



Report from Festival Manager, 2018 SweetWater Music Festival AGM

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Submitted by Paul Eichhorn

The past year for SweetWater has been a busy one including the launch of several initiatives and activities. Below is an overview of some of the highlights:

Online Marketing and Promotions – This area continues to be expanded and SweetWater continues to see more and more people finding out about our organization and our events through social media and our web site. This summer we created a series of promotional video clips to promote SweetWater 2017. The spots featured Mark Fewer talking about each concert during the Festival weekend. They were produced in house and we received a strong response to them. For the 2017 Festival we also expanded the number of Facebook paid posts and for the minimal investment this is well worth the new audience we reach. The number of social media follows continues to grow. In December, SweetWater launched an Instagram account. This is often the preferred social media stream for millennials or the under 35 audience. It is essential to embrace new ways to connect with that demographic for future audience development. Over the past year, we also sent out a greater number of e-news blasts, SweetWater Notes. This continues to be one of the most effective ways to get our message out. In addition, the SweetWater web site received a small facelift, particularly on the home page. This has created a much more, streamlined, contemporary look that is also much better-suited to viewing on mobile devices. Over the coming year, hoping to implement some sort of texting e-news that would again be ideal for younger audiences.

SweetWater 2017 and Other Concerts – SweetWater continued to enjoy strong attendance during our September Festival weekend. This year we had two sold out concerts and attendance at two other concerts remained at levels achieved in 2016. Audience response over the weekend was very positive. The relaunched Luthier Performance was also very successful with over 100 people in attendance for the free, early afternoon concert. I think most would agree, the major highlight over the past year was the decision to stage two jazz-focused concerts at Heartwood Hall. This new venue has proved to be quite popular – two sold out concerts. As a result of our successes in 2017, a second spring jazz concert is coming up in late April and another once again during the September Festival. These concerts also are noteworthy for the mix of audience, many had never attended SweetWater concerts previously. As we continue to look for new audiences, these sorts of concert initiatives are vital

moving forward. A special thanks to Heartwood for being a great partner on these events.

Fundraising – This area continues to see many positive signs. We realized an increase in individual donations and many past supporters who had not contributed in recent years once again made healthy donations to our organization. The second late year donor ask was extremely successful and resulted in double the number of donations over the previous year's effort. In addition, we continue to see more and more individuals stepping up as sponsors thanks to the enhanced sponsorship program initiated in 2016. It is an excellent way to involve our patrons and supporters as well as a high profile way to recognize their important contributions to SweetWater.

SweetWater's grant requests were very successful over the past year including a special Canada 150 grant from the SOCAN Foundation. In addition, we received an increase in funding from the Ontario Arts Council thanks to our recent success. SweetWater will also be eligible to apply for a three-year operational grant in late 2018.

To help provide SweetWater with a long term, stable funding base, the development of a "Legacy Endowment Fund" is crucial. This effort is now underway and will certainly be important over the near and far future.

Outreach – Following the launch our Access Music initiative in fall 2016, this past year saw many fruits of our labours come to life. The String Workshop in late May attracted 28 players ranging in age from 8 to 80. We also saw strong attendance at all of our SweetWater 2018 outreach events. The Mozart for Munchkins event saw more kids and parents and we new partnership was developed with the Rocking Horse toy store. The Classical Jam again had a strong turnout and as noted early, the Luthier Performance was extremely well-received. Music outreach with local schools has been particularly successful both during the Festival period and other times of the year. The recent String Workshops with Edwin Huizinga in early March were extremely successful. Based on these success, SweetWater hopes to continue to expand our links with area schools.

Marketing, Branding, Media – The key initiative SweetWater completed in 2017 was the new branding look and updated logo. This was made possible thanks to the combined efforts of our Fundraising Marketing Committee, Festival Manager, Artistic Director and the talents and expertise provided by Innisfree Design. The new branding system is easy adapt to other events and concerts. All SweetWater materials and online presence now feature this new look. With the new branding in place, marketing for the year ahead will be much easier to create. On the promotional side, we continue to explore new opportunities beyond Grey and Bruce. In particular, we have created enhanced joint promotional efforts with the Festival of the Sound and Toronto Summer Festival. This coming year we hope to initiative similar efforts with the Elora Festival and

other Ontario classical music festivals. A key effort for the 2018 Festival will be to get some media attention on CBC radio both in Ontario and nationally,

Artistic – As always, our Artistic Director has a busy schedule and only occasionally is able to be in our area. We were fortunate to have some time this past spring to do some important preparation work for the September Festival. That said, thanks to technology we continue to stay in touch regularly and that makes it very easy to keep all the key activities moving forward. The support of the Artistic Director on such areas as the OAC operating grant is extremely important. SweetWater is fortunate to have someone who provides energy, dedication, and creativity to his position. This makes the overall operation of SweetWater so much easier.

Administration and Strategic Planning – This past year I once again embarked on new ways to better organize SweetWater archival materials. Most importantly, we now have begun much-needed statistical tracking for various areas including ticket pricing and Festival attendance. Without comparable figures from past years, it's often extremely difficult to determine the best course of action moving forward. This information has been particularly useful to our Fundraising Marketing Committee. In addition, I worked closely with the Treasurer to better allocate expenses and revenues in our budgetary documents. Many items were not slotted in the appropriate areas. Once again, this is important to assist in making key decisions as well as making easier to report to granting bodies. The highlight of the past year was the development and implementation of our new Strategic Plan. This has been in the works since early 2016, initially through discussions with myself, the Artistic Director and Chair. A special thanks to everyone for helping to create this exciting new road map for our next three years.

Let me conclude by thanking the Board for its support over the past year. I would also like to thank the Artistic Director for his vision and incredible creativity and talent. As always, what we accomplish through SweetWater each year would not be possible without our many volunteers, supporters and patrons. Thank you so much!

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