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Choral Canada
Canada Choral

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CHORALES CANADIENNES

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with the text, and to create connections between the music and its communication. Here are three techniques to engage chorister's in their own aesthetic skills development:

1. After movement, inquire into the chorister's personal response to the music, asking, "How does this music make you feel?" In this question, the word "feel" has a dual meaning, implying both the physical and the emotional feelings associated with a given musical experience. Choristers may respond, "bouncy", or "joyous", or "like a robot". Any response is valuable, as it reflects the chorister's lived experience. This type of qualitative analysis can be accomplished through a whole-choir discussion, or through a written response.
2. Encourage choristers to engage their entire bodies while singing. Wiggle, walk, clap, jump, or play a game while rehearsing a section of music. Strive to engage both the core of the body and its extremities. Even wiggling the toes while sustaining a long tone can change the choristers' level of engagement with the music. Try a circle game where choristers pass a clap across the circle to another chorister, while singing! Aim for total engagement, or vibration, of the body. Little by little, these whole-body movements become internalized and translated into the finer details of the choral sound and the musical interpretation.
3. Experiment with the spatial orientation of the choir in relationship to the specific parameters of the repertoire. If the music is antiphonal, ask members of the choir to face one another. If the music is canonic or polyphonic, have choristers walk and weave through the other voice parts as they sing. If the harmonies are dense, clump the choir together. If the harmonies are diffuse, spread the choir apart. These types of large-scale movements lift the choral score off the page.

Social internalization—Developing ensemble response:

As choral conductors, we are dually engaged with two types of pedagogy: individual pedagogy, encouraging each chorister to grow in their personal musical skills, and ensemble pedagogy, developing the choir's unified expression of the music. The choir, as an instrument, balances this dichotomy. Independence is critical, but so is interdependence. As an example, when choristers make direct eye contact with a partner while singing, the individual and ensemble perspectives meet and are integrated. "I am the song", but you are too!

Embodied techniques forge a link between these two ends of the pedagogical spectrum. First, choristers meet the music through their own senses, and then they share this experience with others, verbally and nonverbally, to realize a corporate sense of embodiment. The choir, then, becomes its own type of body, breathing together, articulating together, and expressing together. The following are three suggestions to promote ensemble response through embodied teaching:

1. Choose an individual to model a sound for the entire choir. As choristers listen, they adopt the individual's sound into their own sound vocabulary. Or, choose an entire section to model for another section (this technique can be particularly useful to maximize on the unique timbres of the various voice types). Chorister modeling capitalizes on the sounds that already exist in the ensemble, and creates an opportunity for peer teaching.
2. Strive to develop the choristers' knowledge of the entire score. Ask two sections to switch parts for a phrase (this can be a very challenging exercise,

but when choristers return to their own part, it is invariably better in tune and more rhythmically vital). Or, ask all choristers to sing a given section's part in unison. Or, ask choristers to sing their own part while clapping another section's part. Or, ask the choir to simply listen, perhaps with eyes closed, as the pianist plays the harmonic structure for a given section of music. Challenge choristers to aurally internalize the overall sound and structure of the music.

3. Incorporate the group's embodied experiences into your performance conducting. If a particular gesture or movement has aided the choir in rehearsal, adapt it into your own gesture, as a musical reminder of a felt experience. This type of conducting gesture promotes empathy between conductor and chorister. If the embodiment of the music is very well unified for the ensemble, consider an un-conducted version of the piece for performance.

The notion of *being* the music, or "I am the song", emerges as choristers experience the music through their own bodies, and in community with the choir, composer, and conductor. These various strategies, aimed at the internalization of aural, vocal, aesthetic and social skills for choral singing, have as their central goal a vivid externalization of choral musicianship and musicality.



Carolyn received a Bachelor of Music in voice from Acadia University followed by a Bachelor of Education from UNB. She spent many years as a public school music educator in New Brunswick during which time she was active in both the New Brunswick Music Educators' Association and the Canadian Music Educators' Association. In 1978, she was hired by the Department of Education to organize and found the New Brunswick Choral Federation and served as the first executive director of that organization for ten years. She was instrumental in helping to establish the Association of Canadian Choral Communities (ACCC) and also served as their administrator from 1984-1988. She has served as VP Communications for Choral Canada since 2008.

Carolyn has conducted numerous school, church and community choirs, performed regularly as an alto soloist, presented workshops and continues to maintain an active involvement as a chorister.

