



Piret Noorhani's Interview with Reet Lindau-Voksepp, EMW Festival Advisor

Reet, you are from a very musical family. Have you lived your whole life in Canada?

Yes, I was born in Toronto to Estonian parents, who fled to Sweden from Estonia ahead of the final Russian invasion. They eventually made their way to Canada, and raised a family with eight children in Toronto. Music has always been important in our lives, largely thanks to our parents who instilled in us a love of singing and respect for Estonian music traditions at a very early age. A typical Saturday night found our family gathered around our TV watching The Lawrence Welk Show, singing and dancing along with the performers.

When you think about your life in Canada, what role has music played in the lives of Estonians here? What role has it played in your life? What have been some of the highlights?

When I think back over the years, music has played a central role and there are so many examples, I could write a book. In fact, one book was written recently „60 Years of Estonian Choral Music in Multicultural Toronto” which chronicles the incredible number of Estonian choirs and concerts we’ve had over the years. Almost everyone I knew sang in a choir and some of those choirs still exist today, performing at Estonian events like Independence Day, church concerts celebrating Christmas or Mother’s Day, to name a few.

Then there were yearly events which featured bands, vocalists and dancers – Toronto’s Caravan where the Estonian Pavillion was very popular; Summer Days at Cedar Valley and Devil’s Elbow; Estonian Days and ESTO festivals; Estonian School musicals... I think its safe to say that there was something every weekend. At smaller social gatherings it was the norm for my parents’ generation to sing songs from their homeland– someone always had an accordion or guitar along at parties and family events or around the campfire – they made their own entertainment.

Music has always been an integral part of my life from the day I started singing, at the age of two according to my godmother. As the eldest children, Ellen, Rosie and I, sang as a trio and were invited to perform everywhere – highlights include Baltic Night in Ottawa, ESTO 76 in Baltimore and ESTO 80 in Stockholm where we debuted the first „Salakõrts”. When the younger members of our family grew up, we also performed as

the Lindau Ansambel – highlights include Kuressaare Castle concert during our 1994 concert tour in Estonia, being chosen as finalists in CBC's National Choral competition and receiving an invitation from Veljo Tormis to perform at Viljandi Folk festival.

You are one of the first with whom I discussed the idea of Estonian Music Week and thanks to your support the ball started rolling. We have found so many great volunteers both Estonian and non-Estonian through your connections, for which we are very grateful. What are your hopes for the upcoming event?

Right away I thought your idea was a great one, a dream worth pursuing, given the large number of talented Estonian musicians in the world. I am still excited by the potential and luckily found others who felt the same way - who were inspired by this initiative, who were happy to donate their time and expertise to the project. I am very proud of my Estonian roots and my hope is that this introduction to the Canadian public will surprise and delight, thereby laying the groundwork for future Estonian Music Weeks and the promotion of Estonian artists in Canada.

Do you already have favourites among the performers on the EMW program? If you do, then why have they caught your eye specifically?

I don't think I have a favourite yet – I love all the musical genres which are represented - it's great that we have such a variety. If I had to pick though, then it would be one of the ensembles. Because of my own experience, I appreciate what is involved in learning and harmonizing with other singers and the preparation that is necessary for a performance.

This year, we are celebrating the 100th birthday of the Republic of Estonia. What do you wish for Estonia in honor of this occasion? What do you wish for Canadian-Estonians?

I wish for Estonia - this small, proud, exemplary European nation - to continue to have and enjoy freedom, and for its people to protect their environment, language and culture.

I wish for Canadian-Estonians to pull together and maintain what our parents struggled to build for us when they lost their homeland.