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## | Safely Making Music with Friends & Family during Coronavirus



BY MARY AMATO ON AUGUST 31, 2020

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You can initiate playing and/or singing with your immediate tribe of friends, housemates, or family whether you actually live together or are connecting online. Given the current Covid-19 pandemic, there are measures you can take as a precaution when playing with close friends and family. If you're lucky, you've got players on cajon, guitar, bass, uke, banjo/lele—the whole Luna family—right in your house. But even if you're the only one in your group who is a musician, you can make some magic happen.

### ONLINE

If you're leading online via the most common platforms, like Zoom or Skype (Jamkazam is another story and needs a separate article) try these tips:

1. **Keep it short. Choose one or two songs per session.**
2. **Go for familiar and simple. Choose songs that everybody knows with a simple chord progression. Lean on Me in the key of C by Bill Withers and Let it Be in C by the Beatles are great first choices. If you want to teach a new song, make sure it's simple. Songs with a lot of repetition help everybody to succeed.**

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3. **Send lead sheets ahead of time.** Songs with chords and lyrics that fit on one page are easiest. Emailing the lead sheets ahead of time, so your band mates can pull them up on their phones or tablets or print them out.
4. **Focus on the meaning of the song, not on how well you all play it.** If it's a joyful song, then enjoy it. If you're singing the blues, wail with abandon.
5. **Once you're ready to sing/play, ask everybody to turn off their microphones.** If you've tried to sing/play in real time online, you'll know there's a slight delay that you may not notice in conversation but that becomes glaringly apparent with music. You won't be able to all hear one another, but each person will be able to sing/play along with you.

#### IN PERSON (*Safely*)

In addition to following the recommended safety precautions by the [CDC](#), keeping a 6 foot distance from one-another and wearing a face covering is certainly important. If you're leading whoever happens to live with you—whether it's family or friends—follow tips 1-4 above and then add these:

1. **In the perfect world, it is ideal to share your instruments with others, even if they don't play!** However, given the current pandemic, you'll want to make sure the instrument is fully sanitized before passing your instrument along. If you have two ukes, give one to a housemate or family member and, if they don't know how to play it, encourage them to use the uke as a percussion instrument by strumming along with the right while holding the neck with the left to dampening the strings. The strings will make a percussive sound but won't sound any specific tones.
2. **Encourage a simple body percussion for those who don't play an instrument, such as snaps or foot taps or chest thumps.**
3. **Enable eye contact by going paperless.** If the lyrics of the song are well-known, go paperless. Go over the chord progression ahead of time and then call out the chords as you all play.
4. **If your band is live at home, try an after-dinner ritual.** Rather than trying to convene everybody at a specific time, try agreeing in advance to after-dinner sessions. It's easier to get started when everybody is already around the table together.

A great band leader can make sure that everybody in your group can join in. All ages. All experience levels. And keeping safety in mind at all times. Sing your hearts out and you can't go wrong.

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#### ABOUT AUTHOR



MARY AMATO



Mary Amato teaches uke and songwriting and is the leader of a community music group called SoHy Sing. She is also the author of many novels that feature characters who are musicians and include original music. Her latest book series is for kids and it's about a young uke player called Lucy McGee. Find out more about her at [maryamato.com](http://maryamato.com) and [thrumssociety.com](http://thrumssociety.com).

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**disqus\_aP5BIBOP1e** • a year ago

I love the idea of playing with others online! It's a great alternative until we are able to be together again.

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**Daniel Blackwell** • a year ago

Some really great tips. In particular I hadn't thought of No.5. I knew there was delay so never thought of playing live online together... With the mics off, that could save bags of time; if recording, you could even play several takes and choose the best of three.

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**Larry** • a year ago

There were many good ideas. We've tried to FaceTime playing with friends but not everyone had iPhones. I looked into Zoom. 30 minutes free but if we all chip in, a zoom membership is affordable and gives us almost unlimited time to play, discuss, and learn.

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**Marie Valenzuela** • a year ago

I lead a small uke sing and strum group that meets once a month. We haven't met since February because of the virus but hope to resume our get togethers as soon as it is safe.

I hadn't thought of trying to meet via Zoom, but the suggestions in the article make it seem much easier than I thought, and very do-able. I'll share the article with the group and see what we can do.

Thanks!!!

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**Don Myers** • a year ago

A lot of good ideas here! Thankew!

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**sonoranstrummer** • a year ago

Hi. I've been Zooming with fellow Ukulele players during all these troubled times. At least we have Zoom! I found it much better to practice in person to learn more, that day will come. Plus working a little bit on BandLab. Cheers

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**Kay Harry** • a year ago

I've been "attending" several ukulele jams through Zoom and YouTube. I'm missing my neighborhood music jam and my church choir, but these virtual gatherings are starting to grow on me. I'm finding more of them! But I wouldn't really want to lead one of them.

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**Gregor Povše** • a year ago

Nice ideas to spice up this melancholic September!

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**William E Monticue** • a year ago

Great Article, great idea. Reminds me of Steven Stills song " if you can't be with the one you love, love the one your with" so if you can't play with the ones you play with, play with the ones your with!

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