

Alfred University alumnus Justin Pietropaolo (Mr. Babies on the air) uses a radio station in the woods for philanthropy

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Justin Pietropaolo in
Barryville, NY

About one month ago, Alfred University alumnus Justin Pietropaolo '11 was rehearsing in Lancaster, Pa., for a new production of Matthew Lopez's *The Whipping Man* when the cast and crew were ordered to close the set at the Fulton Theater and pack their bags. Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf had just issued an executive order suspending large gatherings in the face of the growing coronavirus outbreak. The Fulton Theater was closing.

"Everybody started getting panicked," Justin recalls.

He returned to his family's home in New York City, then he, his fiancée, and his brother decamped to a family cottage near the Delaware River in Barryville, NY. They began listening to WFMU, an independent freeform radio station based in East Orange, NJ. With a lot of time on their hands, plus laptops and Wi-Fi service, they decided to start their own digital radio show and dubbed it *Imposter Radio* – named after a podcast Justin's brother had developed two years ago.

Justin is comfortable with improvisation. He studied acting at Alfred University (played Stanley Kowalski in a 2011 production of *Streetcar Named Desire*), and even tried his hand (one week) with a radio show. "You build your wings on the way down," he says. He and his fiancé and his brother began producing *Imposter Radio* from the family cabin (visit www.impradio.net)...and pretty soon he was having the time of his life.

"Most of time, we just hop on the air and play music and talk a lot of nonsense," he says. "But slowly, it started to grow, people started hooking up to the website. I was on air one night, and I realized I was having the time of my life doing this."

He had another realization: Imposter Radio could be used to raise funds for worthy organizations battling the coronavirus outbreak. He decided to stay on air for a marathon 12-hour broadcast, raising funds for the Center on Disaster Philanthropy, a Washington, DC-based organization that directs philanthropic support to disaster-stricken areas and communities. The center recently established its COVID-19 Response Fund “to support preparedness, containment, response and recovery activities for those most affected and for the responders.”

“We set up this idea where the effort would be like a Go Fund Me campaign,” Justin explains. “If you donate five dollars, you get to request a song. Donate more, and you can request a half-hour of songs. For the highest-level donation, I would jump into a freezing cold lake near the cabin.”

They advertised the fundraiser on social media and Imposter Radio, and on April 9, the 12-hour marathon began. “I hopped on the air at 9am, and people started calling in right away.” Twelve hours later, Imposter Radio had raised \$800.

“In the grand scheme of things,” Justin says, “it’s not a ton of money, but it’s still a lot more than I ever expected to make.”

He looks forward to returning to the stage. The Fulton Theater has rescheduled *The Whipping Man* for a run from Aug. 18-Aug. 30. Right now, however, Justin is considering Imposter Radio as a long-term sideline. Part of the fun of radio, he says, is adopting an on-air persona (On Imposter Radio, he goes by the name Mr. Babies, provided by his fiancé). “I’m an actor, and that appeals to me – crafting this person who is you but someone else.”