

December 7, 2020

Ms. Camille Williams-Taylor and Board members
Director of Education
Ottawa Carleton District School Board
By email to: director@ocdsb.ca

Dear Ms. Williams-Taylor and colleagues

As parents of music students at Canterbury High School, we appreciate the tremendous work that you and your colleagues have done to ensure a safe school environment during this difficult time. We are encouraged by the low number of cases of Covid-19 in OCDSB schools. With the 2020-2021 school year approaching the halfway mark, we urge you to please consider allowing the safe re-introduction of group performance into the music program.

In a typical year, students in Canterbury's music program spend 25% of their school hours in music classes, both theory and performance. They are part of ensembles, and participate in before- and after-school rehearsals. In March 2020, the group performance aspect of the program was eliminated to comply with public health measures. We completely understand the need for vigilance to prevent viral transmission. As families, we are all doing our part to stem the tide of COVID-19.

Ensemble music programs have positive effects on character, competence and caring, the exact skills to foster during these times. But with the pandemic unlikely to end during the current school year, we feel it is important to reassess the feasibility of re-introducing performance, particularly in light of all that has been learned over the past 9 months. Missing an entire year of performance may be especially detrimental to all students, especially those in Grade 12 who are on an academic path in music.

As educators, you are well aware of the many unintended consequences that pandemic measures have had on children and youth. Physicians report seeing more youth with mental health problems, including eating disorders, anxiety, depression, and problematic substance use. Youth report difficulties with mood and ability to focus. Music can have positive effects on mental health, especially for students who have committed to a specialized program.

The faculty in Canterbury's music program are passionate, talented, and dedicated to their students. They have exceeded our expectations within the confines of the current restrictions. We have no doubt that they, with your and OPH guidance, could find **creative, evidence-based, and safe** solutions to allow students to perform together. We have attached a document outlining some of the evidence as well as guidance from a number of organizations that support a safe return to group music performance.

Our group is active in fundraising, and would be please to provide any necessary support, such as purchasing additional protective equipment. As the holiday break approaches, we urge you to consider our request before Quadmester 3.

Sincerely,

Laura Lynne Churchill

Paula Walsh-Bergin MD

Co-Chairs, Canterbury Music Parents Support Group

cc. Jane Alexander, Principal, Canterbury High School
Dr. Vera Etches, Medical Officer of Health for Ottawa
Mr. Chris Ellis, Trustee, Zone 6, Rideau-Rockcliffe/Alta Vista

Attachment...2.

December 2020

Resuming in-school music programs at Canterbury High School

Summary

Music students at Canterbury High School have not engaged in group performance since early March 2020. Over the past 9 months, much has been learned about transmission of Covid-19, as well as about safe performance practices. The Ottawa Carleton District School Board should consider parents' request to resume in-person music programs for the second half of the 2020-2021 school year, for the following reasons:

- Participatory music education benefits youth mental health, which has suffered during the pandemic;
- Participatory music education improves students' skills, which is particularly important for those intending to pursue post-secondary music education;
- Safe practices are being used elsewhere, at all levels of music performance;
- Cases of Covid-19 in Ottawa-area schools have been quite low

We completely understand the need for vigilance to prevent viral transmission. However, as Ottawa's Medical Officer of Health stated in November, "The approach I am recommending is that we learn to coexist with COVID, with care". **(1)**

We are proposing that Canterbury's music program resume some aspects of performance, with care, taking into account the need to balance public health with our students' mental health and well-being.

Benefits of music education

Mental Health (2-3, 18-20)

Many organizations agree, and much research supports the important role of the arts—particularly music performance—in promoting mental health. Music is one of our most powerful therapeutic tools in helping to mitigate the effects and impact of depression, anxiety disorders, stress, loneliness and isolation. Music can elevate an individual's mood, resulting in a more positive outlook. It also offers a pathway to connecting with other humans. **(2)**

Mental health has become a concern for everyone in our community, and we are especially concerned about the long-term effects on our children and youth. We believe the practice of music will mitigate the risks for our children. Performance music involves community and collaboration. "The sense of community that arises from participation in band [for example] can help students whose mental health and well-being has been impacted by the prolonged isolation and social distanced, **(3)**.

