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January 11, 2023

To: Owen Sound City Council
City of Owen Sound
808 2nd Avenue East
Owen Sound, ON N4K 2H4

Re: Request for Promotional and Financial Support for the SweetWater Music Festival

The SweetWater Music Festival is seeking financial support from the City of Owen Sound and expanded support in terms of City marketing and promotion. Support for the festival would strengthen the City's commitment to: 1) foster its reputation as one of Canada's best places for arts and cultural activities; 2) develop the River District as a vibrant downtown centre for local activity and tourism; and 3) attract business development and population growth.

What is the SweetWater Music Festival?

SweetWater is an arts organization that showcases top musical artists from across Canada and around the world. We're approaching our 20th anniversary in September 2023 when we'll be celebrating our growth from a modest summer concert series to a vibrant arts organization that presents exceptional classical, jazz, roots, and world music through a spring concert, a four-day festival in September, year-round virtual performances, and enrichment opportunities for area students.

Acclaimed violinist Mark Fewer served as artistic director from 2003 to 2019. Since 2020, the festival has been led by Edwin Huizinga, a renowned violinist and composer. Their respect within the musical world and their extensive network of performing artists have ensured SweetWater's ongoing ability to bring exceptional music to the community.

SweetWater attracts audience members locally and from across the region and the Greater Toronto Area. We are working to expand our audience and make our performances better known and accessible. To increase accessibility and give everyone the opportunity to experience the exceptional performances we bring to the community, SweetWater recently has offered free outdoor community concerts throughout the weekend festival. Last year, we launched the festival with a free concert at Georgian Shores United Church and introduced a "pay what you can" ticket pricing for the remaining indoor concerts.

SweetWater provides more than music performances. It promotes aspiring young artists through its Next Wave program and supports music education through its contact with the schools. The future viability of the arts depends to a considerable degree on fostering an understanding and passion for the arts among young people. SweetWater's education outreach initiatives are aimed at supporting school music programs that have lost considerable funding over recent years. The festival also stages a String Instrument Showcase annually to highlight local luthiers as well as luthiers from across Canada.

How Does the SweetWater Music Festival align with the City of Owen Sound's Strategic Plan?

Society and Culture

One of Four Pillars of the City's Strategic Plan is "Society and Culture." The Plan's goal statement for this pillar reads: "We will continue the conservation and promotion of our heritage and *will uphold Owen Sound's reputation as one of Canada's best places for arts and cultural activities.*" Engagement in the arts enhances individuals' quality of life and their overall mental health.

SweetWater contributes significantly to the City's growing reputation as an important arts community, one that attracts arts patrons to visit the City and that draws artists of various disciplines to live in the community. By programming artists from across Canada and beyond our borders, the SweetWater Music Festival rounds out the offerings of the local artists supported and promoted by the City.

SweetWater's 2020-23 Strategic Plan aligns with that of the City's through our commitment to provide service to community. Our Plan identifies sharing our brand through collaboration and diverse partnerships, including with municipalities, as a priority. By supporting SweetWater, the City would be collaborating with a local organization committed to improving the quality of life and the mental health of the community.

Economy

Arts festivals are a proven means of generating both tourism interest and attracting new residents. SweetWater contributes to the local economy in several ways:

- a) Tourism dollars and support for downtown businesses

Audience members patronize local restaurants and businesses. Owen Sound venues include: Georgian Shores United Church, The Roxy Theatre, Harmony Centre, Heartwood Hall, the Farmers Market, and outdoor spaces for 'pop up' concerts – all part of or within walking distance of the City's recently named River District.

The festival musicians are housed downtown or in local hotels. They also patronize local restaurants and cafés.

- b) Local employment

In addition to renting local venues, the festival hires local photographers and sound and recording professionals. The festival caters meals for the musicians from local caterers and provides opportunities for local vendors to sell food and beverages at its outdoor venues.

What is SweetWater seeking from the City of Owen Sound?

Marketing and Promotion

SweetWater is anxious to build on its success and come better known across the province and beyond. The Festival is seeking more active marketing and promotional support from the City, through

downtown banners, its print material, online platforms, and social media. The City's 2007 Cultural Master Plan, updated in 2012, promotes a broad range of actions the City should take to support local arts organizations, including festivals. Many of the recommended actions relate to marketing support and could be more fully adopted by the City to reflect the spirit and intentions behind the Plan.

Funding for 20th Anniversary Project

SweetWater is a local success story and represents a significant accomplishment for the size of the community. It's a story of the "little festival that could" and one that features members of the community who were and are fiercely passionate about making world class music available locally. We are planning to produce a documentary film that profiles this story as part of the festival's 20th anniversary.

The film will:

- document the origins of the SweetWater Music Festival and celebrate this unique local arts organization;
- profile the local community members and the first artistic director who initiated the festival and pursued the dream of creating a longstanding arts organization committed to classical, jazz, roots, and contemporary music;
- convey SweetWater's vision of continuing to bring exceptional and exciting live music to the area;
- promote the beauty of Grey County and its connection to the arts;
- engage local sound and recording professionals;
- be used as a marketing tool to promote the festival and the community in the future.

We are seeking \$3,500 in funding from the city to support the film project and the running of the festival as we work to present a special anniversary event. For the last few years, SweetWater has received modest funding from Meaford, but not the City of Owen Sound, even though most performances are held in Owen Sound. Other music festivals in Ontario, such as Festival of the Sound in Parry Sound, Collingwood Music Festival, and Stratford Summer Music Festival, receive funding from their local municipalities. Providing support for the documentary project will contribute to the success of the project, give the City the opportunity to demonstrate its support for an important local arts organization, and enhance the City's profile as a cultural hub.

Sincerely,



Vivian McCaffrey
Chair of the Board,
SweetWater Music Festival