



# Alumni Testimonials



## Voice - Nicole Ross, Nova Scotia

In 2019 I had the great pleasure of competing in the National Music Festival. This festival was a wonderful chance to connect with many of my talented peers from across the country, all while learning from each other's performances, repertoire, and musical paths. The masterclass and professional development opportunities that the National Music Festival offers to its participants were incredibly inspiring, informative, and have been an important part of my development as a young musician. I will always be thankful for the rewarding experiences I had competing in this festival.



## Voice and Musical Theatre - Chloe Weir, Ontario

Performers need to perform! But more importantly, students need to study. Every performer is actually a student, always and forever, and there is no better place to study while performing than at the National Festival. Carrying the traditions of local music festivals to a higher degree, the experience is one I will never forget. I learned more in my days at Nationals than I ever could on my own, simply by being in the supercharged presence of incredibly talented musicians and teachers.

I would not be the performer--or student--I am today without that experience.



## Piano - Julien LeBlanc, Nouveau-Brunswick

Le Festival de musique nationale de la FCFM fut pour moi non seulement une occasion comme jeune musicien de prendre de l'expérience de scène et de me donner un but en travaillant un programme pour une performance, mais également l'occasion de rencontrer et d'échanger avec des jeunes musiciens de partout au pays. En venant d'une province éloignée où nous étions très peu de participant à la finale provinciale à l'époque, les échanges que j'ai eu avec d'autres jeunes musiciens de divers endroits au Canada ont joué un rôle très important dans mon éducation et mon évolution musicale.

Le Festival de musique nationale fut également une superbe occasion de découvrir du nouveau répertoire tout en visitant notre grand pays! Je garderai toujours de très précieux souvenirs des diverses éditions auxquelles j'ai participé!



### **Piano – Spencer Klymyshyn, Québec**

The 2019 FCMF National Festival was a very special experience for me. I was able to connect with a large number of incredibly talented musicians, and perform and compete in a competitive, while still supportive atmosphere. I was also able to network and meet individuals from the music scene in Canada, which has been great for my development. As well, the learning experiences at the festival were second to none.

Given that I was the winner of my discipline, a number of opportunities have revealed themselves to me because of this festival. I was recognized by my school, the Schulich School of Music of McGill University in magazine and fundraising campaigns which have increased my exposure in the music community. As well, I have been invited to perform with the Symphony New Brunswick in the coming months which was directly linked to my success at this festival.

Without the FCMF, I would have never met some of the amazing musicians with whom I was able to develop friendships. The FCMF National Festival has had a formative impact on my career as a musician, for which I am very grateful.



### **Voice - Maureen Batt, New Brunswick**

Being in the music festivals in New Brunswick is a fond part of my formative life. At the local level, I always felt like it was an annual reunion of music friends. At the provincial and national level, it was a chance to hear and meet new people in my field. Knowing what I know now about how small our national (and even international) music community is, I am forever grateful for the friends and colleagues I met at these festivals.



### **Strings - David Liam Roberts, Manitoba**

The FCMF National Music Festival is one of the very best opportunities for aspiring Canadian musicians. Meeting like-minded musicians from across the country is extremely beneficial, and the people I have met at the National Music Festival have remained close colleagues and will continue to be throughout our careers. My first FCMF experience was at the 2014 festival in Kelowna, where I received the ‘special prize’ for the Strings category. In 2017, I participated as a member of a string quartet, and in 2018 was honoured to receive the Grand Award in Sackville, NB.

For me, the National Music Festival has been an impactful part of my development as an artist, and I hope that future generations of students will be able to benefit from such a wonderful festival.



### **Voice and Brass - Anna Bond Edwards, Nova Scotia**

I am incredibly proud to be a musician from Canada. Canada welcomed me as an immigrant from Romania in ‘91. I have been very fortunate since I was eight to be a part of my local festival in Nova Scotia, which culminated in my participation in the FCMF festival in 2009 and 2013, in brass and voice. As students and teachers prepare each year for their local festival, a young student dreams of the chance they can make it to this very stage with the best musicians in the country. It all starts at the very beginning with the drive to succeed. This festival sparks that drive in many to become better musicians. That is why this festival has shaped my musical development long before I even had the honor of competing.

FCMF is a national treasure. We must strive to protect it for generations to come!