Academic and social skills related to music education and performance (4-10):

- Children who regularly play an instrument have better memory and attention span

- Learning a musical instrument helps academic success
- Music students score higher in math, science, and English than non-music peers
- Ensemble music programs have positive effects on character, competence and caring
- Music is a powerful contributor to young people’s well-being, including confidence and self-esteem, creativity, inclusion, mental health and wellbeing

Self-awareness, self-efficacy, self-management and perseverance, social awareness and relationship skills are central to any arts education activity, no matter the age and ability of the student or the environment in which the learning takes place.

The Canterbury Music Program

In a typical year, students in the program spend 25% of their academic time in music, and graduate with an Arts Certificate. Ten to 15% of the graduates of this program qualify for music-related post-secondary programs and many succeed in music careers. Missing an entire year of performance may be especially detrimental to students in Grade 12 who are on an academic track in music.

Current evidence and recommendations for safe music performance

*Recommendations from **The International Performing Arts Aerosol Study (11-14)***

A 6-month study, using two independent labs at the University of Colorado – Boulder and the University of Maryland reported in November 2020 that:

- At this time, it appears that if players wear surgical style masks with a slit for mouthpiece AND bell covers, aerosol emission is **reduced between 60% and 90%**.
- Flutes and recorders create a minimal amount of aerosol and it is recommended to play flute with the headjoint between their mouth and mask.
- Bell covers for woodwinds and brass should be made with a multi-layer cover.
- Singers produce aerosol at similar rates as woodwinds and brass. Singers wearing a well fit 3-layer surgical style mask reduces aerosol emission.
- Plexiglass partitions or barriers between musicians are not recommended due to room HVAC system design limitations. "Dead zones" or areas where aerosol can build-up are a concern of plexiglass partitions are used.

National Arts Centre, Ottawa (15 and Appendix 1)

The NAC has resumed live performances, with very strict adherence to safety protocols. Please see attached for their document outlining protocols.

Public Health England (16)

In November 2020, Public Health England stated that singing is considered safer when the following actions are taken:

- As required by national guidance, people with symptoms suggestive of COVID-19, or who are known to have been in recent contact with others who have COVID-19, do not participate in singing or attend singing events.
- Singing takes place only in larger well-ventilated spaces, or outdoors.
- Performance or rehearsal is for limited periods of time at a reduced level of loudness, using microphones for amplification if available.
- Limited numbers of people sing together.
- Singers are spaced at least 2 metres apart in all directions (at least 1 metre apart if the additional measures or controls recommended in government are applied).

Ontario Association of Music Educators (17)

In “A Framework for The Return to Music Classes in 2020/2021,” last updated in August 2020, the OAME urged the provincial Ministry of Education to consider “a variety of delivery options...to meet the music curriculum’s overall expectations, which could include fully distanced learning, **in-person teaching and instruction with lower-risk creative performance opportunities (e.g., in-school instruction in larger spaces, restricting the type of instruments in a group setting)** or in-person teaching and instruction with no live performance.”

Conclusion

Music has been helping us through the pandemic since Day 1—from shared musical moments on porches to pots and pans ringing for frontline workers. As the pandemic approaches the one-year mark, we need to consider how this experience has affected our young people, and do what we can to mitigate the potential risks to their mental health and well-being. One way we can do that is to ensure a robust arts education.

The start of the 2020-2021 was a challenging one. Administrators, faculty, staff, families and students have worked together to ensure a safe environment for learning. It is time to reassess that learning environment to determine whether we can safely reintroduce some of the elements that remain missing. We urge the Ottawa Carleton District School Board to discuss the potential for music performance education at Canterbury High School before the end of the 2020-21 school year.

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Appendix 1. National Arts Centre Orchestra guidelines

Welcome back to Southam Hall!

