **Gustav Holst's St. Paul's Suite**. Sheet music and rehearsal tracks of this lively dance music were provided in advance of the workshop so that participants had the option to prepare their parts. During the Performance Studio, the five separate parts were rehearsed in coached sectionals. Subsequently, each participant recorded and submitted a video of their chosen part, to be compiled by faculty member **Marion Baker** into a single virtual group performance for posting on the Cellospeak's YouTube channel. The completed work is at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Or6eYaf8tzI>.



During the Studio event, daily classes addressed various aspects of cello technique as related to Holst's Jig, including playing hooked bow, shifting techniques, string crossings, chromatics, intervals, accidentals, and dealing with changing time signatures. A session on sight reading strategies and one on good practicing protocol rounded out the instructional offerings. A Friday evening session featured **Marion Baker** hosting valuable "Tech Tips" related to recording and submitting the Jig.



**James Jacobs**, Cellospeak's newly appointed Artist-in-Residence, radio host with Classical WETA-FM, broadcasting in the Washington, D.C. area, and author of the fascinating Cello Variations Blog (found on the Cellospeak website) hosted Saturday evening's very engaging commentary/demonstration about historical influences in Holst's Jig as well as his own analysis/insights about the piece.



Most of the technique sessions during both Studios were accompanied by printed guidelines, musical excerpts and practice resources. All of the technique sessions were recorded. The resulting videos and accompanying written materials are available on the Cellospeak website ([www.cellospeak.org](http://www.cellospeak.org)) for unlimited streaming exclusively by registrants for a few months, and after January 2022 to all Cellospeak members.

The *pièce de résistance* of both Cellospeak Studio sessions was the magnificent faculty recital that took place on the final evening of each weekend. Faculty members contributed a wide variety of pre-recorded musical offerings. Some of the musicians played multi-part pieces in which they performed all of the parts themselves, while others performed with music colleagues or family members. Included were solo cello performances, cello-piano and two cello duos, cello and vocal collaborations, cello trios and quartets, and original arrangements for multiple cellos. Pieces included an incredible range works by **Bach, Khudoyan, Faure, Kossovitz, Beach, Saint-Saens, Bernstein, Beethoven, Rachmaninoff, Bridge, Frescobaldi, Cassado** and a stunning cello transcription of **Wagner's Tannhauser** accompanying an original video compilation of images from the Hubble telescope. A few faculty canine companions even made cameo appearances! All in all, each 90-minute concert was an impressive collection of varied recitals streamed on Cellospeak's YouTube channel. As former Cellospeak conductor and accompanist Gary Fitzgerald often said, "Either you were there, or you weren't." Those who were there experienced something very inspiring and special!



Actually, the same can be said of the entire Cellospeak Studio 2021 experience. If you were there, we hope that you came away inspired and with an enhanced set of cello skills. If you weren't, we hope that you can join us next time!

*Prepared by Barb Stephenitch and Aileen Pisciotta  
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