

Summary of Victoria Folk Music Society Survey—Fall 2009

(Thank you for the 101 responses we received!)

1. Attendance by respondents

weekly: 22 biweekly: 21 monthly: 20 seldom: 32

2. Membership status of respondents

current: 54 lapsed: 24 non-member: 19

3. Ages of respondents

≤ 50: 09 50±: 47 60±: 32 70±: 10

4. Location of respondents

Victoria: 88 Up-Island: 08 Gulf Islands: 01 Seasonal: 02

5. Volunteering by respondents

weekly: 08 monthly: 12 few times/year: 39 never: 29 ongoing: 06

6. Outstanding moments at VFMS

- Many themes were expressed, here's a condensed summary:
 - So many thrilling moments it's hard to recall; Too many to choose from;
 - So many of the main acts are outstanding; Generally, many individuals and groups have been truly outstanding;
 - Every open stage;
 - When open stage equals or surpasses the main act;
 - When "unknown" acts appear and "wow" the audience;
 - Performers with audience rapport and inviting participation;
 - Singing along.
- Many respondents specified particular performers/groups. Too many to list them all, but here are some examples: Todd Butler, Utah Phillips, Paul O'Brien and his kids, Rig-A-Jig, Blue Klezmer Moon, Bruce Brackney and Rick Van Krugel, Les Barker, Valdy, Ian Tamblyn....

7. Liked most about VFMS

- Many themes were expressed, here's a condensed summary in the order they were mentioned most:
 - 1) **Most responses by far:** Sense of community, friendliness, good people;
 - 2) **2nd most responses by far:** Open stage (wonderful, variety, surprises);
 - 3) Variety of performers, unexpected talent, great music;
 - 4) Audience attentiveness and participation;
 - 5) Sharing live acoustic music with like-minded people;
 - 6) Format: Open stage, followed by Feature;
 - 7) Intimacy of venue;
 - 8) Dedication of members/volunteers.

8. Concerned about future of VFMS

not at all: 7 a bit: 35 a lot: 46

- VFMS is a treasure and needs to continue;
- Victoria's best kept secret;
- Noticed that attendance is dropping;
- Demographics, audience is getting older.

9. Measures to make ends meet (*responses followed by key themes*)

a) Raise door price/memberships

not at all: 18 small amount: 56 whatever it takes: 17

- Raising door prices might discourage first timers.

b) Lower-priced features—local acts and/or single artists

yes: 29 no: 30 maybe: 34

c) Decrease feature pay

yes: 3 no: 66 maybe: 21

d) Close down every other week

yes: 5 no: 52 maybe: 34

- Too easy to forget which week;
- Consistency is crucial.

e) Close down for summer

yes: 19 no: 15 maybe: 62

- Or meet less frequently (Every other week then maybe);
- Maybe for July and August.

f) Newsletters by email

yes: 65 no: 9 maybe: 20

- Not as only option

g) Fund raising by other means

yes: 40 no: 8

- Raffles (e.g. 50/50, CD, donated instruments, donated music lessons);
- Major features;
- All open stage or Panel Concert nights.

10. Suggestions for increasing attendance (*key themes*)

- Promotion/Advertising (e.g. CBC, SHAW, GO in TC, Monday calendar);
- Posters (e.g. music stores, music friendly cafes, university/colleges);
- Try to attract younger audience;
- Evenings involving the audience apart from listening;
- Gift certificates;
- Bring a friend free 1st time;
- Sandwich board outside on Sunday.

11. Other suggestions to make ends meet (*key themes*)

- Negotiate better rent or move to cheaper venue;
- Have newsletter available for pick up, only mail it by request, otherwise send via email;
- Fund raisers (e.g. garage sales, bake sales, raffles, etc.)

12. Problem hearing music at Norway House (*responses followed by key themes*)

yes: 16 no: 49 sometimes: 32

- Talk in back interferes with performers;
- Occasionally, but not because of volume, more due to poor enunciation which no microphone can help;
- Mostly singers with poor enunciation and/or let their instruments overpower the vocal.

