

## An Actor speaks

Posted on 12:00pm Sunday 5th Jul 2020

One of the things that has impressed me most about life during the Covid-19 crisis, is how inventive people have become, not just in how we work, but how we communicate, and support one another.

I am a professional actor and at the beginning of April, I should have been in Lithuania, filming some commercials for a Baltic telecommunications company, one of my favourite gigs! The narrative follows the happenings in a restaurant, rather like the OXO family ads here a while ago, and I've been involved for the last four years as "Frau Gerda".



As foreign travel was impossible during lock down, none of the English actors could be there in person, so the clients came up with an ingenious solution enabling the commercials to run on. A "body double" kitted out in PPE, played my colleague's part, the chef in the restaurant kitchen. With a visor and huge gloves it was impossible to tell it was not the original actor, as he tried, and failed, to chop vegetables, taste a sauce, and see through his misted goggles! The English actor supplied the sound track from a makeshift studio in his daughter's bedroom on the Isle of Wight, and the result was a comedic triumph! The saga of life in the restaurant continued, and we all hope to be back playing ourselves soon.



Self-tapes (where you record your audition at home and send it in) are an important part of how actors are considered for roles these days, but new restrictions have meant new challenges. A monologue is a doddle, but what about the other parts? To help out mates, I have recorded off-camera voices at home, and sent an audio file to the awaiting auditionee, for them to fill in their responses as required (tricky to time!). On other occasions I have been present, wearing a mask, and observing a two-metre distance, (sometimes *al fresco*), hoping my responses will still be picked up by the mobile phone recording us both. Fortunately, I never had to make myself heard through a window!

Zoom script readings have been a particular joy, while online meetings have facilitated the work of the various acting charities, of which there are many. Supporting actors, stage management, and others whose livelihoods in theatres nationwide have suddenly dried up, has been crucial. The Actors Benevolent Fund, of which I am a Trustee, set up a 2020 Emergency Fund, and we have been able to continue our work and support throughout the year, thanks to I.T. and the generosity of the public! A performance of the musical version of David Walliams' *The Midnight Gang* in which I played three old ladies (not all at the same time) and which deserved a far wider audience, achieved just that when it was streamed as part of the Chichester Festival Theatre Season. You may have seen a request for donations after such free streamed performances. Well, those donations have meant support not just for the theatres themselves, but for their staff, and charities such as the Actors Benevolent Fund. So, thank you! All in all, my Covid-19 experience has taught me that isolation can lead to greater cooperation, and that's a good thing!

Marilyn