
Questions and Answers

What is the High Park Choirs' new strategy?

The new strategy for the High Park Choirs is to give us a clear focus and direction for the next three years. It gives us achievable goals to attain with the current funding and resources we have, but with a view to setting the stage for bigger and better things in the future. Choristers will see a shift from age-based choirs to skill-based choirs to better reflect the children's abilities. They will also see a more innovative repertoire with challenges they are musically equipped to handle and that will bring out their beautiful sound.

Why do the Choirs need a new strategy?

The choirs have been taking a very short-term and narrow view of the future. Decisions were made for the current year without giving much thought to the longer term. This was not a good way to develop the choirs over time. Now that the choirs are getting close to their 25th anniversary, it was time to start thinking strategically and for at least three years out.

Arts Councils and Foundations, sources of considerable funding, also gave us feedback from our grant applications that told us that we needed a strategy so that they could better appreciate what we wanted to do with the choirs and show the progress we have made.

How does the new strategy affect my child's choir division?

For the most part, the choirs should not see significant changes because the changes have already begun. The conductors have realized for some time that children cannot be placed in the divisions based purely on age. Some children have natural musical ability that allows them to progress more quickly through the divisions. Other children are happy to remain in their divisions until they are ready to move on.

You will see changes in the choir division names. The new names distinguish the High Park Choirs from other choirs in Toronto and reflect our uniqueness and ability to perform challenging pieces. We took our cue from *Cirque du Soleil*[®] and other creative arts organizations that "think outside the box" or "push the envelope" to offer their audiences something different and special.

The youngest or novice choristers are now in the Piccolo division where they learn the basics like beat, rhythm, melody and dynamics.

Choristers who grown musically and have come to understand basic musical concepts, and who have developed the ability to listen and focus are now in the Intermezzo division, signifying that they are transitioning and continue to grow.

Children who are ready for Brio are comfortable with sight reading and theory concepts, and sing confidently in two to three parts. This choir will now be conducted by Zimfira Poloz.

Allegria members have become accomplished singers and are expected to perform at a variety of venues on their own or to collaborate with performers from other organizations.

Will there be any changes to the conductors for each division?

Younger choristers whose skill corresponded to the former Intermediate division will now have the benefit of Zimfira`s teaching in Brio. More children will learn to sing with Zimfira using her phonopedic method of teaching vocal music. They will sing in two to three parts, have fun listening to themselves and learning to self-critique in a safe environment, and grow musically more than they can imagine.

Piccolo, our youngest choristers will still be conducted by Marina and the Intermezzo division will be conducted by Margaret.

How does the new strategy make us different from other children`s choirs?

Other children`s choir take a more traditional and predictable approach to choral music. Their repertoires are weighted more toward classical music. Partnerships, if they exist, are with like-minded organizations that mirror their classical approach.

When thinking of a new strategy to set the High Park Choirs apart from other children`s choirs, an excellent made-in-Canada example came to mind: *Cirque du Soleil*. It has redefined the world`s idea of what a circus can be and has broken away from the traditional circus mould. This is what the High Park Choirs also hope to achieve over time, a reputation for standing out in the crowd and transforming choral concerts into special performance experiences.

Why do the choirs want to be different?

The choirs want to be different because the new ideas are fun for the children and make them look forward to not only what they will be singing this year, but what is in store for them as they move to the other divisions. Being different opens up new opportunities for performing and touring and opens up doors to new collaborations with organizations that are doing interesting things in the arts scene. Being different also will give HPC an edge in the competitive world of fundraising, in order to support our activities and give our children the richest possible musical and educational experiences.

How and when will my child move from one division to another?

The High Park Choirs of Toronto considers your child's comfort level before making the suggestion to move to another division. If your child does not feel ready, there is no pressure to make the change. On the other hand, if we agree that your child is ready to go, it can happen in the middle of a season, rather than at the beginning or the end of a season.

How can I help my child progress through the divisions?

Parent involvement and encouragement are key success factors to help your child progress through the divisions and have a positive and nurturing experience in the choirs. Each division expects your child to do a bit of homework (practice their music and words) so that everyone is functioning at a fairly consistent level. Making sure your child completes their musical homework every week helps to improve their music skills and makes sure they are doing their part on their musical team.

When do the new changes start?

The new strategy is being launched now. We have a new website and a new logo to show our audiences that the choirs are changing and that the change is refreshing.

You will register for the new divisions now, and they will begin to take shape in September 2010.