

Episode Three: A Family Show

[Intro Music]

This is the Institute for Music Leadership

Stephen: I gotta make sure I'm recording. Duh-duh dah!

Kate: Good. Hi! We were gonna maybe try to go outside, but there are a lot of birds and we don't have another - we don't have an external mic.

Stephen: Oh, yeah, totally fine. Please worry about it.

(conversation chatter continues in background)

Stephen: Welcome to another episode of “Create. Inspire. Lead.” I’m Stephen Biegner. Today, we’re going to be listening to a conversation I recorded with my wife and a couple that we knew back when we were living in New York City, about what it was like deciding to start a family as professional, gigging musicians and how having a kid has affected our careers. Kate Maroney and Red Wierenga - who also happen to be Eastman alums – are just wonderful humans, and they’ve both had really different, varied, and successful careers. They also were trying to get pregnant around the same time my wife and I were, and so Kate and my wife, Anna, both talked a lot and supported each other in those early months as they navigated motherhood with their other responsibilities and gigs and all of that. And now Anna and I have Jude, our willful 2-year-old son; and Kate and Red have Ossian who is a few months younger. And on top of being parents, we’re all trying to figure out how to keep working, creating, how to keep engaging in artistically fulfilling endeavors. And of course, we’re now all dealing with that in the time of COVID-19.

So, let’s get into it.

Kate and Red live in Brooklyn, and as the pandemic started getting worse in the city, they thought the best thing to do would be to leave with Ossian and head somewhere to stay with family. That’s how they’ve ended up here in Penfield for the past couple of months.

Kate: We’ve been here since about March 16th.

Stephen: OK.

Anna: So, a few months. Yeah

Kate: You know. We crossed the two-month threshold.

Stephen: Red is actually originally from Rochester, which is how he and Kate ended up crashing nearby in Penfield. He grew up here, and did his undergrad in jazz piano at Eastman. So, he had no trouble readjusting to the Rochester weather when they came up in March.

Red: It snowed on the day of my Eastman graduation. So I was ready for it.

Stephen: April showers bring...May snowstorms? Anyway, Red has been playing music for a long time. He started piano lessons at age 6.

Red: And in fact, didn't have a piano myself at the time. So I played on a Hohner reed organ, which we still have here in my parents' basement, and it still powers on.

Stephen: Red studied for a number of years with Alvin Paris, who led the gospel choir at the U of R, and that got Red improvising from a pretty young age. He went to Penfield High School, partially because the music program was so strong, and while he was there, he met and played under Jim Doser – who – small world – is now the current director of the Institute for Music Leadership.

Red: And within really the first few weeks of being at Penfield high school, I knew that I wanted to be a musician professionally. And then I ended up sticking in town. Obviously, went to Eastman, majored in jazz piano. Studied with Harold Danko; also studied classically with Tony Caramia. And this little bit ties in maybe to some larger questions that we're having right now. After my sophomore year, I - for a few reasons, including, one, the feeling that I was at the level where I wanted to be relative to of my classmates – I decided to take a year off and that was – at the time it seemed like just an enormous decision. And I really had qualms about taking such a huge move. And it was against the plan that I had for my life. Just take a year off in the middle of college. And I spoke with Doug Dempster, who was then a dean at Eastman, and he basically said, "Well, you know, it's a year. What's the big deal?" And when you're 19 or 20 a year, seems like a really long time. You know, a little bit later in life, a year is not such a long time. And so, I sort of keep that in mind during this period, especially, you know, a year we can get through this.

Stephen: After graduating from Eastman, Red stuck around Rochester for a few years playing gigs. And it was during this time that he really started getting interested in electronics and computer music. Eventually, having been in Rochester his whole life and having discovered this new passion, Red decided he needed a change.

Red: And so I moved to the Netherlands and I studied electronic and computer music at the Institute of Sonology in The Hague. And sort of again and while I was interested in electronic computer music and so forth, I wasn't quite sure just how interested I was. And again, within a week or so, I knew that, OK, I need to do this.

Stephen: When Red came back, he moved to New York City. And since then, he's done all sorts of things, from working for a music tech start-up to performing all sorts of music – piano performance and jazz; new music; experimental improvisation...

Red: ...pop, rock, klezmer, Bulgarian sort of...I've been playing accordion for many years, including for the last many years as part of the Claudia Quintet, led by the drummer and composer John Hollenbeck.

Stephen: Red also went back to school and got his PhD in composition at the CUNY Graduate Center and has been teaching at Brooklyn College for the past six years. And all during this time, between gigs, tours, classes, and everything else, he met a girl, got married, and had a kid. And that brings us to Kate Maroney. Now, I had thought that since Red and Kate were both Eastman alums that they were an Eastman couple. But actually, they weren't at Eastman at the same time. And in fact, according to Kate's mom, it was sort of strange they even got together.

Kate: As I once said something about Red being a little weird during one of my family Thanksgivings, my mom jumped in and said, "The only thing that's weird about Red Weirenga is that he's dating my daughter." She threw me under the bus.

Stephen: But before we talk about Kate and Red getting together, here's a little bit you need to know about Kate – a formidable force of nature in her own right. Kate grew up on the Jersey Shore and said she was always involved in choir. But she also mentioned another talent.

