



Report from SweetWater Manager, 2020 SweetWater Music Festival AGM

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Submitted by Paul Eichhorn

SweetWater had its most-ambitious year ever in 2019. Not only did we stage the most events and concerts ever (including two first-time ever events), we also completed a continent-wide search for a new Artistic Director for the first time and bid farewell to our founding Artistic Director at our September festival.

Below is an overview of some of the highlights over the past year.

SweetWater 2019 and Other Concerts – It was no surprise that SweetWater 2019 was another huge success. Not only did Mark Fewer pull together an amazing line up (including world-famous countertenor Daniel Taylor) but many of our patrons made it a point to be on hand for Mark’s final outing as AD. It naturally ended with an emotional tribute recognizing Mark’s incredible contributions to SweetWater. The Festival featured two sold out concerts and the largest audience ever for one concert. This year we also engaged a new supplier to record our concerts and this worked out quite well (a big change as George Faddoul had provided this service since the very beginning).

Earlier in the year, SweetWater Jazz III once again saw a standing room only crowd at Heartwood Hall enjoy an amazing night of music. Two weeks later another great turnout enjoyed emerging, aspiring musicians as part of our first-ever Next Wave Showcase.

Marketing, Promotions, Media – SweetWater continues to enhance and expand our efforts in this area. This year’s SweetWater 2019 ID was considered one of the most striking ever and we must give some credit for the imagery to our longtime design partner Innisfree Design. We continue to find new ways to better leverage our web site and push traffic to the site via our social media streams. Our Instagram account has seen a significant increase in followers in a short time (now outpaces Twitter). Paid advertising was expanded to link to audiences beyond our region. This effort was also supported by our expand Festival Network, particularly, links to Stratford Summer Music. These co-marketing efforts are an excellent way to get our message across and also support our fellow music festivals in Ontario. In media, we received some great press related to Mark’s farewell in September as well as an amazing profile about our new Artistic Director Edwin Huizinga by *rrampt Magazine*.

Fundraising & Development – SweetWater continued to reach out to our current supporter base and again we are extremely grateful to those who made donations. To

enhance this area, a new Support SweetWater web site link was created. This makes it easier for someone to donate, to support an endowment fund, or to volunteer as a Board Member, on a committee, or help at a Festival event. Again, we provided updates to supporters through two mailouts. These were also a great way to talk about our plans for 2019 and to update everyone about our new Artistic Director who also provided the end of year greeting to all.

We once again were fortunate to have so many returning partners (sponsors) along with new ones (TG Group, Baker Tilly, Bellwyck Packaging Solution). Many individual donors again stepped up as partners for our concerts as well as sponsoring a music work.

SweetWater continues to receive excellent funding from our public funders and this is testament to our organizations artistic, administrative, and governance excellence. We are now entering year two of three years of committed funding from the Ontario Arts Council. This spring we received news of continued support from Canadian Heritage (over \$31,000 over the next three years). The Municipality of Meaford increased its support to SweetWater once again and have committed to four years of funding at that level. Of note, all of our public funders have emphasized they are committed to funding no matter what programming can be presented over the coming year due to the challenges posted by COVID-19.

Foundations continue to provide key core funding, especially for our outreach and education initiatives. This past year we received a grant from Community Foundation Grey Bruce supporting our Access Music Phase Three initiative and ongoing support from the Leflar Foundation (a key funder since the Festival was founded). We also again received funds for education and outreach from the Jean Medley SweetWater Memorial Endowed Fund. SweetWater is now actively applying to other foundations to expand our funding base.

This past year, SweetWater created two new funds managed by the Ontario Arts Foundation. The Mark Fewer Legacy Fund will provide a long-term support for artistic excellence of SweetWater (a fitting tribute to Mark) and the Sustainability Fund will offer another stream of annual funding as required. Thanks to Canadian Heritage's matching grant program, funds donated to Mark Fewer Legacy Fund have already grown since last fall.

Outreach – This past year was the most ambitious schedule of outreach education initiatives (eight). It included the introduction of two new events (Access Music Fair, Next Wave Showcase) and school visits by performers in March and in September (highest number of students impacted ever). Our String Instrument Showcase (formerly Luthier Exhibitors) had the highest number of exhibitors ever and our annual Classical Jam saw the largest turnout ever in September. Our Education Outreach Committee had bigger plans for 2020 but like so much else, these will need to be modified to accommodate the new normal. We are dedicated to ensuring music opportunities continues especially for youth.

Artistic – As you all know, this area had its biggest change ever as we our founding Artistic Director passed the baton to his successor this past fall. Transitions can sometimes be challenging but thanks to both Mark and Edwin, it has truly been seamless. Throughout 2019 (ever before Edwin officially became Artistic Director), he was working with me closely on programming for 2020. Mark also integrated Edwin into the 2019 Festival. Edwin oversaw the Classical Jam and Mozart for Munchkins events. Both also communicated frequently during the transition. And although Mark was busy running another Festival as well in 2019, he continued to provide his usual, amazing artistic direction. The results this past September certainly illustrated that point.

Administration – We continue to find ways to create new efficiencies including in the area of financial reporting. The Treasurer has worked closely with me to develop new systems. The end result is a much more robust system to track financials and also generate informative reports for our Board regularly. Along with financials, additional digital archival back ups of key SweetWater files and documents has been created to ensure we have appropriate back ups no matter what happens with other digital files (a must today). Finally, a standard template has been developed for all SweetWater documents including minutes and reports. This features standard typeface, format, and file name system. This makes finding documents easier and provides an organizational standard... this was a long overdue change.

The New Normal – This report was started in early March as we geared up for our AGM to be held on March 21.... that never happened. The emergence of COVID-19 has turned everything in our lives upside down. To say the least, it has impacted SweetWater as well. To date, we have had to postpone or cancel three events and have had to rethink our plans for the coming year. Yes, this is a challenge but our entire SweetWater team has already come together and created several new ways for people to connect to music. Things have changed but we will keep the music alive... you can count on that!

As always, a special thanks the Board of Directors for their support and guidance over the past year and big thanks for all of their hard work which resulted in another successful year for SweetWater. In particular, a special thanks to Colleen Purdon who is ending her term as Board Chair (she has worked with me closely since I joined the SweetWater team and I greatly appreciate all of her support and advice over the past four years). Thanks also to Shawna Macivor, who recently retired from our Board after four years. Her work as Secretary was particularly helpful to me and it was great to work with her to support SweetWater. Thank you to both our current Artistic Director as well as our past Artistic Director for all of their work. Their great work and vision assured a smooth transition in 2019 and has provided a strong foundation for the year ahead and beyond. Finally, thank you to our many SweetWater friends: volunteers, supporters and patrons. SweetWater happens because of the support of our extended “family”. I am sure our family working together will see SweetWater through this interesting period.

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