The following information will help acclimate you to the procedures and precautions we have instituted for a safe work environment. Our guiding purpose is to keep each other safe and healthy while returning to the work we love. The following protocols were developed by the NAC Workplace Health & Safety Committee, the NAC COVID-19 Response Team and the orchestra specific NACO Re-Opening Group. These represent the most important and effective steps we can take to mitigate our risk of transmitting the Corona Virus and align with the requirements from the Province of Ontario, sector-specific guidelines as well as all prevailing advice from the public health authorities.

There are three primary rules governing the behavior of everyone entering the NAC:

- Wear face masks
- Maintain physical distance of 2 metres
- Practice consistent hand and respiratory hygiene

These practices represent a baseline for health and safety. NAC staff, musician representatives and health professionals will continue to refine, improve and update protocols as needed throughout the pandemic.

If you have recently traveled outside the National Capital region, please notify Meiko Taylor meiko.taylor@nac-cna.ca or by phone at 343-997-6678. We may ask that you self-quarantine for 14 days.

What to expect

Before you come to the NAC *each day* you must self-monitor for any symptoms of illness. Each day that you are scheduled to work, you will be required to complete a *health screening questionnaire*. This will be filled out electronically at home and submitted before leaving for the Centre. Accommodation will be made for those musicians unable to fill out these forms electronically. This form will be used for contact tracing should an individual at the NAC contract the virus; public health is required to establish the tracing of any infected person.

The NAC will reimburse any employee for the purchase of home thermometers for your daily testing. Instant read infrared thermometers will be provided at the back stage entry for further confirmation.

All musicians are encouraged to utilize the Health Canada Covid Alert smart phone app available for download: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19/covid-alert.html>

If you have any symptoms of illness, do not come to work. Contact the personnel manager at 343-997-6678.

Like other public institutions throughout Canada, the NAC will not be offering onsite nasal swab testing. We are watching closely for any Health Canada approvals related to point of care testing, home saliva testing or antibody testing. In line with public health guidance, Covid testing for any NAC employees will not be mandatory unless tracing indicates a potential exposure. In the event of any indication of Covid transmission to anyone in the building notification will be made to all individuals with potential exposure and testing at OPH sites will be required.

Musicians experiencing symptoms or receiving notification via contact tracing or school notifications should go for immediate testing at the COVID-19 Assessment Centres. Please contact the personnel manager to discuss any testing or quarantine advice received from these sources.

Here are two likely scenarios for Covid exposure and what you need to do:

1] If a Musician or close contact family member develops symptoms of Covid-19:

- Musician must notify Personnel Manager
- Musician does NOT report to work and remains isolated at home

- Musician follows OPH guidelines

2] If a musician has been exposed to a confirmed Covid-19 case OR receives a notice from Public Health or School Board that a family member or close contact has been exposed to a confirmed Covid-19 case:

- Musician must notify Personnel Manager
- Musician follows OPH guidelines

The Personnel Manager will advise musicians to communicate with public health in making decisions regarding work obligations. All decisions will be governed by public health recommendations.

At the NAC

In general, all musicians and employees must enter the NAC via the Stage Door entrance. If the NAC requires a secondary entrance due to special circumstances, you may be advised to use an alternative entrance.

Put on your mask before entering the building. 3

Upon entering the Stage Door you will be directed by signage to read and confirm the following statements. If you cannot confirm these statements, please inform the personnel manager and expect to return home immediately.

- I have completed and submitted the COVID-19 NAC self-assessment and can answer 'no' to all questions
- To the best of my knowledge I have not recently been exposed to someone with COVID-19 symptoms within the recommended Ottawa Public Health timelines
- I have read and understood the Orchestra Re-entry Preparedness Plan [this document]
- I have taken my temperature before arrival and I do not have a fever

Masking

As per the Ottawa Public Health guidelines all musicians and staff are expected to wear approved face coverings and masks inside the building. This includes hallways, restrooms, lobbies, backstage and onstage.

A wide variety of fabric or polymer masks are suitable, excluding single fabric masks or masks with exhalation valves. While public health universally advises non-medical masks for all indoor applications the NAC will not prohibit N95 or KN95 masks if you feel these are appropriate for your individual needs. For performances, we encourage musicians to choose black or non-patterned masks, but you may use whichever masks make you feel the most comfortable for extended work periods.

