

THE ROCA REPORT

The **Richmond Orchestra and Chorus Association** (ROCA) is a group of dedicated amateur musicians under professional leadership who believes that a rich cultural scene is essential to building a strong, healthy and vibrant community and music enhances the lives of both performers and audience members.

This newsletter is intended to keep all of our ROCA friends up to date on plans for the chorus and orchestra. We hope you enjoy learning a little more about the ROCA family. If you have any questions or comments please do not hesitate to contact us at roca.office@gmail.com.

In this edition of the ROCA Report we feature:

- Summer plans for our membership
- Interview with our Artistic Directors - Brigid Coult & James Malmberg
- Season 2021-2022 sneak peek!



It's June! Every \$1 you donate to our charity association in June via GivingChallenge.ca, counts as a ballot to help us win \$20,000!!



<https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/the-richmond-community-orchestra-and-chorus-association>

Summer Break Opportunities

CHORUS:

A social outdoor gathering, physically distanced sing along on **Tuesday, July 20, 6:00pm** at McDonald Beach landing. Bring your picnic/lawn chair, mask, and choir folder! More info coming to your email soon...

ORCHESTRA:

Two weeks of July rehearsals, outdoors - let's get tuned up! More info coming to your email soon...

Interview with our Artistic Directors

We asked our Artistic Directors, Brigid Coult and James Malmberg for their insight as we continue in this strange pandemic world. It's been more than 18 months of this 'new normal' and it has changed us—perhaps in lasting ways. What about our organization? Our audiences? Read on to hear James' (JM) and Brigid's (BC) thoughts:

1) What has been the greatest challenge for you as an artistic director during this time?

JM: Perhaps the greatest challenges are all of the unknowns. How long will this last? When can we return to meeting in person? Will we be able to have concerts with an audience? When can we return to re-

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hearsals and performances? Will people have lost interest in performing and attending concerts? So many questions with few answers as yet.

BC: For me, I think there were three stages, each with their own challenges. When this hit, I don't think we really had any concept of how long it might last. My primary focus in the spring was on the "community" aspect – so, teaching myself the basics of Zoom tech, and providing a space for the group to meet online on a regular basis. Not an artistic challenge, per se, but dealing with a period of numbness while we came to terms with the situation.



My BCCF hat kept me well involved with the discoveries and challenges that were beginning to emerge, and instigating and facilitating webinars, round tables and workshops, as well as consulting with colleagues in Choral Canada and Chorus America gave me a good idea of what we were up against.

The fall challenge was the practical aspect of all this; learning to manage the tech to a more advanced degree, working out just what was possible on Zoom (since standard choral rehearsals were out of the question), finding rehearsal materials and attempting hybrid rehearsals, until all that activity was closed down. Not being able to hear each other sing was immensely frustrating, but we discovered that singing to recordings did at least give us an awareness of a common purpose and of each other. The end of the fall was divided between preparation of the Christmas parts of "Messiah", and responding to "favourite carols" requests, and that set us up for the spring.

We have a group of singers who enjoy being challenged, but who do not, for the most part, have substantive music history training. We've done five months of exploring music history and singing the results – I hope that we will see a return in terms of reading ability in the future; we have certainly discovered and rediscovered together the glories of five centuries of choral music.

2) What do you see as a possible 'lasting change' in the performing arts due to the pandemic?



JM: In the short term, I am sure we will be very aware of the pandemic and its consequences - small audiences and heightened awareness of local health regulations. One short term positive is that our return to rehearsing and performing will have an emphasis on local artists and talent. It will be a while before international artists and soloists return to their touring schedules.

BC: The choirs (mostly small chamber choirs) who have managed to continue singing and producing concerts have led the way towards issues we will need to consider.

I have always struggled with the issue of recording our performances. Music is essentially a transitory art form, existing only in the moment. Recording solidifies both the good and the bad. And the hassles of dealing with performing and recording rights are a pain (leaving aside that a lot of people just don't bother with it). But I think our live audiences may be slow to return, and that we will need to consider recording and livestreaming as needed – and there are costs to doing that well.

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Singing has been labelled as one of the dangerous art-forms; exhaled breath, especially at louder volume, carries more droplets. So both singers and audience are going to need to come to terms, individually and corporately, with their own risk assessment, and what can be done to mitigate the risks.

3) What, if any, positives have there been at this time? What successes for ROCA do you see coming out of this time?

JM: I think the commitment of the ROCA membership has been amazing! It really leaves me hopeful that we will emerge from this stronger as an organization knowing how important we are as a community. I think we have learned to really appreciate what we have and how important it really is to us and our community.

BC: I am immensely proud of our ROCA singers who have held together as a community, and continued doing choral music, albeit in a somewhat different format. The past five months have affirmed that there is much music we love, and opened up the discovery of much potential repertoire.

4) What vision do you have for the next year or 2 years for ROCA, as we come out of this pandemic?

JM: I am sure we will start with some careful steps to returning to in person rehearsing and performing and things won't really return to feeling normal for at least another year. One really positive development is that the orchestra is going to try to get together in person for the first time this summer in July and have outdoor rehearsals. If this proves successful, I would be thrilled to be able to continue this tradition and have an outdoor summer session every year with the orchestra.

BC: We have to work together as a choir to decide what risks we are ready to take and how we can remain accessible to all our singers.

Assuming that we will be singing together in the fall, we have to get back into condition – eighteen months of singing without our fellow singers around us has left many rusty voices – so much of the fall will, I hope, be focused on technique.

Obviously, everything depends on Provincial Health orders; we don't know how soon we will feel comfortable crowding onto the Fraserview stage with the Orchestra. I have four alternative sets of plans, depending on how things go. What I do know is that we need to find a way to be back together again – and we're aiming to sing our "Let It Be" Beatles program in June 2022.

Additional reflections from Brigid:

I am profoundly grateful to the Board and members of ROCA, who made early decisions that we would not go on hiatus, as so many artistic organizations have had to do, but would continue to hold together as a community and grow in musical knowledge. It's been a hard year, but one that has not been wasted, and one through which we have supported each other, and maintained a foundation for future years.

Thank you to both James and Brigid for their leadership and vision. We are grateful to you, and for this organization of community-minded musicians.

ROCA Season 2021-2022: Sneak Peek!

Time to get back into musical shape! The season will proceed with caution, following the public health orders as they are announced. Tentatively, with careful planning to come, and without knowledge of how large audiences could be as yet, we would like to aim for:

- Orchestra concert in November
- Chorus concert in December (possibly with multiple dates)
- Food bank fundraiser concert in December (orchestra)
- Rising Stars orchestra concert in early spring
- Chorus concert – possible Requiem in spring
- Orchestra concert in May
- June 4, 2022: the much anticipated “Let it Be” Beatles concert with both orchestra and chorus

Keep well, everyone! Have a safe and happy summer!
Watch your email for summer updates and notifications about fall registration.



Do you know a player or singer who would like to join us?

Get them in touch with our office manager to set up an audition!

Email: roca.office@gmail.com



Are you interested in committee volunteer work, or in becoming part of the ROCA Board of Directors? *We need you!*

What can you do, you ask?

Many hands make light work- volunteer your time online - please contact Laura at lmrhead@gmail.com to share your ideas this summer as we start to engage our audiences again.

New opportunities include:

- Website maintenance
- Social media engagement
- Sunshine committee members
- Membership recruitment
- FOH (Front of House) recruitment
- Board Secretary role (online meeting minutes, group emails) ...and more!

