



# UNA VOCE

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The Organization of Canadian Symphony Musicians (OCSM) is the voice of Canadian professional orchestral musicians. OCSM's mission is to uphold and improve the working conditions of professional Canadian orchestral musicians, to promote communication among its members, and to advocate on behalf of the Canadian cultural community.

## The Gold Standard of Communication

Barbara Hankins  
Editor



Twitter? Facebook? Text message? Email? Phone call? Pen on paper? Courier pigeon? Nope. Face to face is the gold standard of communication, explained journalist Paul Wells during the session he gave to OCSM conference attendees on advocacy tips. However well technologies may aid us in keeping in touch, scheduling appointments, or wishing

“Happy Birthday,” they will never replace the importance and effectiveness of being there in person.

Whether it's for your orchestra's Players' Association meetings, your neighbourhood potlucks, or your city's town hall forums, there's nothing that beats showing up.

This is why your delegates return home from OCSM conferences fully charged and ready to work for the betterment of Canadian symphony musicians and the arts in general. They have dined, walked, drunk endless cups of coffee, gabbed in the hospitality suite, and spent lengthy days with colleagues and union staff in face to face conversations. Take advantage of what they took away from the five days in Gatineau – they are a bunch of talkers, I can assure you!

In this issue, OCSM President Bob Fraser recaps the conference highlights. The conference resolutions are included, as well as resolutions from the International Orchestra Conference held in Montreal in May. Michelle Zapf-Belanger begins our series of articles that will introduce new musical directors in Canadian orchestras.

Leslie Dawn Knowles tells of the exciting experiences of the TSO tour to Europe and Israel last spring. We also include a book review about technology by Canadian author Michael Harris that was recommended at the Windsor conference. All the best for your new seasons!

## Health, Advocacy, Diversity 2017 OCSM Conference

by Robert Fraser  
OCSM President

Quite possibly by the time you read this, you will have already heard from your orchestra's delegate about what happened at this summer's conference in Gatineau, Quebec. There is a conference report in the October issue of the *International Musician*, and we have excellent on-line summaries already prepared as I write this. So consider this column to be both a conference report plus some perspectives from the president.



As orchestral musicians, we know the value of the smallest contribution to the whole. Whether you play many notes or few, in a large section of the orchestra or in a solo chair, you know that what you do matters greatly. This is true of the value of our orchestra to the community around us as

well – our small contribution to the whole community is very important, probably in ways we haven't measured. Our collective bargaining raises the bar for others who do similar work but don't have the protection of a collective agreement; our outreach programs enhance music programs in schools; the business community around our halls thrives because of us. And because we're part of the community, what happens in our community matters to us very much. As I pointed out to the delegates in

my address to them at the conference: “If you are a new delegate, you are about to become an activist; if you are a returning delegate, you are about to become a better activist.”

It seemed fitting then, that we should have our conference in the region where so many important decisions are made: our nation’s capital. We had two excellent presentations that took advantage of our location. One was from **Lise Laneville**, from the Arts Policy Branch of the Department of Canadian Heritage. Most of us know the contribution that the Canada Council for the Arts makes to our orchestra (it’s in the OCSM wage chart), but few of us know that there are other government programs that are relevant to orchestras. For example, there is an endowment matching program, where the Department will match contributions to your arts organization’s endowment fund – I was surprised at how few orchestras have taken advantage of it. There are also programs that contribute to arts infrastructure; and even a program that will assist an organization in trouble with a loan, provided a business plan/payback scenario is in place.

I met journalist **Paul Wells** at an Orchestras Canada

conference in Toronto in 2014, and he graciously agreed to address us this summer, as Ottawa is his home base. He is probably best known to Canadians as a political columnist, but he began his career as a music journalist, and he has remarkable knowledge of the orchestral community (he knew all the orchestras who had recently hired new music directors, and he was on the search committee for the National Arts Centre Orchestra when they hired Alexander Shelley). He gave his perspective as a political writer on “How to get government’s attention” – what are the buzzwords of the day? For the record, the current government likes anything with the words “digital,” “reconciliation,” and “diversity.” This was fortuitous, as all three topics were on our agenda at this conference.

Diversity was the subject of a special presentation given by Orchestras Canada’s Executive Director **Katherine Carleton**, and musician-consultant **Parmela Attariwala**. Orchestras Canada (our national service organization for orchestras) has adopted the *IDEA Manifesto* (IDEA stands for Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility). The complete manifesto is on their website, but this excerpt from the declaration says succinctly: “Because we care about the vitality of our art form, we seek