CELEBRATING THE NATIONAL YOUTH CHOIR 30TH ANNIVERSARY 1984-2014

Compiled by Carolyn Nielsen

In the early days of what was then known as the Association of Canadian Choral Conductors (ACCC), the initial board brain-stormed ideas for a useful, meaningful and long-lasting project that would help establish the fledgling organization and benefit our choral community in the future. We looked with envy at the National Youth Orchestra program and dismay at our bank account. Yet, this intrepid group of visionaries decided to forge ahead with a "trial run" in 1984, for what soon became our flagship program: the National Youth Choir/le Choeur national des jeunes (NYC/ CNJ).

Newly organized in 1980, ACCC was then holding its national meetings as an add-on to a major event organized by one of our supporting provincial organizations. The Manitoba Choral Association had generously invited us to Winnipeg for 1984 and ACCC's founding president, Robert Solem, enlisted the assistance of Winnifred Sim, conductor of the CBC Hymn Sing Chorus, to chair the local committee for this new project. Winnifred has recently released her autobiography, *A Candid Coda: Reflections on the Life and Music of Winnifred Sim*, in which she remembers hearing the first performance of that choir in Winnipeg: " ... a musical memory which I will never forget! It was a very exciting time for everyone of us."



The first National Youth Choir with John Standing, conductor, in Winnipeg, 1984

In consultation with the local organizers and provincial representatives, the ACCC board invited John Standing, a highly respected Winnipeg teacher and choral conductor, perhaps best known on the national level for the many fine choirs from Kelvin High School which he led to national and international acclaim. With John as conductor, Derek Morphy as assistant conductor and Stewart Thomson as accompanist, the musical team was in place. We were fortunate to have representation from all ten provinces and, after a mere two days of rehearsal, this first NCY/CNJ presented an enthusiastic and credible performance to an appreciative audience of delegates from across the country. In the words of the late John Standing, “[NYC] is a national treasure and deserves our full support.”

Encouraged and excited by the success of this first modest venture, the ACCC board moved forward with plans to establish NYC/CNJ as a permanent biennial project. Existing provincial choral organizations supported the project and participated by selecting their representative SATB quartets and, in many cases, provided financial assistance to them. In provinces where no formal choral organization existed, we relied on the support of individuals like Barbara Hagerman (PEI) and Douglas Dunsmore (NL) to select representatives for their areas and even organize fundraising events. Although it is not consistently the case, in more recent years, we have welcomed the participation of singers from the territories.

Without a doubt, NYC/CNJ was, and continues to be, a significant musical event for participants. **Michael Molloy, (tenor, 1986 NL)** has this to say about his experience:

National Youth Choir was one of the most significant musical experiences of my life. I was 20 years old and a second-year trumpet major at Memorial University of Newfoundland. I loved to sing, but did not have the benefit of choral singing in high school. I was very fortunate

to have been in Dr. Douglas Dunsmore’s choral conducting class that year and when the call went out for NYC, he strongly encouraged me to apply. I am forever grateful to him for that. It was an opportunity that changed the course of my career.

It is said that in order to improve, a good idea is to work with people better than yourself. That was certainly true in my case. It was so inspiring to work with such talented singers from across Canada under the artistic leadership of Maestro Jon Washburn. The singing was beautiful from the down beat, but he demanded deeper and deeper levels of musicianship and artistry every time we opened our mouths to sing. His attention to detail and his unwavering commitment to excellence is something I still aspire to in my own teaching.

My NYC experience turned my career path toward choral music so much that after graduation and one year of teaching band, I was able to save enough money to pursue a master’s degree in choral conducting. After earning that degree in 1992, I took a job in Greater Vancouver and returned to the city I fell in love with during the Expo. Two years after that, feeling the need to do more singing of my own, I was fortunate to join Chor Leoni, under the direction of dear Diane Loomer. She was our surrogate mother during NYC ’86, her warmth and love making us all feel so at home and safe to make music together.

I am forever grateful to ACCC for what you did for me.

(Michael is currently Music Teacher at St. Charles North High School in suburban Chicago, Illinois)

Ronalda Hutton MacDonald (soprano, 1986, NS/NL)

NYC, Expo 1986 was an amazing experience for me. As a young singer, needless to say I loved the adventure. Seeing the pavilions and meeting new people from around the country. Lots of laughter. Lots of song. But I also learned a lot about the drive as a musician—the discipline needed to be a good one and the love I truly have for music. Working with Jon Washburn, the beautiful Diane Loomer and Doug Dunsmore was an honour. The biggest thrill was singing in the opening ceremonies, a commissioned work by David Foster while he too accompanied the mass choir. We also performed The Lord Bless You And Keep You at a concert. So beautiful, we had it sung at our wedding. I will never forget. NYC will forever live on!

