

## **Artistic Vision Statement**

### **Festival of the Sound**

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## **A CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND**

The Festival of the Sound started with three concerts in 1979. A meeting in Anton Kuerti's cottage with fifty people in attendance showed a clear interest in the community for the creation of a chamber music Festival. I became the Artistic Director in 1985.

Until 2002, concerts were held in "Festival Hall", a gym in the local high school with reasonable acoustics but also intense heat, plastic and metal chairs, multiple interruptions by train whistles, improvised lighting, and no backstage facilities. Festival Hall and the school lobby were ingeniously decorated each summer by volunteers. There was a sense that everyone, performers, board members, volunteers and general public, belonged to something special, even if it was slightly eccentric. In short, there was no room for inflated artistic egos or audience members who were less than committed to what they wanted to hear.

The tough conditions in the main concert venue forced us to hold events in other locations and concerts and events were held in St James United Church, the local museum, on board the 30,000 Island Queen cruise boat, the smaller Chippewa cruise ship, on Georgian Bay islands, and in local homes and gardens. A creative community formed which became the spirit of the Festival and attracted tough, hard core music lovers willing to endure the challenges of Festival Hall and adventurous enough to explore unusual concert venues. All this time the dream of building a first class concert venue remained. That dream turned into reality in 2003 with the building of the Charles W. Stockey Centre for the Performing Arts.

My job was to keep that dream alive by programming concerts that would attract a sophisticated yet conservative public, be challenging enough to interest the CBC, which at that time broadcast most of the programs, be innovative enough to please the grant giving agencies, and meaningful to the local community.

The Festival developed both an international reputation and a character uniquely identified with Parry Sound and Georgian Bay. The audience, community and artists now have a strong sense of ownership which is central to the future of the Festival of the Sound.

## **B CENTRE**

### **1 LEADERSHIP**

I share the leadership of the Festival with the Board of Directors and the Executive Director. We each have a clearly defined role: I plan programs, choose the artists, draw up the rehearsal schedule, and take responsibility for the artistic success or failure of the Festival. The Executive Director, Board of Directors,

and the staff do everything else.

Since I do not live in Parry Sound, I often consult with the Executive Director and the President to get board and community feedback, particularly about suitable programs for cruises and special events. From late September until April we speak or email almost daily.

The level of trust developed over twenty years has been key to my being willing and able to remain in my role since 1985, given that I am full Professor at a major US music school and concertize throughout the world. I have declined invitations to apply to head several so called more "prestigious" organizations because of the value I place on the culture of trust, integrity, and co-operation that is the Festival of the Sound.

## **2 BELIEFS, VALUES AND PHILOSOPHY**

I, like most artists, have dedicated my life to music because of the belief that great music, past and present, has a valuable place in the hearts and minds of all human beings. It contributes to a better understanding of the human condition, fosters community pride, and contributes to economic well-being.

Concerts at the Festival of the Sound demand the intellectual, creative, and physical participation of artists, audience and local community. It does not offer a passive form of entertainment.

The Festival strives to enrich lives through great music by helping create bonds:

- artist to artist
- artist to audience
- artist to local community
- artist to composer
- composer to local community and audience
- outside to local audience members
- youth to artists and music
- young artists to senior artists who can help their career and artistic development

The most important bond occurs during a performance when artist, listener and composer are united by the power of music.

I also believe that the arts provide an important financial stimulus and we are proud to be an economic engine for Parry Sound during the 23 days the Festival operates each summer.

## **3 AESTHETIC/PROGRAMMATIC FRAMEWORK**

The Festival of the Sound is first and foremost a classical chamber music Festival and programs are drawn primarily from chamber music's core repertoire. Our belief that great music can change lives finds fertile ground in the great chamber music works of past composers. The smaller forces required to perform this repertoire means that we are able to present some of the greatest music ever written in an intimate venue. Presenting new work by today's composers is very important and new music is often found rubbing shoulders with masterpieces of the past.

Although chamber music is dominant, jazz, children's concerts, choral music and opera play an important part in our programming.

The Festival of the Sound is a creative Festival. I conceive programs which are then rehearsed in Parry Sound and performed uniquely for the Festival. It is not a booking Festival. Pre-formed touring "shows" are rarely engaged.

I book a wide range of artists who come to Parry Sound for one or two weeks, participate in up to 5 concerts a week, and are paid a weekly fee, most getting the same amount. This allows for maximum flexibility in programming and creates an "esprit de corps" among the artists. Many become a part of the community and most returning performers now view Parry Sound as their summer home. Their loyalty to the area is an integral part of the character of the Festival and is crucial to its longevity, given the increased competition among summer Festivals for top calibre artists.

The Festival of the Sound does not offer top fees and cannot compete financially with richer organizations. Fortunately there are non-material ways to satisfy artists, the most important being given the opportunity to play great music with good friends before an appreciative public in a wonderful concert hall. My goal is to make every artist feel relaxed, appreciated and artistically fulfilled during their time at the Festival. We offer young musicians a chance to perform before an interested and sophisticated public and honour senior artists whose wisdom and maturity should not be quieted too soon.

In the old Festival Hall interaction between artists and public happened naturally, it could not be avoided. The present set-up in the Stockey Centre presents more of a challenge and the former easy interaction must now be more formerly orchestrated.

