

**True Concord Board Retreat
10/2/2021
Dove of Peace Lutheran Church, 8:30 AM**

Introduction:

The morning began with an introduction from Nancy March who reminded board members that this morning was an opportunity to focus on our dreams and noted that we had 100% participation.

Lendre Kearns then engaged the group by asking them to describe a True Concord attribute by completing the following sentence with a multi-syllabic word: True Concord is...

The list of words included rewarding, uplifting, comforting, teamwork, award-winning, family, exciting, collaborative, embracing, worthy, innovative, thought-provoking, welcoming, spiritual, inspiring, ground-breaking, unique and substantive.

Major Vision Statements:

Clyde Kunz facilitated a discussion of True Concord vision statements, posing the questions “Do these stand the test of time?” and “Do we need to revise them or add new ones?”

True Concord is performing regularly in regional, summer music festival, and international performances.

It was generally agreed that touring will play an important role in enhancing the national reputation of True Concord. It was felt that a focus on runouts (including Mexico like Nogales) and short regional touring would be a good place to start. The group felt this vision statement was relevant and does not require revision.

One concern is how much emphasis can be realistically put on moving touring forward in the wake of COVID?

The True Concord Board of Directors and staff have been expanded and diversified well beyond Tucson, Arizona.

Clyde suggested moving Diversity, Equity and Inclusion away from a Vision statement, instead making it a value that underscores all True Concord does. Placing it firmly in the organization’s values was embraced by the board. considerable discussion on this topic followed:

It was noted that diversity is an important focus for many funders, embracing a wide variety of areas of diversification. For example, when doing a presentation to a foundation that was interested in funding True Concord, a member of the panel asked what we were doing to make sure that transgendered students in those high schools are not discriminated against.

By placing diversity as a core value, it was suggested that it would be more embracing of all aspects of the organization – not just board and staff, but artists, repertoire, and audience.

There were concerns about the challenges an organization like ours to have visible results quickly. Welz commented that the general experience amongst American arts organizations is that ultimately DEI must be visible but does not need to happen overnight. He also noted that between 80 and 90% of large organizations

have engaged some type of facilitator/consultant in this arena. Funders nationwide have put arts organizations (and all non-profits) on notice to take the racial reckoning in America seriously but are not necessarily looking for massive change quickly. DEI initiatives can manifest themselves in governance (board and staff), programming including commissions/composers/themes, who is on stage, and in engagement/education activities the latter of which being perhaps the most obvious place to begin for many an institution. Whatever is done should be systematic, methodical, deliberate, and show purpose and results.

This discussion provoked many ideas. One suggestion was to seek greater diversity in our Artistic Advisory Council. It was mentioned that if we want to grow our education and engagement activity, our board should be truly reflective of our community. We could look to school board members, educators, parents, young people, and politicians.

Partnering with other organizations who are reaching desirable population groups was also suggested. For example, doing a matinee performance with ACT ONE who specifically engages with title one schools would be a way to introduce our work to a young, financially and ethnically diverse audience.

It was also noted that run-out touring can play a role in this area as we can bring performances to communities rather than expecting them to come to us.

True Concord is routinely making professional recordings, enjoys frequent radio play nationwide and has received multiple GRAMMY nominations.

There was a lengthy discussion around what recording products are being purchased/utilized and how that could change True Concord's approach. While several people commented that CD's are an antiquated product since many people listen to music digitally, Eric reminded us the Paulus recording got great radio play nationwide on 9-11 and that the Christmas album is often played during the holidays. Recordings can be an entry point to tour booking and to civic pride.

Eric also mentioned that we are now producing videos of all our concerts. While these generate modest revenue they can continue to be sold in future years. It was suggested that a video library also can have value, perhaps most simply for engagement/education. Lendre mentioned that videos could be used in schools if accompanied by an in-person animateur.

It was agreed that a rewrite of this statement would serve to better clarify True Concord's purposes in this area.

True Concord has a permanent home venue (for both performances and administration), recognized as being primarily True Concord's venue.

Andy Watson recalled that we have put the ambition to have our own venue on the back burner, but it needs to be revisited. Tucson needs a music hall.

Andy articulated the pros (branding, acoustics, rehearsals, stability, possible rentals) and the cons (cost, upkeep, and at least partial loss of the gentle nomadic element/brand of True Concord as an organization that goes to the audience...

One thing we learned as a result of the pandemic is that consistent physical space may not be so important. We saw value in performing in outdoor spaces. But we also know that having control over the space we perform in

is important many ways. For example, by having full control over venue availability gives us greater flexibility in securing artists.

Welz noted the brilliant newly rehabbed El Sistema/YOLA building in LA is a possible model, or at least something to learn about. And finally, isn't the University planning a new hall and could True Concord be a regular tenant there, and how about the Leo Rich Theater?

