

MCC IMPACT

REPORT 2025/26



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A Season of Connection

At the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra, we know that live music can strengthen community, spark curiosity, and create meaningful connections. From the concert hall to classrooms, neighbourhood spaces, and communities throughout Manitoba, we continue to hear from audiences and participants that MCO experiences are intimate, inspiring, and deeply human.

“Music continues to be a source of connection, reflection, creativity, and belonging for communities across Manitoba.”

At the heart of the MCO is a belief that music is something to share. Through sold-out performances featuring internationally celebrated artists, hands-on education programs for young people, free community events, and tours that bring music directly into schools and rural communities, the MCO creates spaces where people feel welcomed, engaged, and connected.

We worked to remove barriers for more people to participate in live music experiences. Through community tickets,

open rehearsals, touring programs, community events, and innovative collaborations, we are exploring new ways for orchestral music to feel welcoming, relevant, and connected to contemporary life.

We were also reminded of the value of collaboration – between artists, audiences, educators, students, donors, volunteers, and community partners. From powerful new Canadian works and multidisciplinary collaborations to joyful first encounters with live music, these experiences were made possible through the collective support and belief of so many people.

Thank you for being part of this work. Your support ensures that music continues to be a source of connection, reflection, creativity, and belonging for communities across Manitoba.

With gratitude,

Sean McManus, *Executive Director*
Manitoba Chamber Orchestra



With Our Thanks

It starts with you.

To our audiences, donors, sponsors, volunteers, musicians, educators, community partners, supporters and funders — thank you.

Together, you created moments of joy, discovery, reflection, and connection for thousands of people across Manitoba. From classrooms and community spaces to concert halls and rural schools, your support made it possible for live music to reach people where they are — bringing communities together through shared experiences that inspire, uplift, and endure.

Every concert, workshop, school visit, tour stop, rehearsal, conversation, and shared musical experience this season was made possible through your generosity, enthusiasm, and belief in the importance of live music.

The Manitoba Chamber Orchestra exists because of a community of people who give their time, energy, creativity, and support to help music thrive across Manitoba.

Thank you for being part of this work.



Bringing People Together



Great music is meant to be shared.

Through beloved repertoire, celebrated guest artists, and welcoming spaces, the MCO creates live music experiences that are intimate and memorable. This season, audiences filled concert halls for experiences ranging from the sold-out Cello Festival concert *Between Earth & Sky*, featuring **Colin Carr** performing Haydn's beloved Cello Concerto in C, to *Threads of Gold* with acclaimed violinist **James Ehnes**. Across the season, performances like these created joyful points of connection for longtime concertgoers and first-time audiences alike.

"Your concerts are my happy place. Seasons Ascending was absolutely thrilling; a full day later and I am still levitating with joy."

- MCO audience member

Focus Story: *Threads of Gold*

One of the season's most anticipated performances brought a sold out audience to Knox United Church for *Threads of Gold*, a special recital featuring internationally celebrated Manitoba violinist **James Ehnes**. Spanning works from across James' journey with the violin, the evening reflected the MCO's commitment to creating shared musical experiences that feel both intimate and extraordinary.

To open the evening, the **Winnipeg Youth Orchestra** took the stage for a special pre-concert performance, giving young musicians the opportunity to connect with audiences as part of a major concert experience. For emerging artists, opportunities like these provide not only valuable performance experience, but also a sense of belonging within Manitoba's broader musical community.



Over
4,800 people
attended MCO
concerts
this season

"The music is lovely, the musicians and guests engaging,
the conductor very skilled and committed...
and I always meet at least one old friend to chat with!"
- MCO audience member



Inspiring Curiosity & Creativity

A lifelong relationship with music begins with curiosity.

Through hands-on workshops, school partnerships, and interactive performances, the MCO creates welcoming spaces where young people explore, experiment, and participate in music-making alongside professional artists. Programs like **Toy Symphony**, **MCO Immersion**, and **MCO Play** invite students and families to encounter concert music as inspiring, creative, and joyful.