Kate: Something that Red and I do share, which you neglected to mention, is that we both played trombone.

Stephen: Oh, I didn't know that. Do you ever do trombone duets?

Kate: That would be a perfect quarantine project.

Anna: Do trombone duets exist?

Stephen: So, if you know any trombone duets, please, let us know, and we'll pass them along to Kate and Red. Anyway. Kate continued singing in her high school choir and performing in musicals, and eventually went to SUNY Purchase for her undergrad to study voice and opera. After graduating from SUNY Purchase, she went to a small, little college in Connecticut.

Kate: And then I went to Yale for into the opera program. So, I was I was singing really well and singing like a lyric mezzo, operatic mezzo, kind of doing all the young artists program auditions. And on that track, I had my five arias. I could do a really impressive audition, but I didn't have my technique really firmly figured out. So, when I was working on my master's at Yale, I had a lot of performing experience, but those years were really shaky because I mean, looking back now – it's similar to what Red was saying. I mean I was only twenty-two or twenty-three and it was only two years, but it really shook me because I was in this program with people who were a little older and I felt like I was way in over my head. People were kind of going straight to the Met program from there, and we were singing for management, and it was just opera, opera, opera. And so, I really my confidence was really shaken.

Stephen: Despite her shaken confidence, Kate applied to the DMA program at Eastman. She had applied to Eastman for her Master's as well and gotten really good feedback then.

Kate: But when I applied after my Master's. I didn't get the same kind of feedback, they were kind of like, "What happened? What, what, what is going on with your singing?" You know?

Stephen: Kate was initially waitlisted before finally being admitted.

Kate: And thank God, you know, I was just so happy that I ended up here for a few years.

Stephen: She ended up in Bob Swenson's studio –

Kate: - he just was exactly that kind of nurturing person I needed for my technique.

Stephen: And during her time at Eastman ended up working quite a bit with Paul O'Dette, Dr. Weinert and some of the DMA conducting students he had at the time, as well as a bunch of different colleagues and accompanists who were working with Gene Barr.

Kate: I did so much singing that was not just opera. And it was sort of there that I figured out that that was really what I liked to do. But then I think because I was able to kind of come to a safer place – you know, then I feel like that allowed my singing to grow in a way.

Stephen: When Kate was finished with all her coursework, she thought about what to do next. She had gotten really into early music, and a lot of her friends recommended Boston. But she was also drawn to New York City. She had a lot of friends and colleagues there, and having grown up in New Jersey, she was familiar with the city. She had also happened to see an opening in the admissions office at the Manhattan School of Music.

Kate: But then the job in admissions at Manhattan School of Music came along, which was a great way to move and to, you know, know that I could pay my rent because I had debt coming out of school, you know, and it was just like daunting and overwhelming. Um, that's when I met you, Stephen, I think at MSM. I was studying for my comps and almost done with the DMA...

Stephen: While at MSM – which is where Kate and I met - Kate went out and auditioned for choral contractors in the city and anyone else she could sing for. She ended up with a lot of offers, and while MSM was flexible, it was sometimes tough. Eventually, she had to make a call.

Kate: I really wanted to do these choral gigs. I thought, you know, I'd love to sing *Elijah* with the New York Philharmonic. But the schedule, as you guys know, you know, the rehearsals were four hours during the day, four hours during the day...

Stephen: While trying to decide, she got some good advice from a friend who was also in the scene with her.

Kate: You know, you're here in New York, and, you know, you're here to try to sing. And as long as you can pay your bills for like two, three months down the line, as long as you can pay for health insurance, somehow, you should just go for that. You know, and you could always make money you could always waitress or temp. So, that was really scary. But I look back and I think that that plunge was sort of what I would have needed to do because...Yeah. Then I, then I – with a church job and with a few other things and you start meeting more people was able to cobble things together.

Stephen: After making the decision to leave the job security that MSM offered, Kate's singing career grew. She made connections in the choral world, booked solo gigs, she's delved into new music working with current composers and developing new things. Kate was also approached by Mannes College to develop a course in vocal pedagogy for the extension division which has since turned into a class for the voice and opera department there. And for Kate, a lot of these changes and opportunities could be tied to a specific experience.

Kate: Doing *Einstein on the Beach* was a game changer for me because it was so random, and it came along, and I was really excited about it just because it was this piece that I had studied and thought, oh, this this is really cool, but I wasn't excited about it like from my opera singing background, it was sort of like a different part of me that was excited about it, but then being open to what that experience was changed the way I think about all of the music we make. You know like, the part, the role that I played in that whole you know, it was kind of a transformative experience to the way I think about what I do.

Stephen: (Narration#21) And during all of that, of course, we have our Kate and Red meet-cute:

Red: Yeah. So I mean we actually did meet in Rochester. The Respect Sextet which formed while I was at Eastman of all Eastman students in the jazz program was playing Monte's Crown, which I think now is back to the Rose and Crown on Monroe Ave.

Kate: It's on Monroe Avenue, right by the 490.