(Ronaldo and her husband, Peter, run a private music studio with approximately 120 voice students and own a musical theatre company. She has directed several choirs, has been a clinician and adjudicator for over 20 years and is still performing.)

Sally Dibblee, (soprano 1986, 1988 NB, opera singer)

I love that I get to work with friends made in NYC as I travel across the country singing— from Caroline Schiller in NL to Ben Butterfield in Victoria and many other hugs in between!

My most treasured memory was all of the girls giving Jon Washburn a rose and a hug (and a tear!) at the end of the final concert.

As NYC/CNJ continued to develop, the rehearsal period increased from two days in 1984 to four in 1996 and eventually to the week-long residency that has been the norm since 1988. In 1988, the tour component was introduced and the number of public performances and geographical territory covered during this tour has expanded to a three-province, six-day tour culminating with the final performance and participation at our national choral conference, Podium.



National Youth Choir 1986; Jon Washburn, conductor, at Expo in Vancouver

The NYC/CNJ frequently gives workshops for local schools or community groups during their tours and many singers form special bonds with people they meet in these communities. Just such a bonding was described by **Andrea Ellis (2010 & 2012)** in her on-line article “I Have Had Singing: National Youth Choir 2010” (Historica Canada blog November 3, 2011 —Andrea Ellis)

A major component of the NYC community exists among the choristers, but this community extends to include the churches and towns who host us and our audiences who lend us their ears. For many of us young choristers, NYC provides the opportunity to learn how to sing for an audience, involving them in every note, emotion and sound effect. It also provides us with the opportunity to become gracious towards our audiences.

I had my own experience with a special audience member, Mary, an elderly woman I met at the Canadian Chamber Choir’s performance during Podium 2010. She was a retired nurse who lived all over the world taking care of those who were ill. She was also a pilot. In her younger years she would fly to Northern Canada and provide healthcare to those in isolated areas. She told me that when she was a child she wanted to be a nurse or sing at the Met. Although she didn’t make it as an opera star, she had a wonderful, full life caring for others and was genuinely excited for me as a member of the National Youth Choir.

I invited her to our performance the next evening. Sure enough on concert night, I saw her sitting three or four rows back on the left side of the church. After singing in one of the most memorable concerts of my life, we made eye contact as I left the risers and shot each other a smile. She found me after to congratulate me and I will be forever grateful to her for the sense of community she showed me; it was as if we were in on this together.

(Andrea is currently the Executive Director, Indian River Festival, PEI and was the Co-ordinator for NYC/CNJ 2014.)

In 1998, ACCC established the Conducting Apprenticeship Program. The program offers a young conductor the opportunity to study with one of Canada’s finest choral conductors, to observe rehearsals, to discuss choral techniques and to experience conducting the NYC/CNJ in performance. Since 2012, the program has been made possible through the generous support of The Sir Ernest MacMillan Memorial Foundation.

The first person to benefit from the Conducting Apprenticeship Program was former NYC / CNJ member, **Julia Olsen (1994)**. Writing about her experience in *Anacrusis* (Volume 18, Number 2, Winter/Hiver 1999), Julia says:

Conducting the National Youth Choir of Canada was an incredible experience. One could compare it to being given a luxury car to drive for a couple of weeks. Choirs of [this] calibre are few and far between—it was a great honour to be selected to work with the group and master conductor Iwan Edwards.

Mr. Edwards...challenged me to find a level of expression and knowledge of the music I was conducting which far surpassed that which was usually required. ...he gave me a few suggestions, but mainly encouraged me to take more risks, pushing myself and the choir to a higher level of music making.

I would like to thank ACCC for having the foresight to implement the apprenticeship program. The future of choral music in Canada cannot help but benefit from the training opportunities you have given me and all future Apprentice Conductors.

(Dr. Julia Olsen Davids is currently the Artistic Director of the Canadian Chamber Choir and Stephen J. Hendrickson Assistant Professor and Director of Choral Activities at North Park University, Chicago)



1998 National Youth Choir with Julia Olsen seated second from left in the front row.

The list of Apprentice Conductors indicates the success of each conductor and, especially of the program: Brett Scott (2000), Kevin Skelton (2002), Timothy Shantz (2004), Caron Daley (2006), Jean-Sebastien Vallee (2008), Heather Fraser (2010), Joel Tranquilla (2012) and Irene Apanovitch (2014).

Common themes expressed in NYC / CNJ reflections are the strong sense of community, the enriching musical and professional experiences and the lasting connections formed. Excerpts from some of these reflections follow.

