KIWANIS MUSIC FESTIVAL, 2020

 -- *story by Anna Proctor (OrilliaMatters.com. April 23, 2020)*

Normally, for about three weeks at this time of year, St. Paul’s Centre and lots of musicians in town are very busy with the Orillia Kiwanis Music Festival. The festival has an over 60-year history in this town, and the festival's Artistic Director, Amanda Stanton, was not going to let a pandemic cancel this special opportunity for so many in our community.

“I knew there was a way around this…and couldn’t stand the thought of all of those musicians, who had spent the past several months preparing, having yet another thing cancelled. I watched my own kids’ disappointment as school closed, extra-curricular activities stopped, sleepover and birthday parties were postponed. We wanted to give everyone something to work towards and something to look forward to. Some normalcy during these very uncertain times," said Stanton.

So what did Stanton and her committee decide to do? They decided to go virtual, and they decided very early on. Stanton explains: “My ‘day job’ is an events manager for a national charity, and I started to see the trend in larger city centres—event cancellations, etc. in early March. It still hadn’t really hit in Orillia yet, but I wanted to get in front of it and have a plan B," said Stanton. "When it did become clear that the situation was getting serious, we were ready to go with a virtual festival plan.”

So what does a virtual festival look like?

“Participants record a video of their performance – simple, smartphone videos are fine - and upload as an unlisted/private video. They send us the link to the video. We are organizing the videos into class/division groups and will be sharing them with the adjudicators," said Stanton.

"The adjudicators will view the videos and write out an adjudication feedback piece, just as they would at the live Festival. They will also award marks for the performance, if applicable (some classes don’t receive marks, such as 8 years and under, etc.)," she said.

“The adjudicators will send back the adjudication sheets to us, and we will create certificates based on the marks. Finally, we will distribute the adjudication sheet and certificate to each student. Really, the only piece that’s missing here is the live performance aspect…which is obviously not ideal. However, I think it’s the best possible solution given these uncertain times.”

The festival is usually full of busloads of school groups coming in to play in ensembles, bands, choirs, and more at St. Paul’s Centre. How is the virtual festival navigating those large groups, who obviously can’t come together to perform? “At first, we thought we would not be able to accommodate school groups. However, we were pleasantly surprised to see an abundance of creativity and willingness to stay involved," said Stanton.

“Some school/choir teachers are using free sound mixer apps to piece together their students’ performances. Programs such as Aucacity, Musescore, etc. are being used, and the committee is here to help with all the technical side of things as well.”

According to Festival registrar Stephanie Worthington, there has been a huge amount of interest from participants, especially ensembles, so much so, the organizers have extended the deadline for submissions to May 1.

Regarding the festival committee and registrar Stephanie (the only paid member of a large committee of volunteers who put on the festival every year), Stanton said, “The entire committee has been great. In particular, Don Haskins (president) and Stephanie Worthington have been so supportive and instrumental to getting this virtual experience organized. Korine Keyzer (president of the Kiwanis Club) was super supportive when this was proposed as well. Mayumi Kumagai-Bailey has been fantastic keeping the schools engaged in this as well.”

Usually the festival also features lots of proud parents, grandparents, and audience members, who donate towards bursaries and grants for participants, and really enjoy the live music performances that go on daily at St. Paul’s Centre.

Is there still a way for audience members to participate and donate?

“We’re working on that. Privacy issues need to be considered, of course. We set up a Facebook page recently, so I think we’re going to ask permission to post some of the submissions we receive," said Stanton.

"We’re also going to try to host our Encores Concert online as well. The Opera House has cancelled all events into the summer, and we’re not sure if we will host a live Encores concert in the Fall (or whenever we are able to host that kind of event)," Stanton explained.

“As for donations, the information can be found on our website. We are still going to award scholarships and grants – just as much if not more than usual – and donations are always welcome.”

Congratulations to organizers on finding a new way of doing things in these strange times, after more than 60 years in our community. Check out the Orillia Kiwanis Music Festival Facebook page after May 1 to see some video performances of festival participants.

If you would like to donate to the festival’s grants and scholarships, all the information can be found on the website

[www.orilliakiwanismusicfestival.com](http://www.orilliakiwanismusicfestival.com )