Red: Yeah, we played there in August, August 2006. And Kate was just about to start at Eastman on her DMA. And yeah, we met that night and sort of kept in touch basically once a year when the Respect Sextet would play, normally at the bop shop, I sent a note say, you know, we're playing much kind of a gig. And it really was only several years later that while Kate was studying for comps and in between Rochester and New York and New Jersey, that started, you know, actually talking more regularly...

Kate: And our courtship commenced.

Stephen: Their first official date happened when Red went to see Kate sing at Bach Vespers in December – it was the Bach *Magnificat* if you're curious – and afterward, Kate and a bunch of others who'd just performed in Vespers went downtown to hear Red play. Then, Kate and Red ended up at a nearby bar and hung out there talking until the early morning.

Kate: It was like it was like a vespers 5 p.m. to 4 a.m

Stephen: We'll hear more from Kate and Red, but lastly, let's hear about Anna Lenti – and I guess, maybe a little about me. Now, I'm probably totally biased because Anna is my wife, but she's honestly one of the most intelligent, passionate, and innate musicians that I know. She's currently at Eastman getting her DMA in Choral Conducting – and she also did her undergrad here in classical voice. If the name "Lenti" sounds familiar, you might have known her sister, Elizabeth Lenti, who is an organist and studied here – or you may have studied with her father – Vincent Lenti who has been teaching at Eastman since 1963. But that's not all. Anna's mother is also an Eastman grad – a pianist and organist; her cousin is one of the foremost theorbo players in the country; her aunt and uncle both have multiple music degrees from Eastman; her grandmother, for whom Anna is named, released a record of children's songs; her grandfather was Vincent Rose who wrote tunes like *Avalon*, *Blueberry Hill*, and *Whispering*. If anyone was born to be a musician, it was Anna. So, it's not surprising that when she finished high school, Anna obviously wanted to major in...math?

Anna: I did. I did major in math. To be fair.

Kate: That's right. I remember that.

Anna: Two whole years I majored in. Yeah. No, I. Well, OK. So I think it's because I came from a musical family that I wanted to major in math because I don't know. When you watch - So, my, my dad's a piano teacher at Eastman, my mom is a church musician and also as a piano teacher. Like when I was growing up, she gave piano lessons out of our house. And my sister went to Eastman and is an organist. And watching them all go through their career...You know, you sit around the dinner table, and you gripe about going to work. And so, I would hear about, you know, my sister's struggles with tendonitis, or, you know, my dad would talk about his students and how much trouble they were having. And, you know, finding work is so impossible. I got to see the kind of raw, real despair that can surround music and the life and music way up close when I was really little. And so, I just kept thinking to myself, I don't ever want to be that. I want music to be like - Music is the thing I like the most. Why would I ever do that to myself? I want to make sure that music stays like this thing that I really like and not this thing that's like a chore, or job, or something that stresses me out. And so...And I liked math because it challenged me and I – like, it wasn't something that came naturally. Like singing always felt like something that just like I was born able to do. And math was like, you know, like the first test that I ever failed in life was a math test. And I loved that because it was like, oh, I have something I can fix and get better at. And that's so exciting.

Stephen: Only my wife would have that reaction to failing a math test. She loves a project. I'm sure there's a joke in there about why she married me, but, let's move on. Eventually, Anna did major in music. It was always a part of her life. Growing up, she sang, played piano – in fact, there's a great clip of her somewhere being interviewed on the radio – she'd won some sort of

piano competition – and her Rochester accent is just tops. Anyway – she was all ready to break away from the family business and be a math major, but then?

Anna: But then my senior year, a whole bunch of things happened, my senior year of high school, including this teacher that I really loved, passed away. And he before he died, he asked me to sing at his funeral. And that experience was the first time - it seems crazy that I really went that long in life without realizing this, but it was like the first time I understood that like that it was like a gift to be able to make music and that you could actually change people.

Stephen: Anna decided to apply for Eastman at the last minute, and got in as a voice major.

Anna: But I think I was really interesting because I never I did not go into Eastman thinking I wanted to be an opera singer. And I don't think there's many voice majors at Eastman who could say that because I barely knew anything about opera. I just knew I wanted to be a good singer. And the music that I loved was choral music because my mom was like, that's what we listened to and that's what I sang. And so, I fought my whole time at Eastman to sing more choral music and more early music, sometimes unsuccessfully. And I think that that fight was really good for me in terms of my learning, because like my voice did change a lot.

Stephen: While studying voice at Eastman, Anna realized that she wanted to be a conductor. She realized that her singing would always be an asset – especially as a choral conductor – but from thereon out, she put her efforts into studying conducting. She graduated Eastman and from there went to study at Westminster Choir College. Anna actually met Kate while at Westminster – they ended up singing at the same church job in the city and would carpool to services and gigs together. And two years later, she graduated with her Master's in choral conducting.

Anna: And then after that, I wanted to find a teaching job conducting like in a high school or in a college. But I also was really drawn to New York having lived nearby in Princeton and made some music professionally while I was getting my Master's...

Stephen: Anna decided to take the plunge and move to New York. But it was tougher than she expected.

Anna: It's very, very hard to find a conducting job in New York without any teaching certification. And as a young female conductor, with very little experience. And I think I underestimated how hard that would be. And so, the things that started kind of coming my way were all singing gigs. And so, I just, my motto during that time was take the open doors.

