



Tania Miller, Music Director

VS Musicians 101-Touring with the VS

By Christine Prince – VS Viola

It was 6:30 am .Easter Monday: and bleary- eyed musicians surrounded the bus outside the Royal. People were tired. In the weeks leading up to this day, we had been incredibly busy- Pops #5 (“The King”), Kids #3, Classics #4 (a concert with one of the MD candidates) and the Beethoven Festival. We had rehearsed the tour program Wed, Thurs & Sat, performed the first concert of the tour that night in Duncan. That left Easter Sunday to finish packing and organizing all the details of our lives that would continue on in Victoria while we were on tour: spouses, child-minders, house & pet sitters, student schedules, etc., etc. Now, suddenly, the tour was a reality.

Thanks to the incredible hard work and organizational skills of Mitchell, Peter, and the VS office staff, the tour logistics went very smoothly. “Like herding cats” is the job description of someone in charge of touring musicians. Fortunate, our chief wrangler, Peter, was able to handle the inevitable glitches while on the road. Problems such as “no-show” taxi pick-up, improper air travel ID, roommate incompatibility and delayed arrival of the basses in Vancouver were all handled, calmly and efficiently. In the meantime, Mitchell’s office staff back in Victoria, and the staff on tour with us ensured that the continued needs of the VS were cared for. In addition to all the managerial support, our intrepid stage manager, Eric, had to organize us on a variety of stages and cope with unfamiliar configurations, equipment and stage personnel. He also drove the large instruments from Quebec City to Toronto- a trip that incurred an extra 5-hour detour into Montreal because of temperature control failure in the cargo area.

Falling snow gave our midnight arrival in Quebec City a somewhat magical quality. Walking around “Vieux-Quebec” the next morning continued to have a slightly surreal feeling. But then we got to work. Rehearsing in the afternoon brought back a sense of reality-and some of the trepidation felt about this venture. Tania had a great vision for the tour- but could we pull it off? Playing large repertoire with a small amount of rehearsal on the home turf of larger orchestras in unfamiliar halls suddenly seemed daunting.

It turns out, the answer was Yes! In Quebec City and for each concert during the tour, the VS musicians were able to adjust to the different halls and situations and give their best just as Tania had envisioned. Her faith in us and her continued encouragement was justified. Every concert was well received. The audiences (even in Toronto) were receptive and enthusiastic. We felt we had made new friends for our VS family all across Canada.

Being able to perform the same concert a number of times offered musical growth for the group, as did the opportunity to perform in some excellent concert halls. Comparing our sound in a superior hall, for instance, the Palais Montcalm, to our sound in the Royal was very educational. Audience feedback for the sound we produced in all these halls was also gratifying. A good hall definitely makes a positive difference!

One of the most rewarding aspects of the tour was feeling the incredible support the orchestra received from all quarters. Our management not only supported us logistically, but also sought out extra financial support. This financial support came not only from government and grants- various individuals stepped up to the plate from the inception of planning to insure that the tour would happen. The musicians of the sponsoring orchestras attended the concerts and gave us marvelous receptions. The audiences we encountered along the way were very appreciative. You, our Board supported us going forward with the tour.

It was especially heartwarming and so encouraging to see past and present Board & Foundation members who joined us in various cities. It was great to see them backstage applauding us as we came off the stage. This level of support represented, for me, the bonding of all members of the VS family. I propose a revision to the old adage: "It's ok- we're all with the band!"