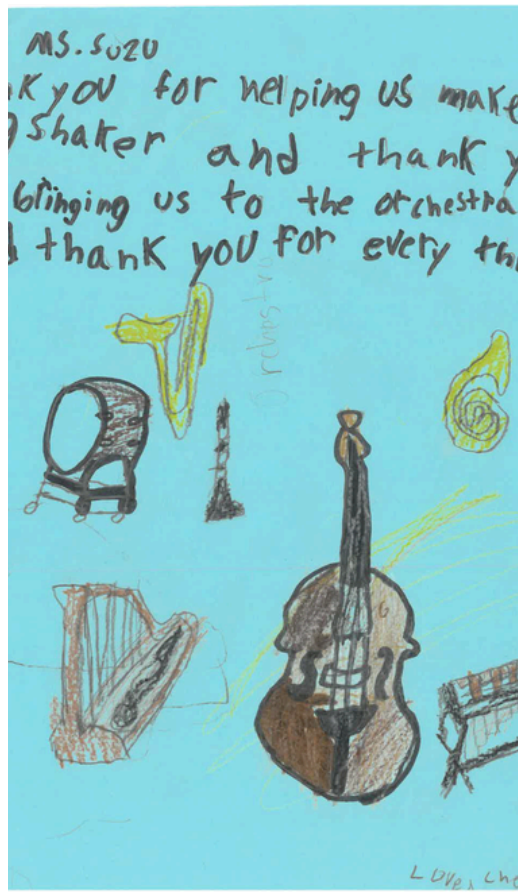


“Thank you for organizing these events and working so enthusiastically to create opportunities for our students to listen to high quality live music. In an increasingly digital world, it is more important than ever to connect in person with the very things that have been the cultural glue throughout time and place.” - *Teacher at General Wolfe Junior High School*

Focus Story: MCO Immersion

Through MCO Immersion, approximately 80 Grade 3 and 4 students at Gladstone School spent the year exploring music not only as listeners, but as active participants and creators. Led by educator and musician Dr. Suzu Enns, the program brought professional musicians directly into the classroom through workshops and interactive musical experiences focused on rhythm, storytelling,

collaboration, and creative expression. MCO Immersion creates sustained relationships with students over the course of the school year, making music accessible, welcoming, and personal. **For many students, the program offers a meaningful first encounter with live music, sparking curiosity, confidence, and the joy of creating together.**



Over 3,500 children & youth experience live music through MCO programs each year



Expanding Access to Music



Music has the power to connect and inspire.

Through touring, open rehearsals, free community programming, and free concert tickets, the MCO works to remove barriers that can prevent people from participating in live music experiences. Whether in rural communities, neighbourhood gathering spaces, or relaxed behind-the-scenes settings, programs and events like **MCO on Tour**, **MCOpen**, **Music for All**, and **Concert on the Veranda** help bring music closer to people across Manitoba.

"Yesterday's concert was an absolute delight! **Great to have it in a neighbourhood space with a community feel.** Wonderful experience!"

- *Concert on the Veranda audience member*

Focus Story: MCO on Tour

This spring, the MCO brought live music directly into schools and communities across Manitoba through its annual MCO on Tour program, with performances and workshops in St. Malo, Winkler, Beausejour, and Falcon Lake. Making orchestral music accessible and welcoming, the tour combined professional performances with hands-on learning opportunities that invited students to participate alongside musicians.