Stephen: This is around when Anna and I met. I'll briefly interject to tell my very short story. I grew up playing folk and rock music. I played in bands all through high school and wrote my own songs. When I graduated high school, I took some time off to make a record and tour a little, and try to make the singer-songwriter thing work. At the same time, I had also been promoted a bunch at my day job and ended up being responsible for running a small,

independent movie theater. I learned all these great managerial and admin skills while there, and best of all, they were really flexible which allowed me to take gigs at night or on the weekends. At some point, I started taking voice lessons to maintain my voice between long, loud bar sessions, and I started to discover Schumann and Bach and all this music I'd never been exposed to. Eventually, with the help of my voice teacher, I applied to a bunch of schools, and ended up going to the Manhattan School of Music majoring in voice. And while I was there, I started working part time in the admissions office which eventually became a full-time job. After a couple of years, I was actually promoted to assistant director of admissions. And while working at MSM, I also had church jobs, I worked as a choral scholar in the Oratorio Society of New York, I had a crazy temple job that was way out in the Hamptons on Long Island that involved getting wrapped up in this weird Russian, Jewish underworld that led to some strange gigs in Brighton Beach. There may or may not be a recording of me singing Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah* in Hebrew. Ahem. Anyway. Eventually I got a church job on the Upper East Side – I was part of a professional octet. And one of the sopranos in that octet, for some reason was forced to sit next to a goofball tenor who made dad jokes and laughed at everything. And that soprano was Anna.

Ok. Sorry about that. We interrupt each other all the time at home, so I'm sure she won't mind. But, now, back to Anna.

Anna: And I just decided to, like, follow where the work was and did that for like two years and decided that I hated it immensely. Singing is not like I love singing and I always want to sing, but it is not how I want to make my money exclusively, because – I'm sure that Kate, you can relate to this. I feel like especially in the beginning, but, but really throughout, there's like a certain amount of singing you have to do to sustain your living that is not 100 percent fulfilling. And I have a very low tolerance for that in my soul. I can't turn off like the conductor in me that wants it to be better and more fulfilling. And so, I found it really soul-sucking.

Stephen: I was with Anna when she transitioned from an office job she had to freelancing full-time. She got a lot of really cool things, including a tour with Apollo's Fire singing Monteverdi's *Vespers* all over the county. She also did some really weird gigs, like this one where she had to sing at an art opening on top of this large salt rock sculpture covered in jelly. Yeah. But freelancing wasn't what she really wanted to do. All the while, Anna had her résumé on file with a company that helped people find teaching jobs. Since she wasn't certified in New York, Anna's only options were private schools or schools just outside of New York. One day, her phone rang, and it was an offer to teach at a small private school out in New Jersey.

Anna: So, then when I got this teaching job teaching middle school, it like changed my whole love of my life – professionally – because I had this wonderful thing that I felt like I was in charge of creating and cultivating music in these young people. And then that gave me the opportunity to only make the music that I found fulfilling. And I just think that is the balance that I want to keep in my life. Like I always want to sing. But I want to do it with people that I love. And I want to do it in an environment that I find inspiring and not just to put something in my bank account, you know.

Stephen: At some point, in both of our trajectories, Anna and I decided to move in together, get engaged, move to New Jersey, get married, and have a baby. And then:

Anna: I think literally I was in the hospital bed holding Jude. And I turned to Stephen and I was like, "I'm ready to get my DMA now!"

Stephen: I'm glossing over that "getting together" part, but that can be a big deal as a musician just starting your career. There's a lot at play there. And I've known musician couples where one gets a job in an orchestra halfway across the country, and the other one doesn't land the gig – so, what do you do? Or someone lands a tour and so they're gone for three months. Or one or both of you is always in rehearsal or playing a club Friday, Saturday nights. Plus, all that time you both need to practice, the expectation to go to each other's gigs, sometimes jealousy can even play a part – like, why does your partner keep landing gigs and you don't? Starting a relationship, never mind a family, can take time and commitment. And often, when you're young and just starting your career, there's a pressure to be available and take every gig.

Red: It's interesting that...I've never really thought about...about that as pressure, but as...as good advice. And, you know, there is this adage that you know, if you move to New York, it will take you five years to actually become established. And yeah, it just seemed conventional wisdom. Take every gig. When you were first in New York, or wherever you are trying to make it as a performer, especially, take every gig. And eventually you'll realize what gigs you want to do, what you don't want to do, or how many you can afford not to do, or...But I think that's something that everyone needs to go through and just figure out for themselves what are the types of situations that I thrive and that that I find really fulfilling and rewarding. And what are the things that I don't really want to do and I don't want to do them what else would I rather do.

Anna: Yeah, I feel like the pressure can be not take every gig, but like try everything once, you know, because I don't think. Because I don't think there should be any shame in saying like that was really unfulfilling, or just honestly horrible. Like there - there were some gigs that I sang in New York where I felt like I was treated horribly. I was singing for somebody who did not care about my vocal health, or about my mental well-being, or, you know, any myriad reasons. But like, you know, I think you should feel free to say no to those gigs if you, I mean, if you can. And I think, I think it's, I mean, it's the same thing with any type of worker. Like, at some point, you, you are faced with this choice of like, "OK, well, do I say no to this gig or do I pay my rent?"