Naomi Russell (alto, MB 1994, 1996)

I have been extremely fortunate in my lifetime to be a part of not one but two National Youth Choirs. The enormous blessing of these NYC experiences was not lost on me back then but my participation in yet another choir since 2001 has especially brought home to me just how valuable they were. A group of singers from the 1998 NYC were aging out of that program and decided that there should be a choir which would be the next step. A choir that would provide that same sense of nationalistic pride, of networking with one's peers, of making connections with musicians all across the country. I was fortunate to get in on the ground floor with the Canadian Chamber Choir and have been very lucky to be a part of all 23 projects we have done over the past 12 years. Singing with the CCC is my greatest joy and there would be no CCC if it weren't for the handful of 1998 NYC'ers who dreamed that there must be something more. Our CCC conductor Dr. Julia Davids sang with me in that 1994 National Youth Choir. Our ensemble talks a lot about community as we travel across the country. What it takes to build community and keep it strong in a society which is increasingly technology dependent and struggling to keep up with the fast-paced world we live in.

Dominic Gregrio (tenor, ON 1998)

There were so many experiences from National Youth Choir 98-99 that made me certain that I wanted to make this my life; so many beautiful and important friendships that have lasted all these years. Fast forward to today and I am lucky enough to be Director of Choral Activities at the University of Regina. This year completes a beautiful circle as I return to Halifax for Podium as a presenter, along with three of my students who are members of this year's National Youth Choir. I am grateful to ACCC and NYC for changing my life, and I am so happy to support this worthwhile project!

Caron Daley (soprano, NS 2000, 2006)

I count it a tremendous privilege to have participated in the 2000 and 2006 National Youth Choir projects. As an emerging choral professional, these experiences were invaluable in my education. The opportunity to meet choral peers, to study with master-teachers, and to prepare and perform



National Youth Choir 2010 conducted by Dr. Victoria Meredith in performance at Knox United Church, Saskatoon, SK

challenging repertoire grew both my skills and my imagination for future choral music-making.

In 2006, as the apprentice conductor, I had the distinct honour of working with the NYC from the podium perspective. Our music was challenging, and it stretched my technique and my artistry. We danced to Bach, grappled with Frank Martin's *Mass for Double Choir*, and saddled-up to Trent Worthington's *Alberta Cowboy Songs*. Conducting Bruce Sled's playful *La-ba-lin-da* at Podium was a particular delight. I am most grateful to the 2006 NYC choristers and to Dr. Richard Sparks for being kind and wise teachers/collaborators.

On a more personal note, I still maintain friendships from both 2000 and 2006. Many of these amazing choral singers have become my career colleagues, as well.

I want to commend the ACCC on thirty years of outstanding chorister

and conductor education. I look forward to seeing the National Youth Choir program flourish in the future!

Scott Reimer (bass, MB 2008)

I am very thankful for my experience singing in the National Youth Choir. ...my experience with NYC fostered a confidence that led me to sing with the World Youth Choir for three sessions, begin conducting choirs (Prairie Voices, Horizon and Antiphony) and performing locally at a professional level. I remain thankful to the Manitoba Choral Association for making NYC 2008 possible and I applaud the ACCC for facilitating such a life-giving opportunity for young singers in Canada.

Mary Blake Bonn (alto, NB 2012)

I can honestly say that the National Youth Choir ranks among my most valuable experiences as a musician to date. Of the choirs in which I have participated, National Youth Choir provided the most challenging and varied repertoire...and perhaps most importantly, National Youth Choir was a phenomenal networking opportunity. Not only did we get to meet young singers from all of Canada's provinces (and from the Northwest Territories), but we got to go to Podium. It is important to see what is going on in choral communities elsewhere in Canada, especially for musicians from smaller provinces, like New Brunswick.

At the beginning of National Youth Choir, apprentice conductor Joel Tranquilla (an NYC alumnus and New Brunswick native) told us how meaningful and memorable his experience as a singer in the National Youth Choir had been. I remember hoping that I would feel the same afterward. I can say without a doubt that I do.



National Youth Choir 2014 conducted by Dr. Hilary Apfelstadt in performance at St. Mary's Basilica, Halifax, NS
© Judy Porter, Judealou Photography

Over the years some of the finest Canadian choral conductors have been invited to conduct the choir. Our singers have benefited from the guidance and musical expertise of John Standing (1984), Jon Washburn (1986), Wayne Riddell (1988), James Fankhauser (1990), Elmer Iseler (1992), Diane Loomer (1994), Robert Cooper (1996), Iwan Edwards (1998), Leonard Ratzlaff (2000), Lydia Adams (2002), Kathryn Laurin (2004), Richard Sparks (2006), Dr. Julian Wachner (2008), Dr. Victoria Meredith (2010), Ivars Taurins (2012) and Hilary Apfelstadt (2014).

