



2010 WINNIPEG FESTIVAL REPORT

OVERVIEW:

Unison 2010 marked the fourth festival of choruses consisting of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, two spirit and straight (but happy) singers from across Canada. Like the Olympics, the festivals occur every four years alternating with the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses (GALA) in the USA. This is the first year it had been held in Winnipeg where it was the largest national choral festival held in Winnipeg in the last 20 years!

At the previous festivals in Edmonton, Toronto and Vancouver, participants and audiences from all walks of life descended upon the respective cities and were overwhelmed by the talent and pure joy of the Festival. We experienced no less in Winnipeg where our participants were featured in concert, trained at workshops and treated to a traditional Manitoba Social and a gala banquet featuring Winnipeg's own Heather Bishop.

Unison 2010 was coordinated by a steering committee which was a branch of the Rainbow Harmony Project chorus, Winnipeg's only GLBTT Choir. The Winnipeg steering committee included:

- Ray Desautels – Chair
- Victor Hooper – Performances/Workshops and Communications
- Murray Lamontagne – Administration
- Leslie Olsson – Facilities/Social Events
- Sandra Bignell – Member-At-Large
- Tony Hailu – Sponsorship
- Doug Holroyd – Treasurer
- Elizabeth Hunt – Secretary
- Dallas Jasper – Volunteers
- Ron Krug – Registration
- Leah McIssac – RHP Board Liaison
- Paul Sullivan – Advertising and Production
- Debbie Maslowsky – Event Planner

Sub-Committee Members

- Mark Bartling - Unison Store
- Jan Burdon - Stage Manager
- Huguette Calvez - Translations
- Sheldon Chartier - Production Tech
- Rob Cote - Graphics
- Edward Ledson - Opening Concert
- Rob Lindey - Festival Choruses/Opening Concert
- Gordon McDiarmid - Fundraising/Grants
- Madeleine Sarrasin - Translations
- Paul Sherwood - Opening Concert/Translations

PROGRAM AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

In the spirit of celebrating diversity, the Festival kicked off with an opening night concert on Friday, May 21st at Knox United Church and attracted nearly 1,000 Festival attendees and public. Featured was Winnipeg's own **Rainbow Harmony Project** along with seasoned song and dance man, designer and director, **Edward Ledson** and high school biology teacher/massage therapist/singer/songwriter, **Deborah Romeyn**.

Four extraordinary honourees were also recognized that evening for their pioneering efforts toward human rights:

Heather Bishop – First out lesbian to receive the Order of Canada, musician, instrumental in first Winnipeg Pride Festival

Ruth Krindle – First federally appointed lesbian judge and counsel for the first gay club in Winnipeg

Chris Vogel & Richard North – first gay couple to challenge marriage laws in Canada

Glen Murray - first openly gay mayor of a major Canadian city

The evening wrapped up with a Fabulous Chocolate Fantasy Reception at the host hotel, The Delta Winnipeg, where over 400 Festival chorus members schmoozed with old and new friends alike.

Saturday morning, choristers, directors and choreographers took part in a unique professional development opportunity - a **Music in Motion** workshop.

Presented by Norman Robert and Walter Wittich, participants had the opportunity to experience both physical and vocal exercises that were specifically designed to strengthen the dual use of body and voice. Choir directors and choreographers explored the collaboration and synergy needed between a conductor (who used to perform professionally in opera and musical theatre) and

a choreographer (a singer and former professional dancer) so that *music in motion* was a driving force and a "cool" experience for everyone involved!

The Festival performances were all held at Knox United Church and were divided into three concert blocks – Saturday afternoon (featuring five choruses), Saturday evening (featuring four choruses), and Sunday afternoon (featuring five choruses). The Unison Store was also open prior to and following each concert, and was coordinated and managed by local volunteers. Merchandise was from the participating choirs and each choir realized revenue from the sales of their items, with Unison Festival retaining a 20% commission.

Saturday evening, Festival participants took part in a traditional "Manitoba Social" at Gio's Club and Bar, with dancing, silent auction and 'social' food.

On Sunday evening, 500 participants celebrated the Festival in style at a grand banquet at The Delta Winnipeg. Guests were treated to a complimentary martini bar, a delectable dinner with guest speaker and entertainer, Winnipeg's own Heather Bishop. The highlight of the evening was Heather's rendition of "Hallelujah", backed ever so effectively by the 500 voices in the audience. The evening ended with virtually all of the guests up on the dance floor in celebration!

Registrants of the Festival had further professional development opportunities by taking part in one of three Festival Choirs. These training sessions were led by a guest conductor, culminating in a special performance at the Closing Concert. The three guest conductors were Marg Stubington (Ottawa), Scott Leithead (Edmonton) and Spencer Duncanson (Winnipeg).

The three choirs were as follows:

1. Soprano/Alto/Tenor/Bass (SATB) – 73 participants
2. Soprano I/Soprano II/Alto I/Alto II (SSAA) – 40 participants
3. Tenor I/Tenor II/Bass I/Bass II (TTBB) – 48 participants

At this Closing Concert (at Knox United Church), all members of the 15 choruses joined in with a lovely rendition of *Circle of Song* and after nearly four days of this incredible celebration of music and meeting old and making new friends, the finale of the Closing Concert brought everyone to their feet and a tear to the eye. As the local Rainbow Harmony Project kicked off the Festival in concert, they too closed the Festival with a most appropriate and heartfelt selection - *With One Voice*.