And, you know, I think there's no shame in saying yes to the gig. But there's also no shame in saying no to the gig, you know? And I think you have to weigh what it's giving you spiritually and what it's giving you in dollars.

Kate: Well, I and I also think there's an adage too that you I'm sure you guys know which is or this saying that people say, OK, well, there are three things that I'm going to consider. For each gig offer that comes my way and I have to have two out of three. And one of them is the quality

of the music making or music. One of them is the people that I'm working with. And the other one is the pay.

Stephen: I've heard this before, and it's a pretty good rule of thumb. Let's say you're doing really cheesy music, but it's with colleagues you adore and the pay is really good. Take it. If you're performing amazing music and it pays well, but you don't really like the group you'll be performing with. Go ahead and take it. Great music but terrible work environment or little to no pay? Skip it. Even if it's your desert island piece or in your top 3, you'll likely get a chance to perform it later. No reason to take a bad gig if you don't absolutely need to. Though, right now, in the time of COVID, Kate expressed how she's even missing those sort of annoying gigs.

Kate: But I miss it. And I miss the people who, like, you know, would turn to me and talk to me throughout the rehearsal. I miss every-. I miss the colleagues that aren't even my best friends that you know. I miss everything about it right now. So that's telling me something, I guess.

Stephen: It's been hard missing out on those freelancing gigs, or even our slightly more stable church jobs singing in choir or canting, but Red, Kate and Anna also teach. And I wondered if that was a conscious choice on their parts to help balance freelance work with something more stable, or this was another open door that they simply walked through and said yes to.

Red: Yeah, it was maybe a little bit more of a decision on my part to pursue that that potential path. You know, again, doing some soul searching and realizing that, hey, most of my relationship with music right now is not a particularly fulfilling nature. So, what are some possibly more sustainable ways of, you know, keeping, you know, my, my musical life together?

Stephen: This is when Red decided to go back to school for his PhD in composition. As part of his fellowship, he taught large lecture classes at Baruch College as well as some smaller classes in electronic music. By the time he was done with his degree, he had ended up teaching there for about three years.

Red: I was also starting to teach at Brooklyn College. And so that transition really dovetailed very nicely. And as it turns out – you know, even my thumbnail sketch that I try to give. Ok: pianist, composer, accordionist, improviser, you know, instrument builder. Yeah. All you know, all this sort of can inform what I do now. And so, you know, I absolutely love teaching in that capacity. And, you know, that certainly was more, more – the general idea of teaching was it was more of a decision. This particular opportunity that I'm in now was. Yes, absolutely. I'm, I'm, I'm walking through that open door.

Kate: Yeah, for me, it was more of a door opening at the time that it opened.

Stephen: Kate's journey was a little different. She had a small voice studio out at Nassau Community College on Long Island when a colleague who worked at the now defunct Extension Division at Mannes College asked if Kate would create a 50-minute class talking about voice pedagogy.

Kate: And I was like, yes, definitely. You know, this is perfect. This is just, you know, it's adjunct, it's...it works well. You know, and it's Mannes. It's right home. You know, it's in New York and with really talented students and interesting people.

Stephen: So, Kate developed a syllabus and course for Mannes, and it ended up being so well-received, that when Mannes got rid of the Extension Division, they continued to offer Kate's course to students enrolled in the college.

Kate: I worked really, really hard to make it something that would be very, very practical to those students, specifically. Like I customized it for Mannes voice and opera performing majors who had never had pedagogy and who I knew were going to be out of school auditioning, and you might really want to make some money teaching voice lessons and, you know, feel as though they had a little bit of foundation for that. So, I've worked really hard.

Stephen: Kate's really enjoyed taking that open door into teaching. Her whole feeling about it has shifted since initially getting her DMA, and she admits, it could change again. She makes sure that she takes her own advice that she gives her students which is that she makes a one-year goal, a five-year goal, and a longer-term goal. And of course, you constantly re-evaluate.

Kate: And that's I mean, that's where family comes into it. The decision to have children. The decision about how much travel you want to do. The decision about where you want to live, you know what? Constantly reflecting and reevaluating those things. I think we've both done because, you know, you have to be ready to pivot and be nimble. And now. Now, even more so, in these circumstances. But I think I've always sort of thought that way.

Stephen: But, even teaching gigs can be unpredictable and time-consuming. And Kate and Red and Anna were all still freelancing as well. So, how did they make time for everything?

Red: It certainly was a lot to balance in between, you know, as you mentioned, the other gigs that I kept up. And in fact, I first played with the Claudia Quintet in April of whenever this was – 2011 – and just subbed on a European tour. And then I remember when I was accepting the offer to go for my PhD at the Graduate Center, someone said to me, “Oh, but what – you now what, what if you start playing more often with the Claudia Quintet?” “Oh, that's not gonna happen.” And then, sure, sure enough, within the first month or so, we have another tour for a couple of weeks. And fortunately, in our case, it's often helped that we're both musicians. And so, when someone has a gig, the other person understands. And so, there's just this understanding that, oh, yeah, you know, you need to do that. That's a great opportunity. Or that, that sounds like a really cool tour. And, you know, of course, I understand. And that doesn't necessarily make, make it easy, but there's –

Kate: We've gotten better at it.

