

New Season, New Ensembles

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As I write this, on return from a Sunday evening concert at the Orillia Aquatheatre, I'm reminded of the impending end of the summer concert season. Our concert began at 6:30pm rather than the usual seven o'clock, because the days are getting shorter. September is only two weeks away, and the fall season is on the horizon. For most community ensembles this marks a beginning of sorts. Whether they have been playing all summer, with rehearsals and concerts, or have taken a complete break, most will be in transition in some way or other. Almost without exception, there will be some reflection on the past year and discussion of what changes might be in order.

Almost every year in Southern Ontario, September heralds the establishment of one or more new community instrumental groups with varying aspirations. So, for our inauguration of a new season of *The WholeNote*, it seemed to be a fitting time to visit a few new startups and some relative newcomers that have now completed one or two seasons. For our very limited and informal study of recently formed groups, I've selected the Milton Concert Band, the Scarborough Society of Musicians, New Horizons/Long & McQuade's Play-in-a-Band Programme, the Kindred Spirits Orchestra and the Newmarket Stepping Stone Band.

The oldest of these five groups, the Milton Concert Band, began taking shape early in 2007, when recently arrived Milton residents (and long-time friends) Angela Rozario and Cheryl Ciccarelli, having recognized the town's growing artistic community, decided to see if there were any other area amateur musicians interested in performing together. Their hopes were immediately met, and the pair were soon scrambling to accommodate over 30 musicians and having to put others on a waiting list. Working with the town of Milton, the group was able to move to its new permanent home at Memorial Arena in September 2007. By now, the band will have concluded their regular series of summer concerts and performances at town festivals, and will be preparing for their fall and winter season.

About one year later, in February 2008, the Scarborough Society of Musicians had its beginnings. It began with a discussion among a group of graduating high school students who had developed and shared a passion for musical performance and didn't want to abandon that love after graduation. The band is a non-profit organization aimed at providing post-secondary school students who are not pursuing professional studies in music an environment to continue developing and exploring their talents. Since its inception, the band has been rehearsing on Saturday mornings, in the music room at Dr. Norman Bethune C. I. in Scarborough. I'm informed that they'll be organizing their future activities in January, but they have already performed a concert, in July 2010. Try visiting their website: ssm@continuingmusic.ca.

Another new band programme is intended for seniors who live close to the heart of Toronto. New Horizons Music and Long & McQuade Musical Instruments have announced their Play-in-a-Band Programme, to begin in September. Designed for adults from 50 to 90 (and older), it's for those who always wanted to play an instrument and former players who want to play again. Whether you're learning to play "from scratch" or dusting off that old horn from the back of the closet, you'll will be welcome. The programme will be directed by Dan Kapp, an instrumentalist and conductor with over 30 years' experience. An information meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 15 at 9:30am, with the first rehearsal one week later. For information go to www.newhorizonsbloor.ca or phone 416-588-7886.

The next in our recent arrivals on the community music scene is the Kindred Spirits Orchestra. Founder and musical director Maestro Kristian Alexander felt that the time was ripe for an audition-

based community orchestra in Markham. The orchestra's official incorporation was on March 16, 2009. Their inaugural concert took place on November 3, 2009, at the CBC's Glenn Gould Studio in downtown Toronto. The ambitious programme included Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll* and Mozart's *Gran Partita*.

The orchestra is still relatively small (38 musicians), which has enabled it to concentrate on developing a refined ensemble sound. For the future they hope to increase the size of their string section and, in their words, "to grow and attract more musicians, more friends, more kindred spirits."

With a relatively small string section, to date they have focused almost exclusively on baroque and classical compositions. They are very eager to broaden their repertoire and approach romantic and more contemporary works. The first such foray into works requiring significantly larger resources took place in June of this year. At that time, I had the opportunity to join the brass section in a performance of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*.

For the immediate future, their growth will certainly be limited until they can move to a larger rehearsal hall. Perhaps the new Markham recreational complex will supply the answer. In the meantime, they are forging ahead with an ambitious season that will include a four concert subscription series at the Glenn Gould Studio. Concerts will include guest violinist Jacques Israelievitch performing the Beethoven *Violin Concerto*, and performances of Beethoven's *Sixth*, *Seventh* and *Eighth* symphonies.

In addition to performances, the Kindred Spirits Orchestra has an education and community outreach programme with professional development opportunities for local music teachers and young conductors. And to promote Canadian composers and music, they have Gary Kulesha and Larysa Kuzmenko on board as resident composers for the coming season.

About one year ago, a new band for beginners and intermediate level players was established in Newmarket. Informally called the Stepping Stone Band, their message was simple: "If you took band music in high school, and years later find you have time and interest in making music, this is perfect way to get back into it. Why play at home alone? The best way to learn to read music is to play in a group or ensemble." The group stopped rehearsing for the summer, but that wasn't the end of playing. Several members, who had upgraded their skills during this first season, are now rehearsing regularly with the Newmarket Citizens' Band and have been performing in concerts over the summer. As for the remaining members, they will form the core for the coming season. As of this writing, this beginner band has 12 members who want to proceed with rehearsals in September. They are hoping for at least eight additional members to proceed with the programme. If you have considered the idea of taking up an instrument again or know of someone who has, pass this message on.

The band will meet Monday nights from 7pm to 9pm at a loca-



Kristian Alexander.



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