The closing lunch buffet was held at Club 200 Night Club and Restaurant, as participants shared fond farewells.

REGISTRATION/PARTICIPATION:

15 choirs from across Canada participated in Unison 2010:

- AVIVA Chorus
- Bridge City Chorus
- Calgary Men's Chorus
- Edmonton Vocal Minority
- Ensemble Vocal EXTRAVAGANZA
- Forte – The Toronto Men's Chorus
- Ottawa Gay Men's Chorus – Le Choeur gai d'Ottawa
- Prairie Pride Chorus
- Rainbow Chorus of Waterloo-Wellington
- Rainbow Harmony Project
- Singing OUT!
- Synergy
- The Women Next Door
- Tone Cluster
- Vancouver Men's Chorus

The GALA Choruses' Chorus, from the U.S., was also hoping to join Unison 2010, but unfortunately, had to cancel their registration. In their place, they sent a five minute video of greetings from many GALA member choruses from across the U.S.A. This was warmly received by all those in attendance.

Total registration for Unison Winnipeg was 442. There were an additional 72 complimentary and volunteer registrations for a total Festival participation of 514.

In addition to the 514 Unison folks above whom attended all the concerts, as well as invited guests, the following tickets were sold to the public for the concerts:

- Opening Concert – 349
- Concert Block #1 – 57
- Concert Block #2 - 74
- Concert Block #3 - 90
- Closing Concert - 31

COMMUNICATIONS & PROMOTION:

Promotion for participation for Unison 2010 began 4 years ago at the previous Unison Festival, held in Vancouver. At that time, the Rainbow Harmony Project

submitted a proposal for Unison 2010 to be held in Winnipeg. Upon confirmation that Winnipeg had been selected, the local Unison Festival committee immediately put plans in motion and developed the Unison Winnipeg website which offered on-line registration. Many emails were sent to all GLBTT choruses across Canada and links set up on various other sites, encouraging registration. Follow up details were then sent out regularly to registered participants via iContact.com.

Once the Festival participation promotion was in gear, media releases, public service announcements, print articles, posters, postcards, and flyers were produced and distributed, Facebook and Twitter accounts were set up and television and radio interviews (in both English and French) were arranged to encourage public ticket purchases for the concerts and to highlight the Festival. Public advertising was focussed firstly in GLBTT publications, then in choral/music circles, then to the public at large.

SPONSORSHIP:

Unison 2010 is grateful for the support of the following sponsors:

Province of Manitoba – Arts Branch	\$1,000
Canadian Heritage and Official Languages	\$1,298
City Councillor Harvey Smith	\$2,000
Foundation for Choral Music in MB	\$4,000
Investors Group	\$1,200
Pride Festival (Siku Vodka)	\$924.22
The Winnipeg Foundation	\$1,000
TOTAL CASH SPONSORSHIP	\$11,422.22

We would also like to acknowledge the following in-kind sponsors for their support:

- Canadian Choral Centre Inc.
- Club 200 Night Club and Restaurant
- Gio's Club & Bar
- St. John's Music
- The Delta Winnipeg

ECONOMIC BENEFIT TO THE CITY AND THE PROVINCE:

With over 500 delegates attending this national Festival and additional local concert goers, there was indeed significant economic impact from this high profile event. The use of hotel rooms (The Delta Winnipeg – original block was

225 and we ended with 412 room nights!) and use of other downtown properties, taxis, visits to local restaurants and attractions, purchases at Manitoba shops and of Manitoba products benefitted our City as well as our Province. In addition, there was significant investment of the host organization with regard to facility rental costs, food and beverage, promotional items, signage and advertising, graphic and web designers, translators, local musicians and music suppliers.

Between hotel rooms, ground transportation, food and beverage and local shopping, we estimate that our national Festival participants spent approximately \$150.00 per day (statistics for a full Conference delegate is approximately \$269 per day). As such, we estimate that the City and Province realized a benefit of approximately \$130,000 from delegates alone – outside of their actual Festival participation (i.e. this is aside from our investment to produce the Festival itself or from public ticket purchasers who may also have invested in local food and beverage establishments or transportation before and after the concerts).

SUMMARY:

In conclusion, the four years of preparation by the host committee of Unison 2010 in Winnipeg was well worthwhile as all members were thrilled with the fruits of their labour. The positive participant evaluations, the team of local volunteers who worked fervently before, during and after each and every event, the gracious support of our sponsors and donors, and the appreciation demonstrated by our public audiences, all combined to create an incredible and fulfilling experience for all involved.

The rave reviews by Unison attendees says it all:

- *"Strong encouragement from the audience for all choirs no matter their level."*
- *"The whole weekend was fantastic."*
- *"The joy of the choristers, conductors, pianists, organizers and volunteers was palpable and will last me for weeks."*
- *"Hearing the other choirs and being with 'family'; congratulations on an extremely well-run event and kudos to the MC."*

Finally, and most importantly, to ensure this special celebration of music continues, it was confirmed at Unison Winnipeg that a formal national Unison organization will be formed to develop policies and procedures and to set up detailed guidelines for hosting Unison Festivals. The delegates in attendance at the meetings in Winnipeg voted Ottawa as the host of Unison 2014!

As a musical celebration of diversity, we sincerely hope that Unison will return to Winnipeg where all the choruses can sing *With One Voice* on the front steps of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.