Red: Yeah. Well, I mean, I remember very early on when we were first dating and we I think

we had a date on a Friday night and I got a gig offer and I said, hey, you know, um, how would you feel about me taking this gig? "Of course, yeah, take the gig!"

Kate: We could have a date on a Monday morning.

Stephen: That's right.

Kate: And I feel like that's continued. And that has transitioned into having a kid like pretty well. I mean, in some ways we get we've gotten really used to planning logistics, planning traveling, one person here, one person – and then we've incorporated Ossian, our son, into things. And it it's gotten a little crazy.

Stephen: Kate mentioned that even with their crazy schedules, they've really never needed more than like, 45 minutes to a couple hours of child care here and there. Now, I left my job at MSM to be able to stay home with Jude the first year of his life while I worked a part-time job that I could do mostly remotely. And even so, we still needed part-time daycare. And now that we're in Rochester and I work full-time and Anna's a full-time student, Jude is daycare full-time. But we still have times where we need like 30 minutes of babysitting. Like, I have a church job that rehearses on Wednesday nights and Anna has gotten a job directing a children's choir that also met Wednesday evenings...

Anna: And initially, it was fine because the children's choir wrapped up right before Stephen had to leave for his church job. So, I would like rush home and help put you to bed and Stephen like, get out the door. But then I was helping with the musical for like a month, basically, and it ended up not happening because of COVID 19. But it was gonna be these, like, six weeks where we would have needed a babysitter for an hour on a Wednesday night. And all of the baby sitters I'd been using were voice majors and they all had church jobs. And my mom also sings in a church choir. So, like, you know, the perk of having family nearby was so it was so stressful trying to find somebody.

Stephen: And sometimes it wasn't even like an I would be like, oh, I had to get to rehearsal at seven and you wouldn't be home until 7:15. So we literally just needed somebody from like 6:45 to 7:15 to come in.

Anna: And like. Yeah. And Jude goes to bed at 7:00.

Stephen: After this, we talked about various babysitting woes for a bit, but then Kate and Red's parents came in and started watching a TV show, loudly, so they moved outside. But this interruption allowed us to jump into what it was like to try to decide to even have a baby in the first place.

Anna: Yeah. So, I guess overall what I would say is I was always extremely frustrated when talking to pretty much anybody about having a baby. I don't personally feel like I was that young to have a baby. Like I, you know, I'm 30 now and Jude's two. So, I don't feel like it's out of

the question for a 28-year-old person to have a baby. And but I felt like I was constantly met with like, a “why would you do this now?” kind of mentality. And the first time it ever happened was when I was in grad school and we had this like conductor forum with a female conductor present. And we were, like, talking about, like, the unique challenges that face women conductors. And the topic of having a baby came up, and this person said, you absolutely should not have a baby until you've gotten your DMA. And I guess I'd never really thought about it at like, to....and I'm a planner....

Stephen: She really is. I actually call Anna, “Planna Lenti.” But for a planner, this advice came as a bit of a shock.

Anna: So, I was twenty-four. I was like, OK, assuming the person I'm with is the person I'm going to marry. Like if I go straight to my DMA now, that's three more years. And then like at least three more years. And then I'm going to have to like find a college job where I feel like secure enough that I can do that. So, we're talking like probably –

Kate: Early 30s.

Anna: – early 30s before we can even think about it. And like, if I want to have more than one kid, which I do like, then we're getting into like having babies when I'm 40. And I just am not interested in that. That is not the trajectory I want for my life.

Stephen: After Anna and I got married and were thinking about kids, she met a similar, negative reception at the school where she was teaching.

Anna: I don't know. The discourse is always like, oh, you have no idea how much it's going to change your life. You're not going to be doing all that gigging once you have a baby. There's just no way you can handle that. And, and, I just felt like I had such a crisis of identity having those conversations. And they only picked up after I got pregnant. Like, like, once I was pregnant, every single mom in the world wanted to be like, oh, you'll never do this kind of thing when you have a baby. You'll never run a half marathon again once you have a baby. And, and, I, like had such a crisis, just thinking to myself, like, do I know do I not know myself? Like. Like, is the baby really going to come? I'm going to be like such a different person that I'm not going to have the like the Anna Lenti drive to do all of these things anymore. And so, at the time I was pregnant. We hadn't – like, we talked about me getting my DMA, but it wasn't like a hundred percent on the table.

Stephen: For the record, like 4 weeks after having Jude, Anna sang in a performance of the Bach B-minor Mass in the city. She also has run a couple of half-marathons and a full marathon since having Jude. So. Take that. Despite all the negativity and caveats, eventually, after a talk with her mentor, she felt encouraged.

Anna: This would be the best time to go get the DMA now because he's like young enough. He's not in school. We can move wherever we want. I was thinking about Eastman and my parents being around and it's honestly been great. And like I love being in school and having a kid.

Stephen: Anna's colleagues have been super helpful throughout our time here. Like, one time I jumped in to sing tenor for a gig that Anna was conducting. And obviously, it was super fun for us to get to make music together, but we also needed someone to watch Jude.

