

## **MINUTES OF THE MEETING**

South Fraser Branch of BC Registered Music Teachers' Association

**Wednesday, October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020**

Zoom Meeting Online, 10am

### **Attendees:**

Helga Murray	Dianne Szarapka	Sandra Starek
Calla Strain	Diana Meister	Janet Gonzales
Sylvia Leigh	Christy Kuettel	Alison d'Entremont
Paulette Nielsen	Andrea Mesana	Jennifer Silva
Susan Senkow	Marlene Bartsch	Michelle Bumpus
Lea Tsui	Yvette Rowledge	Eva Law
Jennifer Condie	Esther Neufeld	Colleen Branson
Leslie Chen	Maureen Hollins	Sharon Farenhorst

**Minutes** of the January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020 meeting are posted on our website.

*Moved by Maureen Hollins, seconded by Marlene Bartsch to adopt the minutes as circulated.*

### **Treasurer's Report:** Sylvia Leigh

Total General Account \$ 29,098.87

Total Festival Account \$ 6,559.79

### **Business:**

#### **1. BC Piano Competition Report:** Maureen Hollins

Our adjudicator, Jamie Syer, wrote a wonderful reflection – that is on the provincial website – about the performers and about how competitions work. I hope a lot of you have listened to the programs – both the first-round programs and the second-round programs are online. There were 5 performers. We were represented by Braden Eguia. Other branches that participated were Victoria, Abbotsford, Vancouver/Burnaby, and North Island. In the end, Ivy Lin (Vancouver/Burnaby) won the Best Performance of a Canadian Work award of \$250; Michael Robert (North Island) won the Adjudicator's Choice Award of \$250; Braden Eguia (our branch) came third (\$300); Rafael Brisebois (Abbotsford) came second (\$500); and Jonathan Devey (Victoria) came first (\$800). Braden wrote a thank-you note to Joanne Loughheed and the BCRMTA. It was wonderful to hear all the programs, which were all at a very high standard. I was pleasantly surprised by how much I enjoyed the programs online and how much I appreciated those young people committing that time.

The process now is for Jonathan to be exposed as our Young Artist throughout the province. I know he does not wish to do online concerts; he has requested to do live ones, and to delay that possibility to 2021, where he will be preparing to represent BC at the Canadian national competition.

From Helga:

Thank you to Maureen for all the hard work she did as the Chair for the BC Piano Competition!

We also appreciate Dina Pollock from Abbotsford for doing all the tech stuff.

## **2. Junior Festival & Composition Festival:** Christy Kuettel

As can be expected, there's a lot of changes for the Junior and Senior festivals. We decided to push the dates later, so the **dates for the Junior Festival are April 13<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup>**. There will be more information coming about that, in the coming months. At present, we are booked from morning to evening each day. Mainly, this is to compensate for the fact that we are not going to run two rooms at the same time; we're going to be using *just the sanctuary*, so we can do a socially-distanced festival. We really should be thankful because that building works so well for us to be able to do that quite easily – the space is enormous; we can have multiple points of entry, direct traffic pretty easily...etc. We don't know how registration will look at that time, and we may not even use all the dates (depending on numbers), but it is our hope that our teachers in the community still enter students to this valuable event. I think it's going to be great. It's going to be different. I don't know about you, but my students get excited about those kinds of opportunities.

So, just to be clear, this is going to be a **socially-distanced festival**, *not* virtual – that's the intention. IF there is at that time some kind of a lock-down, then it will go to virtual – and this is written in our adjudicator's contract, and they have agreed to that. Generally speaking, it's going to be simplified, streamlined, given protocol that we will have to follow so we protect our students, performers, adjudicators, and any volunteers we have.

There will not be any Celebration recitals because of the sheer size of them that we've had in the past. These *may* happen virtually – it's just going to depend on what we can handle. Hopefully we have more than one.

We will be saving money on programs (since programs will be online this year).

The deadline for entries is **February 14<sup>th</sup>**.

It has been challenging getting adjudicators. Right now, Gaye Alcott has graciously taken close to half of the days. She is a distinguished teacher, talented performer, sought-after adjudicator who has worked at many piano competitions, and she is also an apprentice examiner for RCM. She currently has a private studio in Vancouver, and also teaches at the Vancouver Academy of Music. I do have a couple of people that I am still waiting to hear from. I've found that there are adjudicators who only want to do in-person, and adjudicators who only want to do online.

