

# Local musician adapts to virtual reality of the pandemic

MELROSE — Longtime Melrose resident Howie Newman, a full-time musician, was really looking forward to this year. A guitarist and singer, he had booked more than 120 gigs, including a dozen outdoor summer concerts with his folk-rock duo, Knock on Wood.

Then fate intervened. The global COVID-19 pandemic shut down most businesses, banned public gatherings and confined people to their homes. On March 8, Newman played his last “regular” gig, a Knock on Wood show in Norwood. Everything else was cancelled or tentatively rescheduled.

He’s now performing semi-regularly, giving virtual concerts via Zoom, the popular Internet conferencing platform. Newman’s most requested program is his Musical Baseball Show, which includes original baseball songs, trivia and stories about his days as a sports-writer on the Red Sox beat (he was also sports editor of a Melrose paper from 1989-93).

Other concert options are his “Folk and Fun” show, funny original songs and Classic Rock covers, as well as “Music for Seniors,” a program of classic songs from yesteryear.

“It’s very different, that’s for sure,” said Newman, who has performed at the Summer Stroll, the Melrose Public Library, the Melrose

Four Corners Music Festival, the Melrose Senior Center and several assisted living facilities in the city. “Every musician in the world is now adapting to this new reality. It’s taken a few shows but I’m finally starting to get comfortable with it.”

He has chosen Zoom for a performing platform because it allows interaction between the musician and audience. “That’s a big part of what I do, engaging the audience,” explained Newman. “It’s even more critical when you’re playing solo. It’s one guitar and one voice on a computer screen. You have to make it different, make it fun and develop some sort of relationship with the viewers.”

Adding comedy, stories, on-screen images and audience participation has made the shows unique and amusing for a wide range of audiences. For more information about his virtual concerts, including the upcoming schedule, visit [howienewman.com](http://howienewman.com).

“The first few weeks of the lockdown were tough, music-wise,” he admitted. “I didn’t really know what to do. More than a hundred gigs got cancelled and I really had no focus or drive. Then I realized where the music business was going and tried to learn as much as I could.”

Newman participated in webinars, made phone calls, spoke with technicians and read about various

music opportunities. He made two concert-length videos and was able to market them successfully. Live performances were more difficult, though.

One of the biggest challenges was finding an electronic set-up that would work well on Zoom. He experimented with various microphones, equipment, cables and configurations, finally discovering a system that provided clear sound and ease of use.

Setting up a makeshift studio in his living room, he performs shows for organizations in Massachusetts and beyond. His typical baseball show has a Red Sox flavor to it but next month Newman is playing for a New Jersey library that is close to Philadelphia. “It’s going to be fun,” he said. “I’m developing a Phillies theme and switching out a few songs.”

Although the video sales and Zoom gigs represent only a fraction of his intended 2020 schedule, Newman is grateful for the way things have evolved.

“The bottom line is this: I’m getting to continue my music career, which I love, and I’m living in a city where the mayor and residents are talking this pandemic seriously,” he explained. “That’s not the case everywhere.”



**FROM THE MAKESHIFT studio in his living room, Melrose singer-songwriter Howie Newman has been delivering Zoom concerts to Massachusetts and beyond.** (Courtesy Photo)