

Vancouver Folk Song Society's Interim Values - January 2022

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How and why these 'VFSS Interim Values' came about is briefly explained at the end

1. **INTERIM VALUE #1 - WARM AND WELCOMING**

How we experience **warm and welcoming**:

- We experience the VFSS as helpful, cooperative, mutually supportive, encouraging, appreciative, and caring.
- We experience it as welcoming diversity - it's inclusive.
- It's felt as collaborative, informal, non-threatening and congenial.
- Members talk about "finding my tribe," "coming home", experiencing a "family feeling".
- It's a place we want to come back to for more.
- It's fun.

How we express **warm and welcoming** :

- Generous, good musicianship. This has been very evident in the practice of a thriving VFSS; one thing that brings people back to the Folk is good musicianship strongly coupled with a generous willingness to 'pass it along' to others, sharing skills and repertoire, backing people up, encouraging newcomers, etc and not just be a good performer.
- A broad and shared repertoire - this is one of the underlying premises of the VFSS generally and the Harmony Jam group specifically.
- Powerful group singing: this is a unique experience in the secular world. It builds connection and makes for being part of a community. Harmonies create a feeling of support with big choruses to "lean into."
- Supporting each other: Mentoring, sharing skills and repertoire, teaching, singing with newcomers.
- The line between "audience" and "performers" is fuzzy, permeable and changeable. Many performances are with rather than to an audience.
- Democratic structure: everyone is encouraged to participate (organizing, volunteering, performing); less polished performers are supported and welcomed. "Everyone participates, sharing the work and the pleasure."
- There is respect for each other.
- Specifically there is consciousness and sensitivity about diversity issues; active encouragement of intercultural, LGBTQ+, religious diversity and understanding through music.
- The VFSS is deliberately intergenerational; children are welcomed.
- The VFSS promotes a variety of events, something for everyone: ongoing Folk Song 1st and 3rd Wednesday evenings, small educational events, house parties and concerts, big celebratory events and annual retreats,

informal musical collaborations, spawning and supporting various folk endeavours over the years like the Princeton Traditional Music Festival.

- The VFSS copes well with the tension between, on the one hand, wanting a warm and welcoming experience for all despite inequalities in musicianship and, on the other, wanting to hear good generous musicianship to bring us back for more. It's a creative tension that many members in the VFSS are aware of and work on.
- The formats of our pre-COVID gatherings have proven helpful in this. For example, the 15 minute set format encourages the development of musicianship through manageable risk taking

How we represent **warm and welcoming** in our promotional material:

- TBD

2. INTERIM VALUE #2 - LEARNING AND SHARING (EDUCATIONAL)

How we experience **learning and sharing (educational)**

- We experience the VFSS as a feeling of being rooted and connected to the folk tradition
- We experience the VFSS as a place that encourages learning about this folk tradition and sharing it with others
- The VFSS feels like it has a rich historical perspective
- There's a realization that we now have something we didn't know we were missing, i.e. a social context for our singing, e.g. the need to work effectively together reefing a sail and sea shanties
- It feels like we are daylighting and surfacing the "underground river" of the folk tradition in our culture

How we express **learning and sharing (educational)**

- Giving our attention to the folk tradition: Educating ourselves and others, with a life-long learning.
- Encouraging the singing of traditional, BC and Canadian songs, and to share traditional folk music from all over the world.
- Group singing, jamming and supporting each other at whatever level, which is how music has traditionally been experienced over the centuries.
- Sharing and educating about traditional, BC and Canadian folk music, and folk-style music through workshops, presentations, and at events in the broader community.
- Offering a venue for performers in this tradition to play, sing and expand on the tradition.
- Working with other educational and cultural organizations to share knowledge and experience of this kind of traditional folk music, including with children.
- Weaving the educational narrative through all we do.

- By 'passing it along' - this gift that we have received and showing gratitude for that.
- Setting up structures like the Harmony Jam with a repertoire coming from that tradition.