### **Voice and Musical Theatre - Susan Eichhorn-Young, Saskatchewan**

As a Canadian living in the United States for almost 20 years full time, I can say that the concept of music festival is uniquely Canadian, at every level. I would encourage Canadians to consider that what might feel “normal” to them, in having a local, provincial and national music festival system, is indeed, NOT normal anywhere else. This is uniquely Canadian and should not be taken lightly.

Having a music festival system is one of the most fundamental areas of performing arts for young and developing musicians, actors, singers, & players. This is a system many of us have grown up in, which has prepared us for much in our emerging and developing professional lives, in and out of the arts. Music and arts programs are CRUCIAL to the development of a human being; music festivals give that growth an opportunity to be seen in that development.

Please, please, PLEASE do not take this for granted. It is such a privilege to have the freedom to be a part of the festival system, when so many countries do not have anything like this, especially in that it has momentum from a local through a national festival. I hope, at every level, you continue to nurture the talent and craft that is building in your communities and your provinces. I hope you continue to educate your communities how crucial it is to nurture the financial and volunteer commitment it needs and requires, in order to build this musical and dramatic dynamic.

Music Festivals feed our diversity, our society, and our human response to the world. As Canadians, we stand apart in the world as a country that feeds and recognizes the human spirit. Music Festival at every level is part of developing the soul of the human being. It is not an “extra”, but a needed opportunity to allow a place in which a young, emerging soul is given a place to be seen. Nurture it. Feed it. Acknowledge it. Hone it. Develop it. Keep it safe. Please, keep it safe. Our civilization demands it, and requires it.



### **Guitar - Michael Bemmels, British Columbia**

In 2019 I had the great pleasure of competing in the National Music Festival. This festival was a wonderful chance to connect with many of my talented peers from across the country, all while learning from each other’s performances, repertoire, and musical paths. The masterclass and professional development opportunities that the National Music Festival offers to its participants were incredibly inspiring, informative, and have been an important part of my development as a young musician.

I will always be thankful for the rewarding experiences I had competing in this festival.



### **Piano - Carrie-Ann Matheson, Prince Edward Island**

The yearly music festival in Prince Edward Island was crucial to my development as a young pianist. Not only did it give me a clear goal each year, it provided the opportunity to be evaluated by and receive really valuable feedback from some of Canada’s most prominent musicians.

Winning the piano division of the 1995 National Festival remains a defining milestone in my career, as it gave me a much needed boost to move forward in setting new goals for myself both as a musician and as a person. I will never forget Janina Fialkowska’s observation in the moment she announced me as the first prize winner. She said that my most important strengths as a performer were my ability to communicate and take risks. I have gone on to build my career on those very qualities.

I am forever grateful to the National Music Festival for giving me the confidence to keep walking down that path.



### **Strings - Jaeyoung Chong, New Brunswick**

The festival helped me to achieve my ability to play and perform in a scale I couldn't without. To have performed in a high stakes competition gave me more confidence and a better goal for my future music career. Most importantly, the connection that I have made with the musicians competing while spending the week with them gave me great positive memories and inspiration to keep up with my performance and my music career.



### **Guitar - Ben Diamond, Newfoundland and Labrador**

The National Music Festival held in Saskatoon SK in 2019 was one of the most rewarding highlights of my music career. I cherish the things I learned and my success in the National Music Festival throughout my continued development as a hopeful academic, professor, and performer.

The festival began with warm welcoming activities such as trivia and a pizza party, followed by a very generous competition procedure. I was looked after every step of the way in a helpful dress rehearsal, efficient practice time allowances, food sources at my availability, and the most wonderful group of volunteers. The FCMF also encouraged competitors to attend each respective performance in our own provinces, and it was truly special to see my colleagues give fantastic performances.

After the competitions, we had exceptional masterclass opportunities and I was able to meet and work with Phillip Candelaria, who said many helpful things about my playing. I was also able to learn from the other guitarists as they presented their repertoire as well. Going into the night of the awards ceremony, we were welcomed in a very professional manner and we were constantly reminded that we are amongst Canada's finest classical musicians. I walked out of the ceremony with Second Place in the Guitar competition, alongside everlasting friendships and memories.

The FCMF is truly a prestigious event which I hope continues to thrive for years to come.



### **Musical Theatre - Lauren Sazon, Saskatchewan**

My passion and love for music has grown much bigger when I was given the opportunity to be in the FCMF. Because of this organization, I was able to gain more knowledge and experiences as a performer and a student. I learned so many things from the adjudicators which have inspired and helped me hone my skills and I also had the chance to build friendship with the other performers who have the same passion as I do.

