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LAPD Band performances during the pandemic

by Michael Ellington

Adverse circumstances require creative solutions. The Los Angeles Police Concert Band hasn't performed in public or met for rehearsals since effects of the COVID-19 pandemic intruded on all our lives in March. Band Conductor and Musical Director Maestro Richard Allen is a decidedly creative musician. The county's pandemic guidelines indicated that a band of over 50 musicians couldn't gather indoors and play a variety of wind instruments for a protracted period. Given these challenges, he came up with a way for the Band "To Perform and To Serve" during these uncertain times.

Maestro decided on a digital gathering of Band members. If he could exactly assemble the individual performances of all the parts necessary to perform a musical composition, a decent recording might be the result. He selected one of several editing programs and set about deciding what song would be a good first effort. The Band is used to playing a variety of marches at recruit graduations and other city- and Department-related functions. Maestro selected one of "March King" John Philip Sousa's best-known works. In 1987, Congress declared it the national march of the United States. Maestro selected "The Stars and Stripes Forever." He emailed Band members copies of the music for their particular parts and a reference track for them to follow.

The next challenge Maestro had to overcome was recreating the "feeling" of performing as a group. "The ability to play together in a section is impossible to do when you don't have a section to play with," he said. He explained that musicians need to hear what the person next to them is doing. In that way, they can compensate for and support a variety of musical subtleties. In dramatic terms, not



Richard and Band.

only is there no fellow actor to "bounce off of," there is no *visible* conductor to lead the Band and make adjustments. At a live rehearsal, Band members not only tune their instruments to concert pitch; they tune to each other as well. That is difficult to do when everyone is recording themselves separately.

After several days, Maestro started to receive emails of finished performances. He assembled them in his computer, synching the trumpet section with the saxophones and clarinets until the entire Band was digitally accounted for. He used two separate programs, one for the audio and another for the video. This presented the additional problem of boosting audio and enlarging video close-ups during passages that featured various sections or individual soloists. This was Maestro's first time attempting to do this.

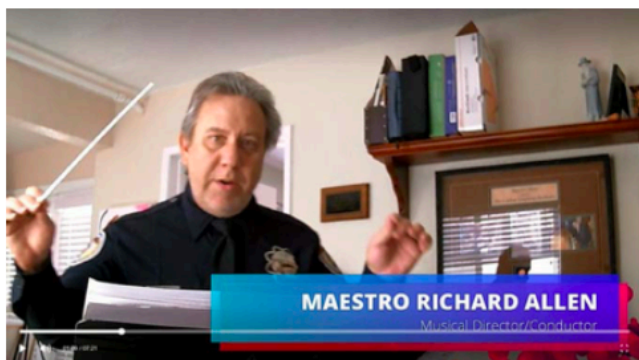
So positive and supportive was reaction to this first video, Maestro decided to attempt a more ambitious production. Vocals provided by LAPD's "Singing Cop" Jim Starr and Band vocalist Christina Challey rounded out a different kind of offering. Maestro used his piano part as the only reference track for Band members to follow. He noted that for this series of recordings, Band members raised the quality of the devices they used



Richard on piano for "God Bless the USA."

to capture their performances. Composer Lee Greenwood is quoted as having said that this was a song he had wanted to write all his life. See what you think about "God Bless the USA" and "The Stars and Stripes Forever" at the Band's website, www.lasown.com.

For more information about the Band, visit our website at www.lasown.com and contact Jim Starr, executive director, at sngcop@aol.com. For greatly appreciated donations, please go to www.lapolice-foundation.org, and in the comments box, put "For the Band." ♦



Richard conducting virtually.

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