

The Genesis of the CWCC/CHCC

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected individuals and organizations around the world. The impact it has had on our routines and realities will most likely be felt for years to come. While we all hope that this new way of life is temporary, it has caused everyone to rethink and reassess priorities, strategies and processes, both personally and professionally. In doing so, new initiatives have emerged to address the short-term effects of this pandemic.

Rahm Emanuel, Chief of Staff to former US President Barack Obama, was once quoted as saying “Never waste a crisis.” That simple yet profound statement rings very true today. While we address the short-term and very serious effects of this pandemic, we as individuals, and indeed as a collective, have an opportunity to improve ourselves and support those around us. It was this desire to strengthen our community that led to the creation of a new organization for post-secondary wind conductors, the Collegiate Wind Conductors of Canada/Chefs d'harmonie collégiaux du Canada (CWCC/CHCC).

When it became clear in March 2020 that the coronavirus quarantine was not going to be a short-term situation, Bill Brennan (Memorial), Mark Hopkins (Acadia), Gillian Mackay (Toronto), Colleen Richardson (Western), Jacquie Dawson (Manitoba), Jason Caslor (Arizona State) and Darrin Oehlerking (Saskatchewan) met via video conference to discuss their individual situations. The inaugural gathering was meant to be a quick sharing session of ideas in hopes of helping each other move forward from the large slate of cancelled musical activities, albeit with a healthy dose of commiserating,

It quickly became clear that our colleagues, including those working in the United States, were facing the same dilemma – how do we create meaningful collaborations in this new virtual reality? How do we maintain relevance in the face of a pandemic? How do we advocate for ourselves, our colleagues, and our students? It was decided that a pan-Canadian discussion was needed as a vehicle for discussion, support and collegiality.

The first video conference dedicated to the new realities of post-secondary wind band activities during COVID-19 was held on May 1, 2020. 34 participants from all ten Canadian provinces, as well as five states in the US were a part of the proceedings. The intentionally loose agenda allowed for topics ranging from learning outcomes, to meaningful musical activities, to successful implementation of technology, to simply sharing what was being done at our individual institutions. Those in attendance at this first meeting were appreciative of the opportunity to connect with friends and colleagues who could speak to their unique and specific field of wind band conducting. It was akin to another Canadian reception at the Midwest Clinic (this time without the loud musical duo at Kitty O'Shea's). There was a sense of something special being developed after this first meeting, and the collective decided that subsequent meetings were important to maintain this new sense of connectivity and forward momentum.

Additional meetings were scheduled, and the invite list continued to expand. All-in-all, over fifty post-secondary wind band conductors and instructors participated at one time or another in five separate meetings. The sense of collegiality and momentum were so positive that sub-groups formed out of the larger collective to discuss more specific streams of study – Conducting and Music Education (led by Rob Taylor and Wendy McCallum, respectively). Canada's university and collegiate wind conducting community were certainly doing their best to not waste this particular crisis!

As the pandemic evolved, as provinces began to re-open, and as institutions began releasing plans for the resumption of in-person classes and activities, it was decided by the collective to seriously discuss coordinating this incredibly impressive brain trust into a more formal organization. A sub-committee of Steven Capaldo (Victoria), Angela Schroeder (Alberta), Jessica Kun (Wilfred Laurier), Mark Hopkins and Darrin Oehlerking met to discuss what the organization could possibly look like.

This was not the first time such a group has been attempted. Collegiate wind band directors in Canada have frequently recognized the benefit of such an organization, and have even met in person a few times to try and formally organize a unifying focus. The most recent and impressive attempt was spearheaded by Brent Ghiglione (Regina), and supported in part by the Canadian Band Association. In May 2015, band directors met in Toronto to discuss a myriad of topics, with some meeting again at the 2017 Midwest Clinic in Chicago. Unfortunately, the ambitious plans and initial enthusiasm were set aside as individuals were drawn back into their own incredibly busy schedules.

While one hesitates to irresponsibly claim that something “positive” can be drawn from such a sad and disruptive event in our history, this pandemic has ultimately caused us to rethink and re-evaluate priorities. Our own personal health and well-being (physical and emotional), our professional engagement and our consideration and service to ourselves as well as our local and global communities have emerged as topics at the forefront of our everyday activities and conversations. And it is this sense of service and support that the CWCC/CHCC is attempting to formalize its spot in the Canadian wind band landscape.

The group is currently conceived as a collegiate community that can address and discuss topics specific to a post-secondary director. These include (but are not limited to): high-level wind band repertoire and commissioning projects; research topics that are beneficial and align with interests across Canada and beyond; best practices for providing meaningful and worthwhile experience during and after the COVID-19 pandemic; sharing strategies and best practices for teaching subjects such as Conducting, Music Education, Wind Repertoire and Large and Small ensembles.

‘Membership’ is currently open to any Canadian citizen teaching at a Canadian or international post-secondary institution, or any landed immigrant teaching at a Canadian institution. We currently ask that anyone who would like to be associated with the group be a member in good standing of any provincial band chapter. It is important to note that the Canadian Band

Association has generously offered to host the CWCC/CHCC on the current CBA website. This is very much appreciated as this fledgling group moves forward.

This group is not meant to be a replacement or a parallel to organizations such as the College Band Directors National Association (CBDNA). Nor is it an attempt to pull university conductors away from their local band and music education chapters (which in turn would take them away from opportunities to collaborate with the Canadian Band Association). Finally, this is not meant to be an 'elitist' organization - the ivory tower does not exist for this group. Instead, the collective is designed to support each other across the country (and our Canadian friends abroad), in hopes that we can improve our understanding of the Canadian musical landscape and better approach the opportunities that are unique to the post-secondary realm.

At the time of writing this short history and timeline of the new CWCC/CHCC, news related to the pandemic, and how it affects all aspects of day-to-day lives in Canada, is fast-paced and ever-changing. We have the responsibility to ourselves, our families, our colleagues, our students, and our audiences, to proceed safely, cautiously, and with the best information possible at the time. It is the hope that everyone involved with the CWCC/CHCC can help develop, process, synthesize and distribute the information as they need to in order to get back to the ultimate goal – engaging in meaningful, in person, musical experiences. We will ultimately achieve this goal by being our best selves, not necessarily for us as individuals, but for the larger community where we live, work and create.

On behalf of the members of the new CWCC/CHCC, we look forward to moving forward, and to not wasting this, or any future crisis, that may test our resolve.

Respectfully submitted,

Darrin Oehlerking
University of Saskatchewan
Past-President, Canadian Band Association



*Published by the Canadian Band Association in the
Fall 2020 issue of the Canadian Winds/Vent canadiens, Vol 19 No. 1.*