

Robert Benedict

Whether or not there will be an Artspace, the kind of Artspace, its location, management, etc., will over a period of time be strongly reflected in the musical development in Fort St. John (orchestras, bands, choirs, popular groups, and soloists). We are of course referring to the proposed concert facilities, as opposed to the library or any other part of the project. Music itself, though, is of course closely associated with almost all other artistic idioms, such as dance and theatre (though the inverse is not usually the case). What Fort St. John and the neighbouring vicinities would benefit to realize is that this concert hall implies the importation of expensive, 'name' performers that will be difficult for the majority of this community to support during these hard times. What we need here is a growth of local art, at a lesser or no cost to the community, prior to or at least coinciding with the preparation of a space -- it's the old horse and cart scenario. This would provide a musical education and enrich especially a young person's growth through a sense of accomplishment. (Of course, this has already been developed to a degree with the teaching of ^{the} piano by fine instructors throughout this area.)

It was a rewarding musical experience for the band, choir members, and dancers as well as for my friend and colleague Heather DeRome, to play at the Bay on Saturday afternoon after the Santa Claus Parade. This was a first performance experience for some of these local talents; they certainly found it very exciting. We also enjoyed the lovely presentation by Northern Dance Theatre -- entertainment and art!

What was achieved musically, set the groundwork for the future; it inspired local talent to work hard enough that the community perceives its

own musicians to be artistically accomplished and sufficient. The ultimate goal should be to educate 'your own' people, as in the family concept that we all know, so that they can contend with the outside world, and eventually be a contribution to it. This would give Fort St. John a place in the world of active music. By the way, we have never seen such a concentration of artistic talent anywhere, as we have in this area of Canada. It should be a priority to develop this potential.

A grey area in the issue is the importation of renowned musicians, as mentioned above. Janet and I are of the opinion that it would be better to import teacher-musicians as well, who would give their time to develop the talent in the area as well as provide example concerts. Lovely recitals without follow-up workshops and teaching would leave Fort St. John's student musicians in a musically rudderless position, and therefore to a degree intimidated rather than inspired. Concert halls have this effect in a town where follow-up ensemble teaching does not occur.

The school system establishes the basics, supplying instruments, and a foundation to technique, as well as an introduction to repertoire. While they provide a plan for each student to accomplish his discipline, the school board and music teachers would be in full support of a follow-up or supplementary music program, which would lead to a high standard Fort St. John orchestra and several bands. Thanks to Mr. Hodson of Dr. Kearney School, Northern Lights College has been supplied with some fine, motivated, and inspired talents. And thanks as well to the College for providing rehearsal space. On December 21st, you will be able to hear these players, as well as a 100-voice children's choir, the Northern Lights Chamber Choir, and other performers in a Christmas concert at North Peace Secondary School. The first Fort St. John orchestra which is now being formed will be presenting its first concert in February (rehearsals at Northern Lights College).

Plans for space to provide art may benefit from some of the experiences that Janet and I have had as staff members at the Royal Conservatory in Toronto for the past twenty years. Actually, it's financially impossible to import even a small orchestra to be used for symphony or concerto work. Imports would therefore be limited to soloists and small ensembles. A concert hall is a home for the Fort St. John musical family, and a strong member of the Fort St. John musical family would be the orchestra which could accompany soloists. Imagine how exciting for a young performer, his family and friends to be involved directly through performance with an artist who would visit Fort St. John. It took almost a hundred years for the Royal Conservatory to decide upon and develop its own training orchestra, and through the founding and direction of Ezra Schabas it has become a national success -- finally, the concert and practice facilities are being properly used.

Hopefully the upcoming Fort St. John concerts will attract many members from a wide cross-section of the community, and build up audiences; the large number of performers in these bands, choirs and orchestra will automatically involve more of the community. It should be noted that one of Canada's finest guitarists, James Oldenburg, drew an audience of only about 25 people, in yet another of the town's empty rooms which could be used -- church and school rooms have also been offered for rehearsal and concert space.

In summary, we believe that the formation of strong, large community ensembles, especially a professional orchestra and high quality bands, is a fundamental priority in Fort St. John. Students of all ages would achieve the most important artistic goal of sharing music with other musicians, as well as a supportive and responsive community. This leads to musical brotherhood, and opportunities for personal expression through all types of art, intended fully for all types of people.

*John
at
Kern Board*