13. Would like music amplified (*responses followed by key themes*)

yes: 11 no: 46 maybe: 14 sometimes: 29

- A thousand times no;
- Keep the integrity, keep it acoustic only;
- Maybe a bit for certain acts, but generally it's not needed;
- Do not want amplified, but sometimes it really is needed especially when there is a large attendance;
- Only if its tasteful and not loud;
- Prefer musicians play without a pick if their voice doesn't dominate the instrument;
- Advise performers routinely to speak up and project.

14. What would you like to see more of? (*key themes*)

- Variety of acts;
- Bands;
- Women performers;
- Multi-cultural folk music;
- Humorous performers;
- Local groups, especially three or more which give variety to the performance;
- Younger acts;
- Audience participation (e.g. singing sets with copies of lyrics for the audience, covers and sing-alongs that most folks know).

15. What would you like to see less of? (*key themes*)

- Unrehearsed performances;
- Chatter/noise from back of room and kitchen during music;
- Singer songwriters.

16. What changes do you think the VFMS should consider making? (*key themes*)

- Perhaps hand out a tip sheet for open-stage performers;
- Create a "season" from September to April/May—summer season is holiday and folk festival season;

- More dances (2 or 3 a year);
- Perhaps a jam from 6:30–7:30 as at Gabriola;
- Try to attract a younger crowd;
- Would like to see more young people—invite Banyan Tree open stage performers to do one night a month at Folk and bring their friends as audience;
- Have a group of “regulars” who make a point of speaking to newcomers and increasing the sense of welcome;
- An increase at the door is long overdue—could go up to \$7.00;
- The MC reminding, good naturedly, people to speak up, “sing up” so we can all hear, and then assert from the back whether or not they've reached the back and get the audience to applaud when we can all hear—the performers need to know this as they are there to be heard (what a gift to consistently tell them what is or is not coming across);
- Open stage performers after an introductory visit need to be screened and perhaps given some feedback before a return visit;
- More local talent as features, have a “bring a friend” night (someone who has never been), encourage talking to all performers throughout the city to come to the Folk to perform on open stage (get members to do this);
- A better “ambience” would enhance the music experience especially the harsh lighting is unpleasant, and perhaps a bit of decor (flowers or ?);
- Concert series with higher admissions, better baked goods (okay to raise prices);
- Acoustic reflector behind performers, raise performers up so they can be better seen/heard from the back of the hall.

17. Participatory music circles (*responses followed by key themes*)

yes: 41 maybe: 16 no: 3

- For about 1/2 hour before evening

18. Interest in participatory events (*responses followed by key themes*)

a) none: 6;

b) folk jam session: 64;

c) song circle: 37;

d) songwriter circle: 22;

e) instrument tune jam: 44;

f) annual retreat: 42.

- Yes please;
- Any of these could be successful and beneficial;
- Could be a jam prior to folk during setup (i.e. 6:30–7:30);
- There is access to most of these at other places;
- Maybe depending on cost;
- Could replace a summer closure.