If you have a medical condition that prevents you from wearing a mask, please contact Meiko Taylor by email meiko.taylor@nac-cna.ca or 343-997-6678.

In addition to your own preferred masks, the Music Department will make available sufficient ASTM Level 2 disposable masks whenever requested. These will be available from the Personnel Manager upon request.

All musicians and staff are expected to wear approved face coverings and masks at all times while inside the building. Detailed discussion of masking on stage follows below.

Entering and exiting Southam Hall

Musicians and staff are expected to wash their hands or use hand sanitizer stations upon arrival at the workplace and frequently throughout the day. This is especially important when arriving at the workplace, prior to and following any meals, and 4 after using the restrooms. Hand sanitizers and other disinfectant supplies will be located throughout the NAC.

String players should be cautious about the effect of sanitizers on instrument varnish. Sanitization stations will be kept at a safe distance from your unpacking areas. Alcohol swabs should be used on fingerboards or strings only. Pocket sanitizers are encouraged as long as precautions are taken to protect instruments.

Please follow signage to backstage. Infrared thermometer checks will be made as you enter the backstage area. Leave all cases at your designated unpacking location, then enter the stage and proceed directly to your assigned position on stage to warm-up. Musicians should not warm-up or linger backstage in any spaces. Please close cases whenever you are finished assembling or disassembling instruments.

While in the workplace, musicians should keep their unpacking area clean and maintain social distancing *at all times*. Do not bring unnecessary personal items on stage or place extraneous items on music stands. Players are responsible for carrying and removing any extra instrument stands or mutes. Please do not share pencils. You may bring personal water bottles on stage.

While on stage use only the chair and stand assigned to you and do not move or touch any other chairs or stands. Staff has taken great care to map out safe distances for all musicians on stage.

All winds and brass players producing condensate [spit] will be required to utilize absorbent pads and will be responsible for their safe removal after each service. The Centre will provide absorbent pads to all wind and brass players for this purpose.

Staff will be located in the wings to assist with the safe flow of musicians entering and exiting the stage.

Please do not linger following rehearsals. *Exit the building as quickly as possible and do not remove masks until you have left the Stage Door exit.*

Access to dressing rooms will not be allowed. *If you are performing, you must come dressed in concert attire.*

Distancing and risk mitigation on stage

Onstage seating will reflect current medical guidelines of 2 meter physical distancing. These guidelines reflect concern with Covid transmission via droplets or physical contact. Maps for seating for each program will be prepared reflecting safe distances. 5

As the pandemic has evolved, the Re-entry Committee has focused our attention on the potential transmission of disease via aerosols. In addition to physical distancing, adequate air exchange and masking are the primary tools for reducing aerosol dangers in the workplace. Masking is a proven risk mitigation strategy for both exhalation and inhalation of potential viral carrying aerosols.

Onstage masking will be mandatory for strings, percussion, harp, keyboard and conductors at all times for all rehearsals and performances. Wind and brass players are being provided with additional specialized facemasks as well as instrument bell barriers.

Understanding aerosol emissions

Masking is now considered a “two-way” protective strategy, limiting distribution of droplets and aerosols upon both exhalation and inhalation. Masks serve to filter and reduce potential viral dosing. While no masks offer 100% protection, there is significant evidence that reduction of the amount of inhaled viral particles is associated with measurable reduction of risk of contracting Covid and reduction of eventual disease severity. The goal of all on-stage strategies will be to reduce and dilute potential airborne particles. Combining sensible family and life practices, safety cohorts and bubbles as well as diligent self-monitoring are the starting tools we all have for protecting our colleagues. Distancing, air exchange and masking are additional and important steps in mitigating risk.

A primary concern within the orchestral world is the extra challenge of reducing aerosols when wind and brass players are present. It is natural to assume that wind and brass instruments are dangerous aerosol vectors. However, it is important to understand the difference between sound generation and airflow. [Try blowing out a candle with a trumpet fanfare.] Significant international studies have been done in the past several months on the dangers of aerosol contamination from winds and brass. These studies are providing the context for the return strategies of many orchestras.

