

Custode (cont.)

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felt that. I know exactly; I was there.' And you start seeing that connection. And I just said, you know, 'Whether people think it's good or not, if I'm able to connect with people, and it resonates, then it's worth sharing.'

"And at the end of the day, I don't know if that means I'm good; if I'm not good. And I guess I don't necessarily care that much, because, if it resonates with people and there's meaning, and there's understanding and communication, I think that's where the worth is."

Custode livestreamed shows during the pandemic, reaching audiences around the world. She will continue sharing music in this way, but, "I'm definitely excited to see live performance come back," she said. "That's hands down, for sure. And whether that means I'm able to get on a plane and get to New York, go to Toronto, go to Nashville, I'm definitely excited to hit the road again in a very traditional way."

Performing on stage comes naturally to Custode: "I have always been my happiest when I'm singing and playing and performing. Like I said, for a while I did cover music. And I was very involved in theater when I was young; dance and theater. And I always loved singing, and just being onstage in front of people. ...

"I think for me, it was a little bit backwards, because I knew, from a pretty young age, that I wanted to go into the performing arts. I definitely knew that I was super-happy when I did that. I was the best version of myself. And then I was really passionate about theater, and then was involved with jazz and classical music, and then was doing pop stuff, and then it just kind of came together in this weird kind of way where I was like, 'Wait a minute, I think I have my own voice that I'd like to express.' "

At NFHS, Custode said, "I tell my students this all the time: I became a teacher because I love music and I love sharing music. I think that's part of performing, too - it's that sharing aspect. And I think it's very natural for a lot of performers to be performing educators; I think it's a very natural fit."

"And my kids this past year have struggled. I'm a band teacher, and imagine a concert band where, on Monday and Tuesday, there's one clarinet, one flute, one baritone, they're one on a part. And they're young; we're talking ninth graders. So, put yourself in that very beginning band stage: You're terrified; you're at a new school; and you have to play your part. And if you don't play it, nobody else plays it."

"And I told them, I said, 'If you ever feel like in your life that you don't matter, this is living proof that you matter. Because if your part's not here, we miss you; we miss your sound; we miss your mistakes; we miss your squeaks; because you matter here.'

"And I think that sense of 'I only have school two days a week and, when I go, it's not really fun, because none of my friends are there. But I got to go to band because, if I'm not there, they're gonna miss me.' I think I've been able to provide that sense of community through music, that has kept the arts so special and so unique, in some of the most challenging times that we've certainly faced."

Christina Custode in online at <https://christinacustode.com>.

Live entertainment at Lumber Jack's

Live music has returned to one of Western New York's most picturesque restaurants.

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