A new vision statement: True Concord's ambition in ~~education~~ Community Engagement.

After discussion, it was agreed that we should be developing a vision statement that not be narrowly defined as education, but positioned more broadly. This led to adopting the term Community Engagement.

A vision for engagement should embrace the following concepts

- Engagement is a goal in itself, perpetual, not merely a tool to sell tickets
- Diverse (wide age range, community reach)
- Collaborative (including with other arts orgs)
- Educational
- Multi-faceted
- Purposeful
- Relational
- Year-round

A wide-ranging discussion about what engagement means for True Concord brought forward a wealth of ideas.

- It should increase knowledge and appreciation of the integration of choral and instrumental music.
- It should be inviting as many people in to the experience as possible.
- It should enhance the experience of True Concord.
- Schools are cutting music out: we can do what complements and does not compete with what is already there.
- Engagement is about activities that increase the excitement of what we do.
- Part of the purpose – intention – is to connect and be relevant.
- I wish everybody could hear our preconcert talks. For example, go out to Saddlebrook and not just perform, but educate about content – why relevant, the composer, etc.
- we need to fight for this art form. This art form is not broad throughout our society. In other parts of the world Choral is hugely broad.
- Everything talks about education and engagement with reference to schools. Late 20's and 30's people... this is the missing group...hard to get two kids and 6 soccer groups to pay attention.
- What if part of our education outreach is to provide a choir master to be a part of summer camps?
- If we want to more fully engage the community, who do we need to recruit to the board and what skills do we need?

Welz commented that when it comes to engaging with youth, we need to do an assessment of what is already out there so we do not duplicate a service already in place.

Another possible vision statement?

It was noted that there isn't a vision statement that specifically deals with our musical/artistic activities, essentially our artistic ambitions.

Eric suggested that an overarching vision, separate from the four current vision statements, should be for True Concord to be recognized as “America’s Chorus”.

Pat Bjorhovde suggested the vision statements could be more visionary. For example, first one could be expanded to say “True Concord is recognized and sought after for performance both in Tucson and in music festivals and international performances.”

Vision Committees?

Clyde reminded us that we have spent time on developing these vision statements in the past but have not had much success in moving most of them forward. Rather than establish new committees, all of the existing committees have ways they will be involved in facilitating the realization of these visions. We should look at these vision statements through an organizational lens.

GOVERNANCE
MARKETING
FUNDRAISING
FINANCE
INFRASTRUCTURE/ADMINISTRATION

These are meant to be long-range visions. - Every one of these has steps that could lead us for 5 years, 10 years and even 20 years down the road.

About Values

Clyde led the board through a discussion of our listed values

Excellence: Providing the highest quality performances of distinctive classical music, whose artistry, beauty and passion will excite and fulfill our musicians, and will move and enrich our audiences.

Exploration: Ensuring a focus on education to increase awareness of, knowledge about, and appreciation for the integration of choral and instrumental music.

Interconnection: Creating relationships, links and experiences to build an expanding community of engaged and committed participants and supporters

Clyde suggested our values should be stated in everything - in all of our materials, on our website, etc.

Eric added that we should communicate that excellence is a value in all aspects of our organization, not merely defining it by our artistic work, and mentioned that the concept of excellence has become trite through overuse.

It was also suggested that perhaps we have two versions of our values, with an internal version that includes the sub-points while the public version is the “headlines”. It was noted that the problem with that is that we are taking out excitement and fulfilling our musicians. Perhaps we need a value specific to the artists.

Discussions concerning values, including diversity, will continue in future board meetings.

Brainstorming ideas to fulfill vision statements.

Lendre noted that in the time we had left, we would be unable to brainstorm and create actionable items for all the vision statements. She chose touring and community engagement as the two for groups to work on.

Considering the context of looking at these through the lens of the existing committees, she invited everyone to sign up for one topic or the other and, if possible, to ensure representation in each of the areas:

Clyde led the Touring Group. It was comprised of Jeannette, Claire, Andy W, Sandy, Susan, Eric, Shawn, Josh and Gina.

Nancy led the Engagement group. It was comprised of Andy R, Pat, Eve, Sarah, Chantel, Welz, Julia and Homero.

Touring

There are several kinds of touring undertaken by arts organizations:

Run outs

National event: festival or prestigious venue engagement

Regional touring such as Chicago/Minneapolis/Madison (summer touring tied around a festival engagement)

National/regional multi-week tours

International engagements (usually festivals)

It was generally agreed that multi-week tours are not a fit to our organization at this time and the best opportunities in the short term would be an in-state run out and a regional tour in the Midwest where we already have good relationships with artists and organization leadership.