Discussion:

- Entry fees are staying the same as last year.
- Can we give our students a break from the extra money from not having the April, June, and September meetings this year?
- Do we want to do a one-time fund to the festival, like last year's one-time donation from the General Fund to the senior scholarship?
- Students don't get a break with the fees.
- Perhaps, if we *do* have extra money in our account, then we won't have to raise the entry fees as soon, down the road?
- If the teacher notices that their student could be performing in the festival, but the student's family is under financial distress because of Covid (e.g. due to losing a job), maybe we can have some kind of a contingency aid for certain students who really want to participate but cannot, due to financial distress, so they would not be limited.

*Marlene Bartsch made a motion that we offer a bursary for the festival for those who are in financial distress who would like to participate. This would be applied through the teacher and presented to the executive. This would apply to both the Junior and Senior festivals.*

*Seconded by Maureen Hollins and Jennifer Condie.*

*Members voted in favour. Motion carried.*

### **3. Senior Festival:** Leslie Chen

As Christy has already mentioned, the Senior Festival will also have major changes this year. Like the Junior Festival, we will be using only the sanctuary. In January, our committees will be looking at specific protocols to make sure that everyone is kept safe (e.g. hand-sanitizing, masks, how we are going to do the specifics for social distancing...etc.). Our Senior Festival will start on **April 21<sup>st</sup>**, and we have the space booked **until May 1<sup>st</sup>**. (At the moment, we are not sure yet how many days the classes will take up – this will depend on the number of entries.) So far, we have one of our adjudicators confirmed – **Dr. Terence Dawson** from UBC! We are very happy that he has agreed to be our adjudicator with the understanding that we are aiming for an in-person, socially-distanced festival, and that we will continue to monitor how things are in the new year; he is aware that if we need to be in “lockdown” (like earlier this year),

we will switch to online. We really appreciate Dr. Dawson being flexible, since it is currently difficult finding an adjudicator who would be okay with both in-person *and* online. (We had approached another potential adjudicator, but she was not comfortable with the in-person format.) We are still in the process of trying to think of other people we can approach.

The deadline is **February 14<sup>th</sup>**. As for the Senior Festival Celebration Recitals, we will need to discuss that with our committee; it would also depend on registration numbers.

Discussion:

-Would Dr. Dawson be able to do a senior-level workshop for us while we have the church booked in that timeframe?

-For the workshop, could we livestream it for teachers who are unable to come? → We would need to check with Dr. Dawson.

#### **4. Canada Music Week Recital: Alison Neufeld**

Hopefully you got the E-mail about Canada Music Week last week. I'm concerned I haven't heard from anybody except one person. Katya Pine wants to premiere some original competitions – that's the only person who has contacted me so far.

Christine Donkin has offered to make a video presentation for us to share with our students. I think it's going to be really inspiring, and I am thrilled she's excited to come on board. I did ask quite a few composers (including Stephen Chatman and Anne Crosby Gaudet), but Christine was the only one that got back to me, and I am very pleased that she wants to be involved.

Teachers can submit up to 6 students each. If we don't have enough numbers, we may open it up. Students can submit their own compositions! Please submit the names and piece selections to me by **November 6<sup>th</sup>** so I can start planning the program.

As far as how this recital will be delivered to the public: if it was up to me to do the whole tech stuff, I can put together YouTube movies (if everyone submits videos that is in a format I can download), but beyond that, I cannot do much. I did put it out there that I'd love to have some help with this project, but so far I have not heard from anybody. If anyone has any advice, I'd love to hear it.

For the format of the video submission: if you have an iPhone or an iPad, sending me an iMessage would work. Or, if you have an Android, Google Drive would probably be best, but I have not figured out how to take videos off of Google Drive and put them into my own files – so if anyone knows how to do that, please help me!

For my studio recital, my students sent me their videos through iMessage. Or, some came into my studio and recorded, so then I could use my device and have it in my studio for them to use. That way, I could easily use the videos.

Discussion:

-Marlene had reached out to somebody who had helped her run the tech part of her studio recital, which was held through Zoom with pre-recorded videos. However, he is unable to help us.

-Marlene will contact **Tom Lee Music in Langley** because Colin had said that for her recital at Christmas, he may have the opportunity for her students to all go and record individually on Tom Lee's piano on their stage, and then he would run the Zoom concert for her. Perhaps he can help us with the Canada Music Week Recital.