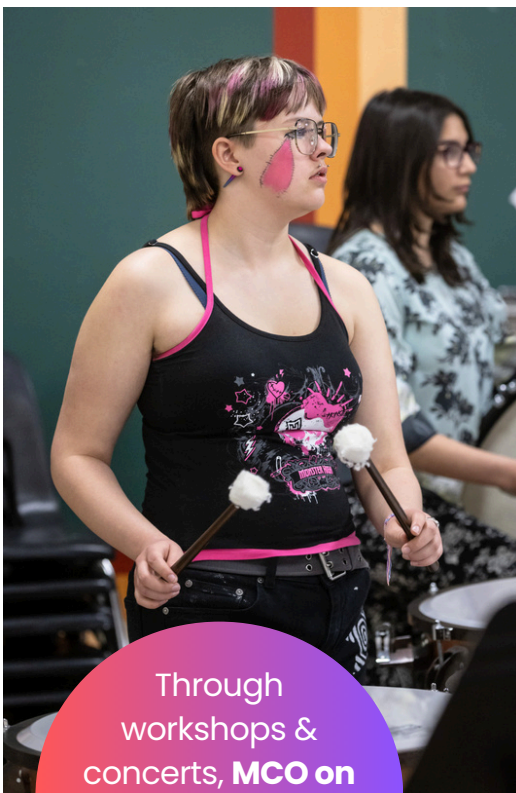
The tour included classroom workshops, school sing-alongs, and collaborative performances of Toy Symphony with local students. **At J.R. Walkof School in Winkler, approximately 80 Grade 3 students joined the orchestra in performance, experiencing firsthand the excitement and connection of making music together.**

“I’ve never had this much fun with music!”

- Student at École St-Malo School

“[My students] were lined up at my door first thing this morning still talking about how much they enjoyed yesterday’s session and concert!”

- Music Director at École Edward Schreyer School in Beausejour



Through workshops & concerts, MCO on Tour reached 800+ rural Manitobans this year



Reimagining the Orchestra Experience



“Lovely opportunity to hear works not performed elsewhere and in an intimate setting.”
- MCO audience member

Live music can open new perspectives, spark meaningful conversation, and reflect the richness of the world around us.

Through new commissions, contemporary Canadian works, and collaborations with diverse artists across musical and cultural traditions, the MCO continues to create concert experiences that feel immediate, immersive, and deeply connected to contemporary life.

This season, several concerts featured newly commissioned work, including by acclaimed composers **Julian Grant** (pictured, left) and Canadian **Kati Agócs**, reflecting the MCO’s commitment to artistic innovation and championing living composers on today’s concert stage.

Focus Story: Songs of River & Fire

This season, *Songs of River & Fire* brought together music, storytelling, and visual art in a powerful exploration of memory, motherhood, loss, and resilience.

Featuring acclaimed Indigenous artists **Melody Courage** (pictured, bottom right) and **Marion Newman** (bottom left), the program moved across opera, contemporary music, and Indigenous voices to create an experience that was both deeply personal and profoundly communal.

A centrepiece of the evening was *Perfect Offering* by Canadian-British composer **Cassandra Miller**, accompanied by new

video art from multidisciplinary Dene artist **Casey Koyczan** honouring Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

Inspired by the sound of bells and a line from Leonard Cohen – “ring the bells that still can ring, forget your perfect offering” – Miller’s work reflected on time, remembrance, and the enduring resonance of shared grief and humanity. Together, the music and visual art created an immersive concert experience that invited audiences into reflection, connection, and conversation beyond the concert hall.



MCO featured **9 Canadian composers** this season, representing 26% of our programming



For *In the Company of Birds*, Canadian composer Kevin Lau (pictured, top right) created *A House Covered With Dawn*, a seven-movement song cycle for the MCO and Winnipeg Sonora Voices inspired by robins, spring, and the idea of home. Written during a deeply personal period in Lau's life following his infant son Robin's life-saving liver transplant, the work explores themes of renewal, resilience, grief, and hope through poetry, birdsong, and vivid musical storytelling.

Performed alongside Winnipeg Sonora Voices, the piece brought young singers and professional musicians together in a moving exploration of memory, belonging, and the emotional spaces we call home.