We thank and celebrate all these outstanding conductors, the administrators past and present whose diligent work has ensured the continuance of both NYC/CNJ and the Conducting Apprenticeship Program and, most especially all those singers from across Canada who have shared with us their voices, their love and their commitment to choral excellence! In the words of the late Diane Loomer, choir mom (1986), co-ordinator (1988) and conductor (1994) writing in *Anacrusis* Volume 14, number 1 Fall 1994:

“Through this ongoing project we have the opportunity to encourage and nurture our future singers and choral conductors. Helping them to understand, appreciate and value the power of choral music ensures the continuation of the choral tradition in this young, vital country of Canada.

Long live the National Youth Choir! Vive le Choeur national des jeunes!”

Donations to support the National Youth Choir program may be made at any time by visiting the NYC page on the Choral Canada web site and clicking on the Canada Helps link.

UNITED BY SONG: “With a Voice of Joy”—An Interview with David Holborn, Conductor of Voices of Joy Community Choir (Newmarket, Ontario)

This is the first in a series of articles about new Choral Canada members who conduct choirs which have a specialized mission.

By Marta McCarthy



Dr. Marta McCarthy is an Associate Professor at the University of Guelph, where she has been directing the choirs and teaching musicianship for sixteen years. She is a graduate of Westminster Choir College of Princeton (M.Mus), the Royal Conservatory of Music (ARCT, piano performance) and of the University of Toronto (B.Mus, B.Ed., Ph.D.). Honours include the 1999 Elmer Iseler Conducting Fellowship, an Ontario Volunteer Service Award, and being named a member of the June Callwood Circle of Caring. In 2005, she was awarded the Guelph Woman of Distinction for Arts & Culture. Marta has led University of Guelph choirs to national and international acclaim through their performances at various festivals and competitions and this year she will conduct the Ontario Youth Choir.

Marta was a board member of Choirs Ontario for six years, including two years as Vice President, was in charge of Volunteers on the 2002 Podium Committee, has been the Choirs Ontario librarian since 2003, and a member of OMEA, CMEA, and ACCC for many years. She has just begun her term as President of Choral Canada

At ten to seven on a Monday night, folks are bustling through the lobby of Bethel Christian Reformed Church in Newmarket, eager to escape the bitter wind chill and even more eager to greet their friends, find their music binder, and take their place in the choir. “Having a place” and “giving voice” are key elements of the Voices of Joy Community Choir, home to approximately sixty singers of “differing abilities”. Their conductor, Mr. David Holborn, is justifiably proud of the fact that this choir is “a model for community participation” because everyone contributes equally, and “we’re really like a big family; everyone feels included”. About two-thirds of the members are clients of Community Living Newmarket/Aurora, and have, more often than not, been *excluded*, because of their developmental challenges, from activities that many of us take for granted. As a result, the concepts *inclusion* and *membership* take on a deeper significance for these choir members. The choir provides a forum for each person to express themselves musically, to experience the discipline of ensemble, to learn and grow, and most importantly, to celebrate all types of abilities, including the ability to feel and spread joy.

Other members of the choir, many of whom hail from neighbouring church choirs, consider it an honour to blend in, musically and socially, with the Community Living clients. There is no hierarchy of abilities—each singer is equally valued. The emphasis on “differing abilities” is comparable to the theory of Multiple Intelligences (Howard Gardner). Gardner posited that for too long our society has placed certain types of intelligence, such as linguistic and mathematical, on a pedestal while seriously undervaluing less quantifiable forms of understanding such as musical, emotional and spiritual intelligence. As musicians, we know that these other forms of intelligence deserve just as much respect. Furthermore, the members and supporters of Voices of Joy value all contributions to the choral experience: for some members, just sitting in the choir and being a part of this community is a viable way to participate. In the past, some members were non-verbal, contributing in spirit if not in actual sound. As accompanist Jan Stem once told me, “Who are we to decide that that is not important?”

David Holborn also conducts Knox United Church Senior Choir in Sutton, Ontario, and directs the Beverly Acres Public School Children’s Choir. He relishes the opportunities presented by each of his positions. In some ways, he notes, Voices of Joy is the most rewarding because of the enormous sense of accomplishment his singers feel as they learn and share music, reaching a wide audience in Southern Ontario. The challenge of training singers with such diverse abilities appeals to him: many of the singers have lovely voices and a few have trained voices, but many cannot in fact read. So they must learn all words and music by ear and then by memory. For those with high needs, learning new music is a struggle; so