

## MUSIC IS WHAT HAPPENS BETWEEN THE NOTES - A Metaphor for Kathaumixw

### INTRODUCTION

“Music is so much more than notes on a page,” our Musical Director, Fabiana Katz reminds us at rehearsal. It’s how we shape and breathe life into them that’s important. Music happens “between the notes.”

Our week at Kathaumixw was a whirlwind of activity. We rehearsed, performed, and listened but it was the moments “in between” where the real magic took place. Laughter on the bus as we counted off our numbers to ensure all were aboard before departures and lovely Linda’s operatic number 34! Awe, joy or tears after an especially moving performance. The spaces between events made Kathaumixw a truly memorable experience.

### TRIP TO KATHAUMIXW

Our journey to Kathaumixw began with a scenic bus ride and two ferry crossings. On board the ferry, we surprised fellow travellers with a flash mob performance of KOM. Once we arrived in Powell River, we were warmly welcomed at the Powell River Town Centre Hotel by our assigned festival volunteer, Nicole Bicknell, before heading out to pick up our festival T-shirts at the Complex, where we finally met Ashlene Nairn – it was a pleasure to meet her after all her helpful communication. She told us that the adult shirts were designed by Sechelt artist Joanna Cook while the children’s shirts featured artwork by Quinn, a talented grade five student. The shirts evoke the colours of the lands and music of the Sechelt First Nation people. Later, we wandered down to Wellington Beach to join the Canada Day celebrations — complete with bouncy houses, crafts, food trucks, music and a relaxed, friendly crowd. We were also struck by the crisp ocean air, dense forests, and panoramic views of tiny islands stretching across the Salish Sea toward Vancouver Island. You can inhale deeply and the water is so clear, you could see small fish swimming. Powell River or Qathet, has friendly small town vibe, the perfect setting for a music festival.

### THE FESTIVAL

THE OPENING GALA on Tuesday evening set the tone for everything that followed that week. There was so much fun, joy and discovery that my brain went into overdrive! We lined up in the rink with the other choirs, buzzing with excitement as each group entered the Great Hall. It was such a thrill to hear “Richmond Singers” announced to cheers and fanfare. We listened intently as Dr. Leslie Paul, a Tla’amin Elder, delivered a heartfelt Welcome Prayer. Then the Festival Choir, backed by the Festival Brass, performed Spacious Firmament, a piece that Walter Martella, Conductor and Music Director of the Powell River Academy of Music explained “has been sung at every Festival opening since it was commissioned in 1994”. The

calibre of performances by guest musicians, too many to mention here, were beyond outstanding. The evening ended with a brilliant performance of Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" with the Lazlo Tamasik Dance Academy. It was an unforgettable evening of music and entertainment.

First thing the next morning, our choir participated in an Equal Voice Choir Competition alongside two very talented choirs: Komorni zbor MEGARON and The Squares. "We came in third" one chorister put it, "out of three"! But we appreciated the positive and constructive feedback from adjudicators who provided us with direction for improvement. Overall, it was a good experience that challenged us musically and brought us closer together as a choir.

Rehearsals for the adult Common Songs were led by the internationally esteemed conductor, adjudicator and educator Dr. Zimfira Poloz, whose joyful spirit was contagious. During daily practices alongside world class choirs, she emphasized the importance of building a welcoming and fun choral community where singers learn in a non-judgemental, inclusive environment. She said this often leads to "sincere and heartfelt performances." Skill development and musical growth, however, are not to be underestimated. Dr. Poloz demonstrated five different ways to sing vowels, emphasizing the importance of finding the right "balance." You aren't just singing the notes. What's important is "the space between them". Notes need "to bloom." We discovered that Fabi is a genius because Zimfira said exactly what Fabi tells us in different words. "We could hear Fabi's voice in our brains." A good friend explained, "It's like going to your aunt's house for dinner, and she gives you the same advice as your Mom, but this time you listen!"

We finished our first full day performing two concerts. The first alongside the Campanella Children's Choirs, USA and the Taipei Philharmonic Youth & Children's Choir from Taiwan, and that evening we sang alongside Yavir Ukrainian Male Chorus of Edmonton, Canada and the Young People's Chorus of New York city, USA. It was inspiring and uplifting to share the stage with such talented and diverse choirs from all over the world! Afterward our ever reliable bus driver, Hardial, whisked us away to our hotel for some much needed rest and relaxation!

Our Friday afternoon concert at the Evergreen Theatre brought a meaningful ending to our performances at Kathaumixw. After the concert, Fabi shared that Zimfira sought her out personally, deeply moved by our singing. She had been brought to tears, revealing the emotional impact of our music. We also learned that you never know what song will move someone in the audience. This became clear during a sing out at the Coastal Breeze Seniors Community where the residents clearly loved our entire performance. This was especially apparent during Tetiana Mandrykina's beautiful solo in "Avinu Malkeinu", when one resident was moved to tears.