#### **4 WORKING VALUES**

It was reportedly stated at a granting meeting of the Canada Council for the Arts that the Festival of the Sound is "a quality organization run by good, honest people." In my view there can be no higher praise from our peers. Trust and respect have been and continue to be central to the success of the Festival. I have been the Artistic Director for twenty-seven years, Allan Beers the Office Manager for twenty-three years, and Margie Boyd the Executive Director for twenty years. Because we have faith in each other's abilities, a culture of calm competence has developed over time and leads to the relaxed atmosphere that permeates the Festival, even in times of crisis.

#### **C RANGE OF PROGRAMMES**

The Festival produces about seventy events every summer during its twenty-three day run. An average of fifty of these events are ticketed and usually include three cruise concerts on the Island Queen, three jazz concerts, two choral events, two flat-floor gala events, an orchestra concert, one or two touring groups, and about thirty to thirty-five chamber music concerts. The up to twenty free events include lectures, interviews with artists, and open rehearsals. Unfortunately it is not yet possible for us to present a winter classical music series in Parry Sound but we usually co-present two concerts a year with the Stockey Centre.

Music Scores, our educational outreach program takes place in the autumn and spring and is our most

important local initiative. Invited guest artists spend a week in the area visiting grades four to six in all the schools. During these visits the children get to know the artists, their instruments, and the music they love. At the end of the week the children are then bussed or walk to the Stockey Centre for a formal concert. For many, it is their first visit to such a magnificent building and their first experience of a concert. However, they feel comfortable because they already know the performers as "nice" people and know a little about the music being played.

Music Scores is the Festival's investment in the future of the arts in the area and is free to the schools, its mandate being to introduce young people to the arts and encourage future Stockey Centre attendees.

## **D OVERARCHING GOALS**

CBC's tragic change of policy has taken away the Festival's national platform and changed it from a nationally prominent organization to one that is now focused locally. We must deal with this new situation by developing a strong local base and working harder to tell our story outside the immediate area. Increased web presence is crucial, as are tours, recordings, and above all, aggressive, creative marketing.

At this time, Parry Sound and the Festival cannot support a winter series of classical concerts, much to my disappointment. This is a project that needs to be developed in future years.

Music Scores, our educational outreach program, is a source of pride to all involved and is ripe for further development. The program can expand to include resident young professional musicians working with the schools and local musicians and amateurs to enrich the cultural life of the entire area. The Festival needs to play a major role in the development of this project.

My view for the long term future sees Parry Sound as a destination for the cultural tourist. Using the Festival's reputation and energy as a catalyst, the Stockey Centre will become a home to all the arts. Combining the natural cozy sophistication of an environmentally aware small community with world class arts presentations would attract more of the type of audience members who now support the Festival and lead to a vibrant economic community centered on the arts.

The Festival of the Sound, in partnership with the Stockey Centre, would eventually host a jazz Festival, a dance Festival, an ethnic arts Festival, a drama Festival, a choral Festival, music competitions and master classes, the possibilities limited only by the imagination. When doubts creep into my mind about this ever happening, I simply look at the performance hall of the Stockey Centre and remember "dreams do come true."

Parry Sound itself must first become a more visitor friendly town with improved hotels, restaurants and shops. Much has been done, but all seems to be waiting on the development of the waterfront. The Festival of the Sound must continue to raise the awareness of Parry Sound to the benefits the arts bring it.

## **E MEASURES OF SUCCESS**

The most obvious indicator of the Festival's success is the very presence of the Stockey Centre. It is

evidence of ultimate community connection, especially since it houses both a first class concert hall and the Bobby Orr Hockey Museum.

The commitment and energy of the board and volunteers is an indicator of community involvement. It has always been a source of pride to me, and amazement to others, that a town of 6,500 people can field a board as hard working and committed as the Festival's.

Audience growth is measured in the long term. It is common for a patron to first attend one or two concerts, and then return the next season for several days or a week, eventually becoming a season pass holder. Audience loyalty built slowly is key to the Festival's stability.

The number of individual donors is as important as the amount given. The Festival's base is not rich and huge donations are extremely rare. There are no large corporations based in Parry Sound so we depend on the generosity of many giving what they can rather than a few giving what they should! This is a long way from the so called "elitist" reputation classical music has suffered from for decades. Locally, the Festival still struggles with this misconception and must work toward it's elimination by slowly, sensitively bringing the greater public closer to what we do.

Artists can be very quick to move on to other so called greener pastures and without their loyalty to the Festival it would not be possible to mount the ambitious program the Festival presents. That loyalty must be constantly nurtured.

My personal measure of success comes in those moments when a great work is being performed and the wonderful silence of concentrated communal listening fills the concert hall. Musicians hear and feel this and are fulfilled, the Stockey Centre is in its glory, doing what it was designed to do, and listeners are joined in timeless community with others through the music of a great composer. This is why I spend hours planning each season, the Board of Directors and volunteers give freely of their time, the staff work endlessly on organizational details, artists dedicate their lives to music, and listeners travel great distances to be present. Everything we do and all that we are comes down to that moment when, through sound, a soul is enriched and life is made better.