

PRESS RELEASE

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Resilience and Innovation in a time of Covid 19

Avalon School of the Arts provides connections to creativity

Trying to connect in a time of social distancing may seem impossible, especially when considering the performing arts. However, Avalon School of the Arts in Holland, Michigan has forged a path through online learning. Co-owners Rich and Marie Burkholder are determined to continue their 16-year tradition of providing quality arts instruction to the community during the COVID 19 crisis and beyond.

Avalon School of the Arts offers classes and private instruction in dance and theatre. The Avalon Music Academy of Holland offers private lessons in piano, guitar, ukulele, drums, bass, violin, and voice. In the early stages of COVID 19 news, the Burkholders began exploring ways to continue Avalon's mission to teach and promote the Arts by offering high quality online instruction with their professional staff. They also wanted to reach out to families and aid them as students quarantined at home. "Online lessons and classes are a wonderful solution for our Avalon students", reports Avalon Music Academy Director Rich Burkholder. "They offer us the ability to reach students at any time throughout the day via Zoom, Skype or FaceTime. This allows students and teachers to interact visually, which is so important for teaching relationships. Music teachers are offering private lessons while dance and theater teachers hold group sessions. To this date, we have done over 800 online music lessons and 3 weeks of fully online dance and theater classes. We have received all positive feedback from our families who are thankful their students have a creative outlet for their energy."

Currently, staff have converted areas in their homes for online teaching. Teachers and students work on practicing skills and learning new techniques much as they do when together on site. Dance Department Director Marie Burkholder mentions other benefits of online classes. "We are so thankful to be able to offer our students normal activities during this time. Students are meeting with their teachers and classmates during their regular class times. They see and greet one another, get feedback from their teacher, and work on choreography & technique. We have had great conversations about the importance of adaptability, resilience, and teamwork."

In stressful times the arts aid in maintaining mental health and physical well-being. Immersion in music and movement positively stimulates the brain. Rich Burkholder adds, "We are seeing students make huge gains because of renewed focus and dedication. Our students are using this time to grow as artists and as people. It's beautiful. We are also offering more opportunities to connect such as our 'Cabin Fever Buster Saturdays' Zoom forum and our live 'Sunday Afternoon Singalongs' on our Facebook page."

Avalon is a large family-oriented community united through the arts. The staff is passionate about their areas of expertise. They take joy in sharing this passion with students. Parents report improved attitudes during and after their child's classes and lessons. "Thank you so much for figuring out a way to hold class. I think Zoom is a perfect way to keep class going and give the kids a bit of their normal routine. The feed was clear, and the audio was great. It was incredibly similar to an in-person class. I enjoyed getting to see the children's progress. It was surprisingly easy to sign up for the class via Zoom." Students are so excited and happy to see their teachers and classmates. Great progress is being made with extra time dedicated to practice.

Difficult times can provide new, innovative ways to thrive. Avalon School of the Arts is resilient in connecting while we all strive to find a new normal. Contact the dance and theatre department at (616) 738-6495 / info.avalonschoolofthearts@gmail.com or the music department at (616) 834-0854 / info@avalonmusicacademyofholland.com to connect with them.

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