Anna: So, I like was complaining about that and my colleagues just stepped up, like, my conducting colleagues stepped up and watched you for free for a whole week. So, they came over and like, I'd cook dinner for them and they would watch Jude. And one of them, our friend Rayvon and his wife Britney, took him out to the Strong Museum, and we paid for him, like offered to pay for their entries and everything and they wouldn't accept, like...People rally around you if you have a baby – if you have a good community. What better community than Eastman? And like meanwhile, this person who gave me this advice to not have a baby till after my DMA did that and she has a baby now in her first year at like a major job, which I can't imagine is any less stressful than what I'm doing. So, I you know, when young people like I just had a conversation with a young female conductor who is having the same kind of questions, and I just I always tell them there is literally no good time to have a baby.

Stephen: I'd like to say that Kate had a different experience, but...

Kate: Yeah. I can relate to the people who say your whole life is gonna change. You're never gonna sleep again. You're never gonna you're not going to be able to sing or practice. I mean, things do change because. Well, I think, Anna, you and I are probably pretty similar because I sometimes look back on the first year after Ossian and I'm like, was I trying to prove to people that it like I would just jump right back in, like, try to do everything? Maybe part of my personality is that I was going to be like, I can do everything.

Stephen: And, Kate also got back into the game pretty quickly. Shortly after having Ossian, she gave a recital for the Brooklyn Art Song Society of all this really complicated music. Pieces by Ruth Crawford Seeger, and this composer Daniel Felsenfeld – that kind of stuff. And it was tough to balance, but she did it. And some things weren't as polished as she'd hoped, but in other ways:

Kate: There's something about it that was so freeing.

Anna: Yeah. You survived! Like, you did it!

Kate: You know, I feel like in some ways my singing is better. You know, I'm not as tightly controlled, or tightly prepared because you're like, well, OK, I've done what I could do. And my job is here to like, you know, give this gift of music, do what I can do. You prepare as best you can and then, and then try to communicate. And because you go through the experience of having a child, and I think we both feel this way, I don't know, there's a lot more that I feel I can

connect to I can connect with everyone in the audience. You know, you can. There's so much more humanity in what, what we're doing. So, I don't know. Yeah. It's not maybe as technically perfect all the time or as prepared.

Anna: Yeah. And I think when I look back on the advice that people gave me, I think, I think like...because I think it's a really common trope that like your whole life is gonna change. You'll never sleep, like all of those things. And, and, I ask myself a lot like why that's the thing that people go to?

Stephen: Anna bore the brunt of this since she was the one who was pregnant, but I got a little bit of it too. And, of course, our lives were going to change, but we were still going to be the same people that we are. Music would always be there. And in some ways, having a kid has shown us that we can slow down, and take care of ourselves, and then come back. All of these experiences add a notch in our resiliency belts.

Anna: I was talking about this in relation to the post I made about, like, this current situation. Like, I mentioned having Jude as, like, a time when my career had to like pause. And then I also mentioned, like, having a vocal injury, same kind of thing. And like, all the anxiety around that. It has taught you something really particular and special about your own ability to survive and thrive in, like, a challenging environment. And so, I've felt like at the beginning of the whole COVID 19 thing, like, I felt like immense grief and had to process like everything we were losing. But I also feel calm in like a way that I don't see a lot of my colleagues feeling calm. Like I just. And I think it may have to do with this, like resiliency factor of like, these moments in my life where I've had to press pause and then come back to music. And it's always been there.

Stephen: From there, the group moved into a conversation about what it's been like trying to take gigs with a kid. I sort of knew what Anna and I as a couple were able to say yes to and what we had to turn down, but I wondered what Kate and Red's experience was. Kate politely interjected first.

Kate: I think that – I'll just jump in. I mean, Ann and I are both in this Momology group thing. So, I think I think a lot has been changing from what I can hear and from what I hear, what I hear, and what I can tell in that a lot of people we've worked with, even if there wasn't a precedent, even if something didn't exist where they were like, OK, we have childcare. People have been willing to work with me.

Stephen: For example, both Kate and Red were in this Michael Gordon piece, *Aquanetta* at Bard last year, and when they mentioned that they had a kid, the festival offered to work with Kate and Red, and they were able to bring Ossian to the festival. Bard didn't pay them more, but they were super accommodating, housed the whole family, let their parents come up and watch Ossian so that they could both keep working. And for the most part, that's been Kate and Red's experience.

Red: Almost always people have been very helpful and supportive. A few times, people have said, “Yeah, that's not gonna work for, for this particular situation.”

Stephen: And what about their income?

Red: There's, there's so many variables. And sort of in the middle of really that the first year of our son's life, like I mean, I went from a full-time job, plus teaching at a Brooklyn college to going part-time plus teaching in Brooklyn cause to only teach in a Brooklyn College and playing gigs. So, there's been a lot of variations, and part of even the moves to, you know, me working part time was just because what I was doing wasn't worth either Kate not accepting gigs or us staying for a babysitter. So, it's tough to give a straight answer.