Notes from the Touring Opportunity group brainstorm:

(Notes provided by Shawn)

Achievable next steps:

Regional Tour

- A. Expand advisory board to include Festival knowledge and regional knowledge
For example, someone in Moab, Vail etc. for Festivals; someone in Minneapolis/Chicago and Wisconsin for regional tour.
- B. Fundraising/finance
Develop budget
Fundraising in the communities to which we are touring might be able to happen through house parties.
Are there local, regional, national foundations who would support someone touring into a particular region or community?
Can we access the connections of local composers or artists who will be included in the program?
We may benefit from a marketing/pr firm that has national contacts in this area.

Run-outs

- A. Build relationships in rural communities
- B. Identify which programs would be best for that engagement
- C. Work with community foundations
- D. A run-out tour that would make sense would include Nogales and Hermosillo or possibly the nations
- E. Promotion should include local news and Spanish speaking radio
- F. If considering a performance on tribal land, it should have accompanying education programs.

Community Engagement:

A broad range of potential ways in which True Concord could engage had been developed in the plenary, some of which were already in True Concord's roster of activities.

Among them:

- Masterclasses in high schools
- Partnerships with local arts community
- Master chorale – summer camp
- Choir masters to existing summer camps
- Young people's concerts (recorded, marketed and presented online)
- 21st Century "Leonard Bernstein" (recorded? Incorporated with concert videos?)
- Add educational component to existing video concerts
- Collaborative programs with other community organizations
- Pre concert talks and education pieces about the work on video
- Education using composers (about composition, music and poetry)
- Create a youth honor/all city choir inviting candidates from all the county high schools
- Capitalize on the uniqueness of Voices and Orchestra combo
- Issue-focused lectures/workshops/panel discussions exploring the issues in the composer's work
- rap choral cantata
- K-3 singing
- Engage True Concord artists beyond the concert week to facilitate activities
- Engage with local teaching artists to facilitate activities.

It was also suggested that there could be programs developed to serve with Head Start, Preschool, seniors, assisted living facilities and hospital facilities.

Once in the small group, Nancy invited her group to identify their priorities in this area for moving forward. The results were:

Summer day camp idea - 5 votes

Collaboration - 4 votes (with 1 shout-out to literacy programs)

Add Component to video recordings – 2

Leonard Bernstein-type education – 3

Youth All-City Choir (& Orchestra) – 4

Composition / poetry education – 1

Adult education – 2

Re-visioned master class for all age groups – 1

Notes from the Community Engagement group brainstorm:

(Notes provided by Welz)

In addition to an inventory that would then get us to understand the arts education/engagement landscape), a further discussion on age groups/cohorts best reached by vocal music/text, on geography, on who would do the work, on the possible video component, on how this relates to commissioning and who performs and what is performed by True Concord.

Perhaps most important in clarifying/defining terms, is defining Engagement - lots of folks have different ideas about this and this is a constant dialogue within the non-profit arts community. One approach is to understand that 1) engagement is a two-way process between organization and community and 2) that it is an inherent part of the culture of the organization, a value. Engagement should happen as the first step of a community project not as the afterthought of a pre-developed idea. Other important oft-discussed components include engagement being responsible to our communities and the times we are living in; that is is not about meeting people's expectations, it's about exceeding them; and that we must acknowledge "...the Curatorial Me as it is the phenomenon behind the soaring numbers of people who are buying musical instruments, making their own music, uploading 6 billion hours of content each month onto YouTube, and teaching themselves other new creative pursuits."

A tangent conversation focused on True Concord employing local singers, plus whether the instrumentalists felt a part of the True Concord family, and this subsequently led to a dialogue on what True Concord was - is it a Vocal Ensemble that sometimes adds instruments based on repertoire? What is the True Concord brand and how does it fit into the arts/classical offerings in Tucson. Apparently this is not a new topic to the True Concord family, and there was much interesting commentary on this topic, and it is healthy to examine it regularly?

Next Steps

Lendre suggested that we identify a Czar for each of the vision areas who could undertake meeting with the various committees to get next steps and feedback from them. She also suggested that the Czars be a team of two.

A potential job description for the Czar:

- a. Coordinate brainstorming meetings with representatives from each sector
- b. Work with Eric, Welz and Josh for identification and clarity on specific steps and timelines.
- c. Present to board at a meeting for full discussion
- d. Follow up with various committees to confirm their "do list" related to the activity.

Sandy and Lendre volunteered to be the Czars for the Touring vision.

Andy W agreed to be the Czar for the Venue vision.

Nancy offered to revise the statement concerning recordings and video.

Claire offered to draft the vision statement for Community Engagement.

Pat offered to be a co-Czar for Community Engagement. We are still seeking a partner for her.

The meeting came to a close.

*Respectfully submitted,
Lendre Kearns*