19. Willing to volunteer as organizer and/or attend planning/business meetings (*responses*)

do: 8

no: 23

maybe: 40

yes: 12

20. Other comments (*a condensed sampling of the themes you expressed*)

- A huge thank you to the folks who keep the Folk running;
- A (facilitated) meeting involving the community in the new year something like we did in 1999;
- This survey is a really good idea and a good start for preparing for the folk club's future. I also think that things ebb and flow and right now they are ebbing but that could quite likely turn around in the future. Stay the course!
- I've stopped coming for a few reasons as I'd been coming for 2 1/2 years almost every Sunday and the performers were repeating for me (it was the 3rd time, and I wasn't interested) plus the people I like to see stopped coming so I've moved on to other things, also sound and lighting are poor, core volunteers could be getting tired—I still check out who's playing each week;
- Good survey, thanks;
- I wasn't aware that one should/could become a "member". This could be better publicized;
- Our personal preference is for high quality (musicality) for the feature; polarizing features, i.e. bluegrass, country, shanties, excludes us from attending and perhaps others, there are dedicated clubs for such specialized music. Paul O'Brien brought out a good crowd because of his high level of musicality plus the appeal of the youngsters performing, so the sheer entertainment value matters to most people;
- The Folk has been a great influence in my life, I wish I could live closer as I want it to continue;
- ...social organizations often develop a fatal inability to radically change at times like this because of the attachment of the leadership to their beliefs, roles, and identities; For example, the folk music you present only represents white folk music. Demographics have changed....
- I hope ways can be found to help VFMS move into a new chapter as The Folk is a very important organization in Victoria. My sporadic attendance in last couple of years has more to do with my own life and not so much to do with whatever is happening at the Folk—thanks for the work that went into this survey;
- More singing;
- I love the Folk! I wish we were in the Victoria Day parades as in days of yore;
- I have enjoyed being a member of the Folk Music Club for several years yet have not attended more than a couple of times this year and did not renew my membership. There were some events I would have liked to attend but had a conflict of interest; I will rarely if ever come to hear a singer songwriter (maybe Eric Bogle or David Francey or other notables—fat chance);
- Thanks to all of you who have contributed so much time to this, really appreciate it;
- The VFMS is a wonderful organization! I've enjoyed many many nights of inspired music and thank the organizers for all that you've done to keep Sunday night a special time;
- Thank you for all you do!
- We can make this work;
- My partner is recovering from a car accident and has a hard time sitting for any period of time, but we do hope to come back to the Folk Club as we enjoyed it very much;
- Great appreciation for the dedicated, long time volunteers who are the glue holding the club together: Thank You!

- I think the folk is special in our city and is a great venue for talent to showcase and build confidence; because it is so long-standing beware of cliqueness—systems need to remain open to survive and this survey is a good way to be open;
- Hold some outdoor events in Spring/Summer/Fall, perhaps in conjunction with parks departments; an occasional speaker might be welcome too, as long as the message is fairly brief and relevant;
- I love the events but really don't see how anyone who is hesitant to move to the front can get enough out of a performance to really enjoy it; if I had to tough it out in the centre or back of the hall I would consider not attending—maybe that's part of why the attendance is dropping;
- I think this questionnaire, although helpful, is a bit repetitive and in some ways too involved. I used to attend regular meetings while I was volunteering and I recall that as the club had a strong cash surplus we significantly increased rates to all featured artists—I thought this was a dangerous path to take and that the proposed increase were much higher than necessary as all of the features I mc'd appeared quite happily at the lower rates;
- Talk to younger people about what would interest them, sell t-shirts, mugs, develop a dessert book, consider closing in July/August and/or December to both reduce rent and give volunteers a break;
- Through folk music we offer a gift to each other—friendship and belonging, socially conscious music teaches us sharing, compassion, inclusion, etc., a very needed thing in a society where individuality and greed seem to rule;
- This is a wonderful resource in the community, I love that I can show up without having to get all dressed up and then listen to world class talent for such a modest price;
- I haven't attended enough recently the last few years to get a sense of what features are allowed or what the criteria is but I hope creativity and musicality combined with acoustic-oriented music are most important (and obviously being people-friendly, too);
- This survey is a great idea! Perhaps we should keep an ongoing comments box on the entry table and encourage folks to use it; the status quo at VFMS regarding Christmas has been very negative—a lot of us actually like Christmas music in season and not just protest and put-downs;
- A smaller cheaper venue without amplification might also work; the volunteer crew structure is somewhat opaque; the atmosphere is pretty intimidating to new members;
- Most folk clubs are having trouble with dwindling audiences these days...the major challenge is to get younger folks involved at the organizational (especially bookings) and performance levels;
- Long live the folk!