

Communities for Immunity: Stories about COVID The Peale, Baltimore | 2022

Tristan Stefanovic (00:00): Hello, everyone. So lovely to be here with you tonight. Let me introduce myself, Tristan Stefanovic, I'm a junior at the Baltimore School for the Arts. And tonight I'm going to be sharing with you the culmination of a several week program that we've worked with a program called Voices on Vax. It's been a lovely opportunity and I'm so proud and happy to share this story with you tonight.

Tristan Stefanovic (00:21): So this story begins sometime back in 2019, the fall of 2019, and at this time I was beginning my time at Baltimore School for the Arts as a freshman. I was quite excited because this is a very unique school. And I've heard a lot of about it because both of my siblings have been there. The reason it's such a unique school is because it's a combination of academics and arts at the same time. My personal art specialization, as you can see behind me, I am a cellist. And so I was very excited to be able to combine my learning in such a way.

Tristan Stefanovic (00:55): So the first few months of school was excellent. It was really great to be able to have academic classes and then sit down, not only learn about music, but playing ensembles with others, whether it be large ensembles with other string instruments or with full orchestra settings or chamber music, which is a smaller group. It's just such a great opportunity to be able to go into school with smile on your face and say, "This is something I really enjoy doing."

Tristan Stefanovic (01:26): Every year at the Baltimore School for the Arts we put on a show called Expressions. You may have heard of it if you're a Baltimore local, where we combine all of the departments together. So there's a theater production, there is music, there is dance, there is all this stuff combined together, it's really fantastic. And so March of 2020, was when my first Expressions was, I was extremely excited to be able to participate for my first time. I was both playing with the string orchestra and also with the band to accompany some of the singers playing several arrangements of some popular songs and it went fantastically. We had shows and our final show was on a Sunday night and it went really well. It was great to come back to school the next morning and say, "We did it. We can stop worrying about this because it was really a great experience."

Tristan Stefanovic (02:16): And I think it was about that Thursday when we were in an orchestra rehearsal that our principal at the time, Dr. [inaudible 00:02:23] walked into the room and took aside our music director and had a word with her. And we didn't know it at the time, but this was the beginning of the end so to speak in the sense that we would not come back to school the next day or the next two weeks or for the next year. And it was at the end of that day that we found out that we should take everything out of our lockers and we probably won't be returning for two weeks. And at the time we think, this is great. We just finished our big show. We get two weeks off, excellent. No problem. I can deal with this. I can go relax. I can do whatever I want.

Tristan Stefanovic (03:04): But as it started to drag on, we realized, this is something serious, and they started setting up virtual classes and it was just a mess because there was no schedule that worked together well. Some teachers had classes at 8 in the morning and some had them at 11, and there was no single schedule and you might have overlapping classes. It was really a mess, and it was so chaotic

and such a stressful time, I'm sure for both the teachers and administrators, but especially the students, because you were jumping your way from one Google Meet to the next and saying, "Oh, excuse me, I have to go to math class now." It was terrible.

Tristan Stefanovic (03:41): And another terrible thing is that we didn't have our arts classes to keep us happy and doing things other than academics. And so kind of, we finished that year on a kind of a low note, as many of us did, I kind of just waited out the summer and around August right before school started, we were informed by the city school system that our school would be digital. And that was a big blow to us because 90% of what we do in person, especially from a musical perspective, we cannot do on a Zoom call. We can't play together. We have to play one at a time and then listen to each other and it just doesn't work. It's not the same.

Tristan Stefanovic (04:22): And yeah, school started last... Or yeah, it would've been a year ago now, in September of 2020, and we had a schedule fortunately, and academics were fine, music classes it just wasn't the same magic. And vaccines start to come out for adults, but there's still no word for teenagers. And so also around March or April, we start getting word the vaccine might be coming, but still not approved for 16 year olds.

Tristan Stefanovic (04:49): And so, one of the things that I did during the pandemic and having schooling at home is to escape sitting at a computer for 10 hours a day, I would on Sundays, this is at the suggestion of my father, we'd go in hikes. Whether it be in Maryland or in Pennsylvania, this was a great way to escape sitting at a computer and going out into nature is fantastic. And so it was after one of these hikes in around March or April that I find out that they have some surplus vaccines at a site across the Bay Bridge in Maryland and they're offering them the 16 year olds. And so we go, and it's a three hour drive, but oh my God, was it worth it. We drove up, rolled down the window, stuck our arms out the window, got the shot, and drove back. And then the next two weeks later, I got my shot at the Baltimore City Convention Center.

Tristan Stefanovic (05:35): And so we're going to fast forward again here to the beginning of this year, just a few months ago, and being able to walk into school knowing that I am protected and I am able to do the things that I love while also furthering my education is such a great feeling. And I know not all of you can relate to this because you may not be a musician or an artist of some kind, but if you are an athlete, if you are somebody who really enjoys doing what they do for work, and that has been taken away from you, it's the same feeling. We've all experienced something. And I think the lesson here really is that you really don't know what you have until it's gone. We take these things all for granted and the way to get these things back right now is getting yourself vaccinated, is getting the booster shot, is getting family and friends vaccinated to make sure that we stop new variants from popping up and stop prolonging this. So we can all go back to the things that we love.