

## A Brief History of NACHO

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(less than a 5 minute read)

Having received a few queries about how NACHO came to be, it seems like a good time to write down A Brief History of NACHO to save repetition and illustrate the path which lead to where we are now.

I got started in music for the first time after retiring in 2011. I had zero music background or experience playing any instrument. Music was something that seemed interesting, now that I had some time, so I chose drums/percussion and signed up for some lessons. After about a year on my own, I joined a band on the North Shore. While a nice bunch of people, the focus was on brass and winds, however the evening winter commute was difficult. Next, I tried a local seniors orchestra—yes, a full orchestra with all the musical food groups! Again, the group was very nice however the public performances were really not for me, and the music program was too challenging. It was not for beginners. So in 2016, I started looking around for an adult beginners orchestra that did not perform for audiences.

I discovered that although there are many community orchestra groups in the Metro Vancouver region, there were **none** which focus on adult beginners and had no public performance aspect.

### How to address that problem?

The New Horizons (NHIMA) organization appeared to provide an answer and their Group Planning Manual offered a starting point for organizing an adult beginners non-performance orchestra. I then created the name: **Newbie Adult Chamber Orchestra (NACHO)**, the first NACHO website (nachobeginners.com), and signed up as a Planning Group Member with NHIMA in March, 2017.

Joining the New Horizons Planning Group program was a watershed move because the organization assigns a Mentor to work with you during the development of your program. In April, 2017 the Mentor assigned to me was Dr. Roy Ernst, the Founder of the New Horizons International Music Association. **Over the next year and a half**, Roy was an extremely valuable resource. We corresponded regularly as I bounced ideas off him and he helped me avoid problems. To this day, Roy Ernst continues to be a great help and I continue to consult with him about challenging issues if/when they arise.

## The Heavy Lifting Period

Much work went into the two year interval prior to NACHO holding its first practice session in September, 2018. In that two year period, I spoke with two faculty members involved in music education at UBC and members of the BC Registered Music Teachers Association.

I interviewed five potential Music Directors--some retired high school music teachers, some professional musicians--and found that our current Music Director, Dr. Janelle Ragno was the only one who actually understood the goals of NACHO and had ideas on how we could accomplish them.

For more than a year leading up to our first practice session, Janelle and I had many phone, email and in person conversations about the program and ways to deliver NACHO for a range of musical backgrounds. The music programs you see in NACHO today are totally due to the hard work of Janelle and her partner Dr. Andrew Luchkow bringing musical life to the values that are key to how NACHO works.

In March, 2018 Janelle and I organized a NACHO Open House at the Dunbar Community Centre as an introduction for potential Fall program participants. I enlisted the support of local music stores to set up information tables about their musical instrument rental programs and instructional offerings. The Open House was very well attended, which indicated we were on the right track.

In April, 2018 I was interviewed by the CBC Radio host Sheryl MacKay on the North by Northwest program. We discussed the goals of NACHO as the excerpt below illustrates (recorded on April 12, 2018 at CBC Vancouver):

“NACHO is focused on being a social orchestra, not a performance orchestra. There are many people who would like to pick up a musical instrument but are intimidated by the thought of doing public performances, and I’m one of them. However, when taking lessons on an instrument, you put in private time with your practice, doing exercises and working with your one-on-one instructor to build your skills. While this can be rewarding as you see yourself improve, it’s a lonely process. For seniors, we do not need more lonely activities. However, there is this conflicting situation—you don’t want to perform for people, but you miss out on the fun and shared experience of practicing with a like-minded group.

Addressing this quandary is the goal of NACHO...providing that shared, non-threatening environment where you can get together with others to learn about playing as a group, following the lead of your conductor, but with no audience performance pressures. And, oh yes, participate in the all-important social coffee break at the mid-point of the meeting!”

The key features are providing a safe, no-stress, social and welcoming environment where participants, with a range of skills, can enjoy immersion in

an orchestra experience without the pressure of an audience. To bootstrap and support the program start-up in 2018 I received a City of Vancouver Community Arts Grant of \$1,000 through the Dunbar Community Centre. These initial funds helped pay for Janelle's time and other initial costs and set us up for the September 2018 program start.

## **The Implementation Phase**

While we had a great start up at Dunbar, the practice space and arrangements weren't ideal. After an extensive search, I found St. James Community Square, which offered a much larger suitable space and some equipment storage. In order to move to St. James, I would have to establish NACHO as a registered non-profit society. In BC, a non-profit society must have at least 3 directors, so I recruited two of NACHO's participants, Mary Lou Riederer and Beverley Maxwell, and completed the society registration process. The NACHO Music Society (NMS) came into existence on November 11, 2018.

Since then, even with Covid intervening, we have maintained an active and sustainable level of membership while keeping the non-performance aspect of NACHO as a core value. NACHO is unique in Metro Vancouver as the only non-performance adult beginners orchestra, a feature that is built into our [Constitution](#).

Janelle continues to create wonderful music programs which we can all enjoy, from true beginners to seasoned musicians, and I am so grateful to her for embracing this project.