



Stratford Concert Choir
sharing great choral music

Stratford Concert Choir Announces Interim Artistic Director

Changes are afoot at the Stratford Concert Choir (SCC). In January Brian Wismath will take over as interim artistic director, replacing Ian Sadler who was at the helm for 32 years.

“We were sad to say good-bye to Ian Sadler after all that time and we were also worried about filling his shoes,” said choir president Charmion Chaplin-Thomas. “We could hardly believe it when Brian Wismath showed up.”

The timing couldn’t have been better. Wismath and his partner had already planned a move back to Ontario from Victoria, B.C. and decided to settle in Stratford. When he learned about the opening at the SCC, Wismath was intrigued. “I thought, ‘Maybe this is a group that really needs a new perspective, someone who isn’t from here,’” he said, “There’s a real opportunity for choral growth and development.”

With a long history as a music director, performer and teacher, Wismath’s love of music was first nurtured when he sang with the Toronto Mendelssohn Youth Choir. He went on to study music at Queen’s University and then did a master’s degree in choral conducting at the University of Arizona in Tucson.

He also spent a year as a visiting student at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm. That year was pivotal for him. “Their level of music-making is extraordinary,” he said. “It increased my toolbox as a conductor. Most importantly, though, it inspired me to expect an ensemble to sing at a level that I didn’t know was possible.”

He took that inspiration with him to Victoria, where he was on the faculty of the Victoria Conservatory of Music. He also directed five different choirs as well as the Victoria Civic Orchestra. In 2017 he received the Herbert Drost Award from the B.C. Choral Federation in recognition of “an individual who has had long-term effects on choral music and choirs.”

His contract with the SCC officially starts in the new year but Wismath is already thinking about the ways in which he can use his experience. One thing he’ll do right away is introduce the choir to new music. “The great thing is I’ve been able to test drive 12 years of repertoire in Victoria,” he said “I know which things worked well and which things haven’t been as successful.” Beyond that, he is keen to develop relationships with other arts organizations in the city. He also wants to audition new singers in January, hire a professional accompanist and look for new performance venues. It’s all part of a master plan. “What I’ve tried to do is reinvigorate choral music, he said, “breaking down the walls around what it has to be and looking at what it could be.”

If Wismath has his way, the SCC—and its audience -- can soon expect exciting new things, “You always want audience members to leave and wish there was more, counting the days until the next opportunity to see that group,” he said. “That’s how I want to see the concert choir operate.”