How we represent **learning and sharing (educational)** in our promotional material:

- TBD

3. INTERIM VALUE #3 - SINGING FOR SOCIAL PURPOSE

How we experience **singing for social purpose**:

- We experience the VFSS as being embedded in the traditional music of regular, everyday people's struggles, tribulations and victories.
- We experience this value in the same way we might value a Brueghel painting showing the real lives of ordinary folks.
- We experience the feeling of support, inspiration, and camaraderie when we sing the songs of those engaged in making the world a better place for all, with no one left behind.
- We think of the VFSS as giving a musical voice to progressive ideas and as a welcoming place for songs about labour, equality, justice, ecology, peace, democracy etc i.e. songs that highlight the voices of the underdog that are rarely heard in commercial music.
- It feels like the music of the VFSS is not just a joyful way to spend time together but also a way of making a difference in the world.
- In difficult times, such as ours with Climate Change, COVID and huge inequality, there's a feeling of having our spirits lifted through singing together.
- We experience the VFSS as resonating with the struggles in our own lives i.e. singing songs about our everyday experiences in our work and lives.

How we express **singing for social purpose**:

- Singing songs of peace, social justice, ecology, planetary survival, democracy etc. from perspectives that are not usually included in commercial music.
- Being a musical organization that focuses primarily not on 'performing' and 'entertainment' but on creating a higher level of social cohesion through singing together.
- Trying, despite the overwhelming power and influence of commercial music, to create the same relationship of folk music to people's lives as exists in countries like Ireland, Scotland and South Africa where a huge canon of music is widely known and sung together by all political stripes at all kinds of events.
- Tapping into a centuries old culture of traditional music of everyday people, the underground river of folk music - songs about the diggers, the Magdalene Laundries, When We Go Rolling Home, etc.

- Creating the connections between songs about the struggles for social justice in other times and places, and in the here and now
- Offering VFSS resources to musically support local community events, the events of unions, of women's groups, of intercultural groups, for socially progressive causes, protests, picket lines and marches etc
- Typically recruiting new members from these events
- Doing all this singing for social purpose without compromising the other VFSS values of "warm and welcoming" and "learning and sharing."
- Welcoming diverse perspectives.
- Being a musical venue that welcomes the highlighting, shaping and writing of the music for progressive causes and the struggles to achieve them.

How we represent **singing for social purpose** in our promotional material:

- TBD

INTERIM VALUES INFOGRAPHIC - see other attachment

HOW AND WHY THE INTERIM VALUES CAME ABOUT

1. Why Interim Values?

The 2019 Board had planned a day of in-person discussion organized by the Visioning Committee to put together a set of VFSS's values to guide its operations. But the in-person Visioning Day was postponed because of COVID. Hence the 2021 Board was looking for set of Interim Values until the Visioning Day could happen.

2. Motion from the minutes of the Board Meeting April 28, 2021

*A group to be appointed by the Board to develop a few **Interim Values** that can guide the operations and activities of the VFSS; these values to be based on VFSS history, the VFSS Constitution, past mission statements, the 60th Anniversary Brochure 'Joys of Membership' statement, and everything gleaned so far from responses to the Vision Committee's requests from members ... the group to lead a discussion about the selected set of **Interim values** at the Board meeting on May 26 2021; the following to be explicitly asked by the Board to form this group: Christina Ray, Janie Benna, Jim Edmondson and Lynn Applegate. (Helen Shilladay appointed shortly after)*

3. Where did our ideas come from?

To access the richness of our VFSS history, the Interim Values group used the sources mentioned in the motion above. The group also reflected on some of their peak VFSS experiences of the past 30 years, and reviewed two key documents:

- 1) *An article in the 1972 VFSS journal, Come All Ye,, edition Vol 1 #1 by Jeannie Moss called 'Looking Back'.*

2) *An article by Roger Holdstock about the VFSS in the 1986 Vol 20 #1 edition of the Canadian Folk Music Bulletin*

4. Why the distinction between experiencing and expressing?

Values are an experience - how we receive the value. They are also expressed. How we express these values is shown in how we set up our activities.

5. Why write TBD beside the third distinction - how we represent our Interim Values in our promotional material?

The Interim Values Group deliberately avoided commenting on this third distinction for the Interim Values. This work was left for the new Communications Committee.

6. Why a written document and an infographic?

We produced both formats because:

- *people have different comprehension styles*
- *the longer written version allows for greater explanation, nuancing and example*
- *the infographic has quick, eye-catching appeal*

7. Overlap of ideas?

Looking through all the documents attached, the Interim Values Group found the experience and expressions of many values popping up again and again. There was so much overlap. The VFSS Interim Values Group was guided by those findings.