With the help of this organization, I was able to express myself through performing. I was able to grow musically and share to everyone what I love to do. I am forever grateful for the wonderful experience.



### **Voice - Tracy Dahl, Manitoba**

The impact of the National music festival on my career is probably more important than most could or would imagine. It was at the National music festival when the adjudicator invited several of the competitors to attend a seminar in New York City that coming September. The gentleman ran a summer program in Graz Austria and was having a seminar for young singers. Two of the singers decided to take advantage of his invitation and went.

It was at this seminar that I sang in a session called, "Would I hire you?" I was a naive young singer, running on enthusiasm and passion for singing. I had no idea who I was singing for. The three gentlemen on the panel were all extremely influential people in the world of opera. Two of them continued to be important in my career after that day and one said,

"Would I hire you? Yes, I have a job for you speak to me at the end of the session." It was my debut with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra in Toronto and at Carnegie Hall in New York City.

I suppose some people might call this a version of 'six degrees of separation' where a festival in Winnipeg led to the Provincials, to the Nationals in Regina, to a NY seminar to Carnegie Hall! The level of singing was amazing the year I competed at Nationals and the top three singers, all females that year, went on to International careers: Kathleen Brett, myself and Lyne Fortin. I feel very blessed that I was there that summer and made the connections that I did. I am ever so grateful for my years in the local music festival and my teacher, his wife - my pianist and the friends I made during that time.



### **Woodwinds - Gerard Weber, Saskatchewan**

My local music festival in my small hometown community of Humboldt, Saskatchewan connected me to others - musicians, adjudicators, volunteers - who were as passionate about music as I was; it was the gateway towards a larger, national musical community, which I am proud to be a part of.

This community that I came to know at the local and provincial festivals early on in my career inspired and encouraged me to excel to the best of my abilities, and I was thrilled at the opportunity to perform and meet new people at the National Music Festival in 2010, 2011, and 2012. I would not be the musician I am today without these opportunities.



### **Chamber - Andrea Pedro, British Columbia**

Being a part of the 2015 National Music Festival has been one of my most inspiring musical experiences. I am especially grateful for the opportunity to immerse in an exciting and driven atmosphere, to compete and perform with Canada's young talent, to meet potential future colleagues, and to meet and work with adjudicators and faculty from around Canada. The journey of preparing two trio programs to the best of our ability and then having the chance to travel to different parts of Canada to share music with the communities and fellow musicians is very special.

Thank you FCMF!



## **Piano – Dakota Scott-Digout, New Brunswick**

Growing up in a small town in rural Nova Scotia, I did not have access to a local music festival. When I participated in my first music festival as an undergraduate student at Mount Allison University, it was easy for me to appreciate the importance of local, provincial, and national music festivals for young Canadian music students.

The network of music festivals across Canada offers young musicians an important performance milestone, all within the context of education and celebration of artistic achievement. It is crucial for us to support the FCMF and the vital role it plays in the lives of budding Canadian musicians.



## **Brass and Piano - Guy Few, Saskatchewan**

I am so very blessed.

Blessed to have parents who cared about a balance of physical strength, arts and academics. Blessed to have teachers at school that understood and supported my passion. Blessed to have instrumental instructors who pushed me to the highest standards. And so very blessed to have an organization that fed my passion and drive for perfection, my excitement to be part of a community and a competition – the Canadian music festival movement.

My first festival competitions were at the age of 5 and I was hooked. Every year my teachers and I would plan repertoire to fit both RCM exams and the music festival. I was obsessed. I wished to fulfill the goals set by my teachers, while making my parents proud. And, how I craved the time that would be spent with members of my studio and studios across the province as we joined together to perform for each other and for wise and inspirational adjudicators.

Before long I was competing as a pianist, trumpeter and in speech arts. My parents, sisters and grandparents were such great support – and to this day I can still see my tireless mom mouthing the words to my speech arts pieces from the audience. Some years I was in as many as 14 classes in Brass, Piano and Speech. And what did I learn? I learned how to behave, dress, speak, bow, walk and communicate positively with others. I learned to perform with others, first my sister as duet partner, and later, pianist colleagues as second piano for concerti – finally the incredible skills offered by my teachers and professional collaborative pianists for second piano or competition repertoire. I learned to be a good competitor while staying true to my own standards of technique and interpretation. I grew up.