-If Alison is making the recital via YouTube, the deadline for video submissions is **November 21<sup>st</sup>**. That would give her just enough time to put it together.

If we end up going with the Tom Lee option, then that would be up to Colin.

-Alison will ask Christine Donkin again about fees. We should still be prepared to give her a decent honorarium for doing this, even if she does not present a fee.

## **5. RCM Action Plan:** Helga Murray

There's been so many changes at the RCM that have not been conducive, I believe, to fostering a healthy relationship between the teachers and the RCM. A lot of these changes have taken place gradually over a number of years. A lot of people have complained and grumbled, but not much has happened. These changes that I feel are detrimental to this relationship have grown exponentially. Where they really reared their ugly head was with the onset of the pandemic.

During our provincial council meeting, the Victoria branch shared with us a survey they had sent out to their membership, and they have gotten back a ton of responses. We are proposing that each branch – starting at our level here – have a survey or an **action plan** that we can take from our branch to the provincial council, and hopefully go to the national level.

One of the points of contention was: if you wanted to register your student for Level 8 Theory, for example, you couldn't just buy the exam. You had to buy the whole course, and your student would have to do all the unit tests, because the final exam was not the total mark. It's my understanding that they have now walked that back. You now *can* buy just the Level 8 exam without the unit tests.

Maureen Hollins:

I have a copy of the Victoria branch survey. It captured my attention because it was a similar story to what I heard from Alison Neufeld. The Vice-President of the Victoria branch has **lost not only online theory students, but – because of their marketing opportunities – also online piano students!** (The RCM has been marketing free online piano lessons if you sign up for online theory – I have not personally experienced this, but it has been documented by Victoria.) The Victoria branch has approximately 60 members. There are excellent questions on the survey, but on every question, RCM does not come out well. The experience collectively of Victoria teachers is not happy at all.

So then, I went to the one person I knew who did a lot of theory with RCM – Jennifer Silva. She was very kind to E-mail me back extensively her concerns about **the changes and practices, many concerns about the cheating going on with the exams, and the marketing procedures of the RCM.**

Since then, I chatted with an RCM examiner on Vancouver Island, asking him if he had heard anything. He is not a member of the BCRMTA in Victoria. He said he had not heard anything, but that the RCM “is shooting itself in the foot.”

I wrote to Joanna Loughheed (our BCRMTA president), because I knew our branch was vitally concerned, had experience and documentation, and needed to go to the next step. She said the CFMTA has it on their agenda to discuss it in their meeting this week. She understands that branches are getting restless. She feels that we need to hold on, and that we should be doing something in a coordinated manner, as opposed to scattershot (from all over). If we can get some **suggestions from the branches**, that would be helpful. In their September meeting, they had decided to wait to hear what the CFMTA was going to do. Once she gets something from CFMTA, she will get back to the presidents and delegates of the branches. Joanne has CC’ed the CFMTA executive my E-mail, so it has been registered that South Fraser wants to do something.

I have tried to get advice from various quarters, and to also document it. The only information that I can’t find is how many teachers who *aren’t* registered teachers submit their students for exams? The realism is that maybe RCM does not the registered music teachers to survive.

We need an action plan. If you come up with any other ideas, please E-mail Maureen.

#### Discussion:

- Unregistered teachers must be losing business too → is there a way of getting them on board?
- The United States doesn’t have “registered music teachers”.