Current research suggests speaking produces more aerosol emissions than what is emitted through the bells and tone holes of wind instruments. This is due to the filtering effects of deposition, friction, condensation and bore geometry. The results from several recent studies indicate that aerosols from wind and brass *instruments* are non directional and do not flow further than 30 cm from the instrument before decreasing to the level of ambient air. Evidence suggests there is more potential aerosol emission from wind and brass *players* when their instruments are *away from* their lips. This is why your wind and brass-playing colleagues will be working diligently to keep masks on *as much as possible*. Mask use during inhalation is just as important for their individual safety as for everyone else on stage. Wind and brass players will be practicing masking protocols that balance the need for adequate breathing, oxygenation, functioning embouchures and overall respiration 6 protection. These practices will not be perfect but they will significantly reduce potential exposures. Proper mask fitting is essential for everyone. Multi layer masks increase filtering efficacy but also increase resistance to air flow, which may increase leakage at the nose, cheeks or chin. The NAC will be providing self-adhesive nose wires to facilitate improved fitting at each service. Music department staff will have the obligation to observe and assist players in wearing their masks effectively at all times.

Speaking - even at normal volumes - releases droplets and aerosols, so *you must not remove masks when speaking*. This will apply to all employees at all times. The conductor will be supplied a microphone in order to communicate effectively during rehearsals while fully masked.

Plexiglass barriers remain mandated by the Province of Ontario between audiences and brass/singers. However, the recent aerosol studies indicate clear barriers inhibit the efficiency of air exchange on a stage. Therefore, barrier use will be limited to a few select areas as required. Stage set up may be further refined during our work periods according to evolving observations of prevailing air motion on stage.

Engineering modeling of the Southam Hall HVAC systems calculate a complete replenishment of outside fresh air every 20 minutes. This falls within minimum guidelines of 3 “Air Exchanges per Hour” currently recommended. This is an ongoing process of fresh air replenishment, distribution and the dilution of potential aerosol contaminants.

What to do before, during and after services

Your guiding principle should be to minimize time spent in the building as well as minimizing time spent in hallways. On breaks between services you should leave the building and not linger.

During a service, when you are not required on stage we recommend two possible locations to pass time while waiting to return:

1. At your designated unpacking/packing spot backstage, maintain 2 meter distancing and wearing masks.
2. Assigned aisle seats in Southam Hall, with mandatory use of sanitizers before entering the theatre. Please respect the rigid cleaning requirements for all public spaces, including armrests. Assigned seats will reflect 2 meter distancing. A list will be posted of which aisle seats you will use.

We strongly discourage you bringing any food with you into the building as we do not have a safe location with enough space for eating. Small snacks are permitted. 7

Instrument storage

Musicians will travel back and forth daily to the Centre with their instruments. Overnight storage will be provided on stage level for double basses, tuba, timpani and percussion. Bass players should handle only their own personal travelling trunks. These trunks will be available for daily use but may not be shared or exchanged. Percussionists will be responsible for sanitizing any shared instruments or mallets before storing or before use by another musician.

Additional rooms

Locker rooms, Musicians' Lounge, Practice Rooms, Bass Room are not available. If access is required to any of these spaces to collect important items, please contact Fletcher in advance to make an appointment.

The Green Room service will be limited and *people will not be able to gather in this space*. Microwave ovens have been removed from the building.

As much as possible, meetings should be conducted remotely. In-person meetings should be coordinated in advance by contacting Fletcher.

Congregation in public areas of the Centre will be severely curtailed. Please stay within the designated work areas and passageways.

Drinking water fountains in the building will remain out of service. However, water dispensers will be available backstage. Please bring your own reusable water bottle with large opening and secure top. Paper cups will *not* be provided. To limit frequency of use of the water dispensers, we encourage you to bring bottles full of water when you leave home. 8 Hand sanitizer stations have been installed throughout the building. You are also encouraged to bring small personal sanitizer bottles with you at all times. As suggested above, all musicians should familiarize themselves with the safety of sanitizers relative to valuable instruments.