Kate: Yeah, I mean, I could jump in. I think, and this might be useful for people listening or, you know, to hear our income has fluctuated vastly year to year, you know, over the past few years. We work with an accountant who has luckily helped us figure out how to set up quarterly payments for 1099 income, which, which has increased for me the more that I gig. And, you know. And the first year that took me by surprise and April was like a total freak out. You know, figuring that stuff out is really important.

Stephen: That was true for our income as well. Before Jude, one year, Anna and I truly almost ended it all while trying to file our taxes. We had 1099 income, W2 income, a whole bunch of other stuff, plus we'd moved from New York City to New Jersey, but also did work in Texas, Massachusetts, and Ohio that year. So. It was the most frustrating experience of maybe our whole marriage so far. And, I'm joking, a little, but we eventually found someone who could help with our taxes, moving forward. And we found someone who could help with some financial advice that fit our budget. And there's a range of advisors and pricing tiers that could work for you. So, it's important to try to figure that piece out. And having a kid is obviously expensive, but we've managed to figure out what we can say no to, what we can take, and know how to be frugal when it's necessary. One other thing Kate and Red mentioned was family support.

Kate: And our family has been supportive in, um, in childcare. You know, as much as much as they can be. And I know, you know, our parents are older. They're...this is their first grandchild. And they're, you know – Probably none of them would be comfortable necessarily alone with him, like for a weekend, or, so...You know, we wouldn't want to do that. It's, it's been more over the first year of his life. Of course, now, we're with your parents, right now. But over the first year of his life, like my mom would come in and stay a night or two and, and stay with him when I went to rehearsal for two hours or something. You know, it's...And, and that made a big difference. That...We're lucky. So, not everyone has that.

Stephen: Kate's right – we are super lucky. I mean, up until we moved to Rochester, Anna and I just weren't in a place where we had any family support. My family was 3 hours away, and Anna's were five. It was tough, but having it now has been so helpful. And, not everyone has a support system, or the option to take their kid to work with them, or sometimes, a parent may

not even have a partner who's supportive of what they do. And that's not to say that raising our kid hasn't been hard, or sometimes a little lonely, but just to acknowledge that we have been afforded certain resources and opportunities that others have not.

But it seems like when I talk to other friends or colleagues who have children, there is a bit of a shift happening. I hear about more and more gigs saying that it's ok to bring your child and a caretaker, or maybe they have some sort of built-in child care option. It seems like more places are trying to build a culture that they maybe wished they had a few decades ago. I mean, I've sung with Kate Maroney. I've sung with my wife. And to me, they are people worth hanging on to, and so, if as an organization you can be accommodating to retain that talent, I mean, why wouldn't you.

I also sort of see it as part of other office trends that have been happening over the past couple of decades. Little things like a more relaxed dress code, longer maternity leave, or even paternity leave, flexible hours so the morning people can come in and be unnaturally cheerful at 7am, and the rest of us grumps can come in a little later, or more freedom to work from home – though, right now, I think we're all experiencing some serious remote-work fatigue. But, basically, the idea of creating the kind of workplace you want to work in, the kind of culture that you want to support, that prioritizes balance and family. We can do that in the arts too. I want to keep working with Kate and Anna and Red. I want our kids to see what we do and to be exposed to the discipline and work ethic that goes into our music making. And I want them to know our music. I want them to be involved in this musical community that we get to be a part of.

And, after talking to Kate and Red, I felt hopeful that as more working musician parents talk out in the open about how to navigate their lives with children, the community will find more solutions; find creative ways to rehearse, or offer performances; and hopefully they'll end up inspiring a whole new generation of musicians who have had this music woven into their daily lives. And maybe they'll be the ones who go on to make even bigger changes in the music world.

[Outro music *Solfeggio the Cricket* – Anna Lenti – Anna's grandma – from "Animal Songs" 1969]

Stephen: Special thanks to Kate Maroney, Red Weirenga, and to my wife, Anna Lenti, for taking the time to talk with me. Hopefully, you all got a brief glimpse into what went into starting a family, what it's like having a kid and a professional career. Maybe you disagree with some of our choices, or maybe you had no idea that you could make the choices that we did – either way, if you have any comments, questions, trombone duets that we can pass along to Kate and Red – please let us know. I'll have my email in the show notes.

Thank you also to Alexa Silverman. She's our new summer intern mainly helping out with our Arts in the Loop initiative, but she's also a music engineering whiz. Alexa agreed to help out and cut all of this together, mix it, add music and sound design, so she is the reason the show

sounds so good this time around. I am so, so grateful to her. Thanks Alexa! I can't wait to work on more of these with you.

And we do have more episodes in the works. We're figuring out how to put everything together in the time of COVID and furloughs, but I promise, more is coming. As always, if there is a topic you're interested in having us cover, if you enjoy the podcast, if you hate the podcast, if you still aren't sure what a podcast is but are afraid to ask at this point – please let us know and send me an email.

And this music? This is the original Anna Lenti from her album of children's songs. This one is *Solfeggio the Cricket* about a cricket who teaches the world solfege. I never got to meet this Anna Lenti, but I'm told that my Anna is the true embodiment of her grandmother. So, I'll go ahead and let Solfeggio take us out today.

Thank you so much for listening. Go out. Make art. Do good work. I'm Stephen Biegner. Until next time.