Feature Artist: Kevin Lau

"The Manitoba Chamber Orchestra has been **one of the most meaningful artistic collaborators of my career**. Through commissions, repeat performances, and long-term creative relationships, the MCO has provided **rare opportunities for Canadian composers to grow, take risks, and build lasting connections** with audiences and musicians alike. Under Anne Manson's leadership, **the orchestra combines artistic excellence with bold, innovative programming** and a deep commitment to Canadian artists. What makes performing with the MCO **especially memorable is the warmth and attentiveness of its audiences** and the uniquely intimate atmosphere that connects performers and listeners. The orchestra approaches new work with extraordinary care, sensitivity, and passion, creating experiences that are vibrant, inclusive, and deeply engaging."

— Kevin Lau

VINYL VAULT

In a digital world, the **MCO Vinyl Vault** offers something increasingly rare – the warmth of analogue sound, shared discovery, and music you can hold in your hands. Each month, music lovers gather to browse thousands of records spanning every genre imaginable, from classical masterworks and jazz standards to classic rock, folk, opera, and unexpected treasures waiting to be rediscovered.

Run by a dedicated team of knowledgeable volunteers, Vinyl Vault has become both a beloved community gathering place and one of the MCO's most important fundraising initiatives. In the spirit of the MCO, it's a space built around conversation, curiosity, and a shared love of music. Every purchase helps support MCO concerts, education programs, and community engagement across Manitoba.

themco.ca/community/vinyl-vault





FROM OUR COMMUNITY

"Your venue is a huge part of the magic. We are so close to the performers. Practically right beside and above, **I feel like I'm part of what's going on** - that electric feeling of live music being shared between performer and witness." - *MCO Audience Member*

"It was a terrific performance - **very together, very spirited**, and had playing of great quality. Thank you Anne, it sounded driven, organic & beautifully paced."
- *Julian Grant, Composer (Vaudeville in Teal)*

"Thank you for all you do to make **volunteering with MCO such an enjoyable experience**. Getting to know the people behind the scenes who help make everything happen has truly added to my appreciation of the concerts and the organization." - *MCO Volunteer*



"*Mozart Meets Motown* was an awesome experience. I have taken students to many school concerts and this felt like a rock show. Students were exposed to classical music, avante-garde experimental performance, multi-cultural music and pop music. Authentic, interesting, and enjoyable. It was a real treat. Please do this again." - *Band Director at École Dugald School*

"Thank you so much for these tickets. The performance was divine. Beautiful adaptation of Vivaldi. The first violinist was so talented, he felt the music and he was so gracious with the other musicians. The venue with all the stained glass windows and columns, arches and huge pipe organ was a feast for the eyes and superb acoustics for the music."
- *Client, Fort Garry Women's Resource Centre*



Photo Credits & Acknowledgements

Cover: Melody Courage and Marion Newman photo by Julio Assis

Page 1: Sean McManus photo by Matt Duboff

Page 2: MCO audience members (top) photo by Matt Duboff; MCO Music Director Anne Manson (left) photo by Julio Assis

Page 3: James Ehnes photos by Matt Duboff

Page 4: MCO Immersion (top) photo by Laura Friesen; Musical Storytelling (left) photo by Corah Enns

Page 5: MCO Immersion photos (left and right) by Laura Friesen; thank you note (middle) photo by Suzu Enns

Page 6: MCOpen audience members (top) photo by Suzu Enns; Concert on the Veranda (left) photo by Matt Duboff

Page 7: MCO on Tour photos by Matt Duboff (left and middle) and Ashleigh Viveiros (right)

Page 8: Kerson Leong with the MCO (top) photo by Matt Duboff; Julian Grant (left) photo by Julio Assis

Page 9: Marion Newman, the MCO, and Melody Courage photos by Julio Assis

Page 10: Winnipeg Sonora Voices and the MCO (left) and Kevin Lau (right) photos by Sean McManus

Page 11: MCO Vinyl Vault (right) photo by Sean McManus and video stills (bottom) by Julio Assis

Page 12: Musical Storytelling (top) photo by Corah Enns; MCO volunteer (bottom) photo by Julio Assis

Page 13: MCO concert photo by Julio Assis

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With special thanks to all our photographers for capturing the moments of connection, creativity, and community that shaped this season.

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