

In 2020, when the pandemic began, I started getting shows cancelled from March onwards. Like everybody, I thought “Crikey, what am I going to do now?” During lockdown, the care home market dried up and although we were doing Zoom shows, they required a different technique. You need to make it very real and live, and bring in references and participation that highlight that, otherwise your audience don’t seem to realise it’s a live piece of theatre rather than a programme on the TV.

To begin with, we had a few teething troubles and it’s difficult to get Zoom right if it’s not working at the other end. I found that carers would set up the screen, leave the room or go off shift, then there’d be a break in the connection and you’d still be performing, unaware that the audience couldn’t see you.

Unfortunately, none of us were prepared when Covid first hit. There was a shortage of protective clothing and a lot of people left hospital and were taken straight into care homes, so the virus just spread. It was a really rough time, and a lot of carers were exhausted – the strain on people was immense.

I adapted by performing driveway concerts on residential streets during lockdown last year, and outdoor shows in care homes started up again about June. Some of them

set up marquees or gazebos, others were in car parks, and sometimes I would stand outside while people watched me through windows. I also performed inside to socially distanced audiences and sometimes I had to sing in a mask, which can be a bit tricky.

It’s just about getting on with it really – it’s my job, I love performing and it’s great to see the residents again. Certainly, some of the care homes I used to work with haven’t come back and that’s because they haven’t fared so well, but I’ve found new customers by going slightly further afield.

**“Sometimes residents who have dementia are suddenly able to sing along”**

Performing in a care home is very stimulating. Sometimes residents who have dementia are suddenly able to sing along with the music, or you get a wanderer who will sit down and watch your show. It’s also about bringing people out of their shells because when you speak to people in care homes, they say the

worst part is boredom. And you suddenly think “In another 40 years is that going to be me?”

We’re an ageing population and it’s not something to take lightly; that’s why it’s important my shows are the best they can be and of extremely high quality. However, when I’m an old lady, I think I may well give the entertainers hell, especially if they sing ‘I’m Too Sexy For My Shirt’ – “You call that music? I can’t hear you!”