The Closing Gala wrapped up a truly memorable week. Following another evening of outstanding performances by guest choirs and competition winners, the prestigious Choir of the World at Kathaumixw Award was announced during the Gala Closing Concert. This year, the well-deserved honour went to Komorni zbor MEGARON who were presented with a one-of-a-kind First Nations art piece, carved by Tla'amin artist Craig Galligos, and whose name will

be added to the Kathaumixw Totem Pole, which stands proudly at the Powell River Academy of Music alongside past recipients. Kor Canada also won many prizes and Espiritu from West Vancouver won the prize for the best performance of a Canadian piece.

## BEYOND THE FESTIVAL

Qathet, has something for everyone. Between concerts and sing-outs, singers went to see the museum, swam on the beach, shopped for memorabilia, or at local dress shops, enjoyed a “beverage” (or herbal tea!) at the local watering hole, attended other concerts, visited with friends and family, enjoyed forest bathing, or took a nap. Unity in diversity is part of what makes RS such fun!

## GRATITUDE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all the people of Qathet who let thousands of people invade their town and take over their recreation centre, pubs, and restaurants. You made us feel so welcome. Thank you to the thousands of people who volunteered, some coming from as far away as Oregon on their own dime, to be part of making the festival run smoothly, and be part of the magic. They fed us delicious, healthy lunches, organized us, herded cats (oops, choristers), had chairs, signs, flags, music stands and water ready for us.

Thank you to Nicole Bicknell, volunteer, who met us at the hotel, and also worked to troubleshoot the arranged rides to their competition for soloist, Veronica Armstrong, and accompanist, Elizabeth Oh. We would also like to express our sincere gratitude to everyone at the Powell River Academy of Music, now qathet Academy of Music & Arts, especially Walter Martella, Finance and Administration Manager Val Thompson, and Marketing and Communications Coordinator, Ashleen Nairn, for your incredible work organizing Kathaumixw. We appreciated your warm hospitality, communication updates, your dedication, and everything you did to make things run smoothly throughout the week.

Thank you to the hotel staff at the Powell River Town Centre Hotel, who fed us, cleaned up after us, closed the pub at 10:00 so we would get a good night's sleep, and lent us a car so we could drive a singer to the hospital early one morning. Thank you to Lynn Walters for helping us get limber in the morning with our morning stretch. Thank you to everyone at Magpie's Diner for delicious food (and shakes), for putting up with our costume changes to avoid spilling food on ourselves, and for opening late and finding staff for your off hours to keep us fed. Thank you for putting up with our spirited singing; but we hope we left a few joyful harmonies behind!

Thank you to International Coach Lines for the comfy bus - with seat belts - and to our amazing driver, Hardial, who looked after us as if we were his own aunties and grandmothers. His capable driving in narrow, and sometimes twisty roads made us feel safe and got us to events (and shopping) between the notes.

Thank you to all the choirs who inspired us, the choir leaders who shared their knowledge and enthusiasm, for the leaders who gave us feedback and encouragement, and particularly Dr. Zimfira Poloz, who recognized our sheer joy in singing. Zimfira was like our cool, fun aunt, who taught us many important things and inspired awe and appreciation, despite her pseudo-sister, our choir mother Fabi, saying the exact same things!

Thank you to Fabiana Katz for your incredible leadership as our choir director and for joining us on our trip to Kathaumixw. Your dedication, energy and belief in us made the trip possible. Thanks for recording all our music which helped us to arrive confident and prepared. Thank you to Elizabeth Oh, for your skillful and joyful accompaniment at rehearsals, performances, and on practice recordings. Thank you to Barb Mathias for her engaging percussion.

Thank you to the Committee, and the Board for organizing it all, Pat Lindberg for a great bus coordination; the Costume Committee, Jan Barstow, Norma Bebluk, and Darlene Stewart, who kept us dressed in style; Linda Hicks, Pat Hinton, Pat Lindberg, and Margaret Hewlett with her insider knowledge of Powell River; Lorraine Shikaze for pitching in on the multitude of details as they arose; and Pat Hinton and Kelly Johnson who demonstrated our appreciation with locally purchased presents. Thank you to all those who shared their pictures and to Harjeet Grewal who wove them into a daily story for us to share.

Thank you to all our sponsors and the City of Richmond for the funding support that made this experience possible.

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

What is choral music? Well, we certainly had our view of that expanded a thousand-fold with all the types of storytelling with words, sounds, and vocalization. Just as the music is between the notes, the pleasure and the performance is in every practice and between the songs. If only the best songbird sang in the forest, it would be a quiet place indeed, but with everyone lending their voice, the forest is a feast for the ears. So too is the pleasure of singing with a choir. Let every practice be your best work and sing with the joy of singing in your heart!

Kirsty Gourlay

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July 2025