And I was so very lucky. My natural gifts, trained and balanced by my teachers, lead to me competing at the National Music Festival by the age of 11. I competed 4 times at the Nationals, often at the CNE grounds in Toronto in the Music Building and Queen Elizabeth Theatre and one year at UofT. At the end of the CNE when cleanup was yet to begin, the fairway was silent, buildings closed, papers and wrappers blowing into banks like snow. Yes – the grounds were silent but those buildings were not. Canada's best musicians were there and the music rose from four different halls, inspiring young and old alike. It was amazing for me. I went to support every Saskatchewan candidate of course but there were others, performers that demanded attention, whose gift was undeniable, not to be missed. I came second on my first time out and second again at my next appearance at the Nationals. One year I participated as the collaborative pianist for the Saskatchewan team. And finally, on a year where I competed in both brass and piano categories, I won the brass and went on to win the Grand Award.

Clearly, the music festival movement brings a community together: competitors, family, teachers, volunteers, collaborative pianists, festival administration, adjudicators and audience. This movement trains all professionals in our communities, doctors, lawyers, professors, academics, accountants, researchers and the most informed audiences in the world.

So, in the end, we are all blessed.



### **Voice - Elizabeth McDonald, Ontario**

The music festival experience was an integral part of my experience and training as a young singer – my local festival offered substantial scholarships that afforded me the opportunity to further train abroad. It was also at that time that I moved through the Provincial Music Festival (Ontario) and subsequently performed at the National Festival. The experience of this process of preparation, travel, performing, and receiving adjudication was an important step in my training.

As I reflect on my experience as a young singer, I realize that it continues to inform me today as a teacher at the University of Toronto. Each year I encourage singers to perform at their local festivals while considering the whole picture of what it would take to perform at Nationals, and to use this as an opportunity to gain valuable stage experience. From my studio, I have singers who have won major international competitions but started in our Festival system and it was through these experiences that they build up the knowledge to be able to take their performing to the next level.

There is a reason why we have excellent singers all over the world despite being a small country! Our National Music Festival system is an integral part of our music identity and culture.



### **Piano - Phillip Cho, Québec**

Festivals play a key role in the development of the young musician. I, for one, have benefited greatly from such events by expanding my network of fellow musicians, teachers and jury members who together form some of Canada's most prestigious community of artists.

The FCMF has tested my endurance and through it, I have delivered some of my best performances during my musical career. As the First Prize Winner in Piano and 2nd Grand Award Winner among all disciplines in the 50th National Music Festival in Ottawa in 2017 (Canada's 150th Anniversary), I can testify that my success was a result of perseverance and hard work.

In 2016, my first time at FCMF, I left the festival making many new friends but earning no prize. While some would consider giving up, I used that experience to motivate me to work even harder the next year.

Due to experiences such as these, I believe that music festivals provide the emerging artist the right platform and opportunity to undergo that tedious, yet beautiful, process required for any developmental area in life: the process of trying again. After all, do not the rays of success shine behind the gate of failure?

The festival movement not only helps the young musician build a career, but it also tests the strength of one's inner self - which is the starting point of all profound artistic expression.



### **Voice - Máiri Demings, Nova Scotia**

Participating in the 2016 National Music Festival was the most beneficial part of my music education as a young singer. I gained valuable skills and formed friendships that I will take with me through the entirety of my life and musical career. At the festival I learned how to network, put together and prepare a recital program, listen critically to become a better musician and teacher, and (since I came from a very small town and had never strayed too far from home) how to manoeuvre an airport and a big city.



### **Voice - Rebecca McIntosh, Manitoba**

The 2017 National Music Festival was an amazing opportunity, not only to visit and enjoy our nation's capital but to sing for a new and receptive audience of peers and fans. I will never forget the experiences learned there.



### **Piano - Eric Brisson, Québec**

Je garde d'excellents souvenirs de ma participation au Festival National de Musique. C'était une occasion parfaite de faire la connaissance de musiciens d'autres provinces et de visiter le pays. Je supporte chaleureusement la mission éducative de la FCMF - merci pour tout ce que vous faites pour les jeunes musiciens canadiens.



### **Voice - Skylar Cameron, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick**

Music festival has been a huge part of my life from a young age, and it has undoubtedly cultivated the artist I am today. The National Music Festival was a culmination of all the years in my local music festival and was one of the most wonderful and educational experiences I have had. I am so thankful for that opportunity and for all the amazing people I met in Edmonton [2015] and Sackville [2018].