- RCM has made a great investment in promoting themselves in the US.
- People have been making their concerns known to RCM but RCM does not care.
- RCM does not listen when you complain to them. RCM cares about money
- Idea: Don't send your students to RCM exams (e.g. don't promote having students do exams at every level). Don't market RCM to your students anymore.
- Boycott**: get all the branches and provinces, and pick ONE exam session at one time (e.g. April) to not send students for exams – backed by every branch and province. Hopefully the voice gets heard by the RCM then. There needs to be enough of financial impact to RCM that they can measure. There needs to be enough branches; it wouldn't work if only one branch does it. It would be more powerful at a national level. → We should be directed by the CFMTA if we end up doing a boycott.
- The longer you can postpone your student's first RCM exam, the longer you can withhold that contact information from RCM. (E.g. Once the student has signed up with RCM, RCM starts sending E-mails marketing their online theory course, and the student might just go with the online theory course.) – When you sign up for exams, you have to tick off the box that says you give them permission to send you E-mails.
- Switch to **Conservatory Canada** – Christy Kuettel is already switching over
- There is no honouring of our experience, our feedback...etc. from RCM
- Students are signing up for online theory, sometimes even without their teachers knowing.
- Legal**: consider getting a good lawyer for a filing a class action lawsuit against RCM
- The difference between buying the stand-alone theory exam versus the whole online package is only a 20\$ difference!
- Huge negative impact of doing these online theory courses on the kids' music education**: they now don't need to learn how to draw a treble clef or a key signature...etc. History students know they can now just do the exam open-book; they no longer need to memorize anything.
- Our students are objecting to the behaviour of other students. It's affecting not only the teachers but also the students.
- Integrity of the system has now been compromised; we are creating a whole system where **kids won't develop integrity** (e.g. because students can now cheat).
- There is information around that the RCM has been led on their course of action by their marketing department. That results in two things for us:
  - 1) the attitude that private teachers market themselves too
  - 2) it's lost: the ethics of the reason why we all supported the RCM – which was for the value of a fair and wise examiner to hear our students, and for some standardization across Canada in the process.
- RCM tends to respond better to parents than to teachers → Is there a way for us to **involve the whole community**, the people who value music in the local community? (E.g. people who value what we've offered before.)
- Jennifer Silva would be happy to send out something to her students/parents to see if there would be some feedback about that.
- RCM completely denies any cheating going on
- Academic integrity need to be addressed

- What if we used social media to market ourselves too? A number of months ago, on Facebook, RCM was marketing online private lessons. → How do we use **social media** as an organization (e.g. CFMTA) to promote who we are, what we do, and how RCM has undermined the integrity of everything.
- This whole thing has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Pre-pandemic, students would not have traded in-person teacher for online lessons, but now everyone is mostly teaching online.
- If you sign up for online theory with RCM, you can choose to get 2 free online lessons?!
- We need to have more of an online presence – e.g. Facebook
- Conservatory Canada** refunded students their exam money during the pandemic (for those who no longer wished to do the online exams) but RCM would not do refunds (only credits). Claudia Muir has experience with Conservatory Canada.
- So many of us have championed the RCM and been on board with them for so long, but now they are throwing us under.
- You could be on the phone with RCM, waiting for hours, only to get them to hang up on you.
- Zoom exam problems with RCM. (Helga's students had a nightmare of an experience.)
- To switch over to Conservatory Canada, it is a bit of a learning curve because they do things a bit differently, but they do things a lot better. They have been doing online piano exams for years. They also do it in a way that is superior. Their exams in general include elements that RCM does not have. Christy Kuettel is impressed with it. She has been looking at the Conservatory Canada syllabus and also the *Contemporary Idioms*.
- Conservatory Canada has absolutely no plan to offer online courses.
- One thing Conservatory Canada does offer is for the student to buy a bit of extra time for a little lesson with the examiner after the exam, based on your exam.
- Conservatory Canada is there for the teachers and students; they are not there to keep funding a recital hall and a building (like the RCM is)
- Conservatory Canada website is easy to navigate

*Christy Kuettel made the motion that she will get Conservatory Canada to do a Zoom presentation for us a month from now. Sylvia Leigh seconded it.*

- We can send letters by mail to the RCM. Letters get looked at more than E-mails.
- We should target the things that have a direct effect on us (e.g. marketing online lessons) and what the exact problems are.
- RCM started online teacher courses for people in farther communities (e.g. up north) who can find it hard to get to a teacher.
- We need to offer RCM alternatives. Making stand-alone online exams does not solve the whole problem.
- RCM presents a biased option in their chart comparing stand-alone online exam versus the full course.
- Online course makes it much easier to get a higher mark for the students.
- Victoria survey was a good way to reach out to the different teachers.

- We can write individual letters and give them to executive to send off together.
- Individual letters will be more powerful than an everybody-signs-this-letter.

Maureen will send off all the suggestions back to Joanne Lougheed.

Christy will try to set up Conservatory Canada presentation.

Michelle will send out a newsletter to the membership about starting the letter-writing campaign: please write one letter and submit it to the executive to send off together, and then do a second letter and mail it straight to RCM.

Deadline for letters: **November 11<sup>th</sup>**.

Maureen will request the CFMTA to encourage more teachers to write letters in the province?

## **6. January Elections – positions:** Helga Murray

In January, the two years are up for the people on the board. Sylvia would like to step down as **Treasurer**, and Leslie would like to step down as **Secretary**. If someone would like to put their name forward, please let us know.

*Esther made the motion to adjourn the meeting.*