

# THE SHOWS MUST GO ON

## SUZANNE ROLT



*'It's a giant game of musical chairs' In her weekly diary, the chief executive of St George's Bristol charts the efforts to ensure this beloved concert venue survives lockdown*



Master of suspense: St George's chair Ben Heald and artist Luke Jerram survey the latter's *Apollo* sculpture

It's now three months since we closed the doors of St George's, so a good time to take stock. By nature, I'm in the "count your blessings" camp, and I still believe that if we can just survive the immediate storm, there's every chance that we can get through this. But each week the cash reserves head further south, and with no news yet on the emergency funding front it's difficult to not feel a bit defeated sometimes.

On Saturday, we invited a local folk trio into the hall to record a new music video for our Thursday lunchtime series. There was no audience present and we held to the social distancing rules, positioning the musicians on separate sides of the gallery. They opened with a jubilant fanfare to celebrate the summer solstice and it felt momentous; hopefully, it will prove to be the first step in our journey back to operating as a live performance space.

Our audience has been behind us all the way, with viewer numbers for our concerts increasing each

week. More importantly, several have sent in personal letters of thanks and donations, which helps St George's as well as musicians themselves. Concert promoters are making pencil bookings for the hall: the brave ones are gambling on pre-Christmas dates, others are looking further ahead. It looks like autumn 2021 could be the busiest season on record, as everyone rushes to make up for lost time.

Thankfully, my Covid test results came back negative and I'm now much more aware of the need to pace myself better. But we're now down to three staff members. To get away from computer screens, we decide to carry out some jobs that were hard to do when audiences were flowing through the doors.

Our impressive glass sculpture, *Apollo*, designed by artist Luke Jerram, is a real focal point of our new building, suspended from the high ceiling of our foyer. It's beautiful to behold but a demon to clean. We need a cherry-picker to elevate us

20ft into the air, but the cost is prohibitive and they're thin on the ground at present. We try instead to reach as far as we dare over the balcony with the longest-handled feather brushes we can find. Sheets of dust float down on to café tables, but there's no one here to notice, so no harm done.

The afternoon descends into a giant game of musical chairs as we try to figure out how one-metre social distancing might work in the main hall. Equipped with a tape measure and set of floor plans, we set about stacking away two out of every three chairs. The hall looks bare and our trademark intimacy feels distinctly compromised but, as one supporter told me this week, St George's is more than just a building, it's a community. It's not really the chairs we're missing, it's the people, and we can't wait for them to return.

*'Our glass sculpture, Apollo, is beautiful to behold but a demon to clean'*

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