Attendees at this year’s OCSM conference in Gatineau, Quebec: Row 1: Matt Heller (OCSM 1st V-P), Elspeth Thompson (Hamilton Philharmonic), Bernard Leblanc (SSD Director for Canada), Melissa Goodchild (Saskatoon Symphony), David Thies-Thompson (National Arts Centre Orchestra). Row 2: Xiao Grabke (National Ballet of Canada Orchestra), Liz Johnston (OCSM Treasurer), Rochelle Skolnick AFM-SSD Director), Brain Baty (OCSM 2nd V-P, Niagara Symphony), Celeste McClellan (guest, Local 625, with Tuko the schnauzer), Barbara Zmich (ROPA Resident Emerita), Michelle Zapf-Belanger (Thunder Bay Symphony), Francine Schutzman (OCSM President Emerita), Barbara Hankins (OCSM Publications Editor). Row 3: Edith Stacey (Edmonton Symphony), Shawn Spicer (London Symphonia), Faith Scholfield (OCSM Secretary), Mark Rogers (Canadian Opera Company), Christopher Palmer (Symphony Nova Scotia), Bob Fraser (OCSM President), Greg Sheldon (Windsor Symphony), Paul Beauchesne (Victoria Symphony), Mike Macauley (Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony), Mike Hope (Calgary Philharmonic), Alan Willaert (AFM V-P from Canada), George Brown (ICSOM President), John Michael Smith (ROPA President), Vince Vohradsky (Vancouver Symphony), Peter Sametz (Regina Symphony), Steve Mosher (SSD Assistant).

to better understand, reflect, engage, and celebrate our diverse community.” Having just attended both the FIM International Orchestra Conference in May, where 30 different nations of the world were represented, and our sister conferences in the USA, ICSOM and ROPA, where diversity was a hot topic, the *IDEA Manifesto* stood out as a great opening gesture in what will be a long process of community engagement. One of the resolutions we passed at the OCSM Conference was in support of the *IDEA Manifesto* (printed elsewhere in this issue).

I began this column with a statement about how important each musician’s contribution is to an orchestra. That also puts enormous pressure on us as people; we have to work hard to get it right. Sometimes things break: either we break internally, or our bonds with colleagues become broken. So we devoted some more time to musicians’ health – this time our own mental health and interpersonal dynamics. We had two excellent presentations about performance anxiety. The first was a screening of an excellent film called *Composed: A Documentary*, produced by **John Beder** and edited by **Katie DeRoche**, both of whom were in attendance to discuss the film and answer questions. The film was a series of interviews with musicians, teachers, and experts on the subject of performance anxiety. As you could guess, a lot of it centred on our audition process. Christopher Palmer, the delegate from Symphony Nova Scotia, gave the film its best review with one statement: “I wish they had this film when I was a student in the 70s!” On the day following the film, we had a presentation on the “fight or flight” response by bassoonist and music psychology expert **Lisa Chisholm**. She described how “fight or flight” affects our anatomy in various ways, and suggested methods to counteract it. Her company is called Master Performing (<http://masterperforming.ca>) – check it out). Lisa has a number of presentations that would benefit orchestras and students alike.

Our legal counsel **Michael Wright** gave a presentation on the legal issues of workplace harassment and bullying: the Local’s (and orchestra committee’s) responsibilities, and management’s obligation to provide a harassment-free workplace. In a profession where people are very closely monitored and directed, this issue can become complex. As much as we need to protect our bodies from injury, we also need to protect our mental health, and *Una Voce* editor **Barbara Hankins** brought the *National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace* to our attention (with a little help from actress-comedienne Mary Walsh). “The Standard,” as it is referred to throughout the document, was launched in January 2013 by the Mental Health Commission of Canada and is described on their website as: “the first of its kind in the world,

. . . a set of voluntary guidelines, tools, and resources intended to guide organizations in promoting mental health and preventing psychological harm at work.” OCSM adopted a resolution urging orchestra managements to adopt and implement “The Standard.”

In addition to all this, as at all OCSM Conferences, we have an opportunity to hear from delegates what is happening in your orchestras – the good and the bad. We also hear from the leadership of our union, its staff members who deal with symphony orchestra issues on both sides of the Canada-US border, and our pension fund. OCSM is not only “the voice of Canadian professional orchestral musicians,” we are also curators of our history and the repository of information. That information is critical to the future of our profession, and its dissemination is vital. So much of this depends on communication, and we continue to work toward improving the way in which all this information gets to you. I know that some of you aren’t reading this article at all; others read every word. Some show great interest in OCSM, others fear to show that interest because they’re worried about being tagged for committee work. It is this latter group that I wish to address – you don’t have to be a committee member, a negotiations whiz, or work long hours outside of reed-making and long tones to be an activist. To be an activist, first and foremost you need to get informed. If you know people who pass over this newsletter instead of reading it, challenge them to read it! Follow our social media feed and our news digests that Matt Heller (our 1st Vice-President) puts together. Share this information with your friends. Talk to audience members about these issues. Those of you who teach, share these things with your students. Show up at town hall meetings in your community; make sure you and all your colleagues vote!

As always, I wish successful and exciting seasons for all of you. I am humbled to be asked to serve another two-year term as your President, and I look forward to serving alongside you as you make the world a better place through music.

## OCSM Conference Resolutions

### Resolution no. 1

**Subject:** Diversity and the IDEA Declaration

*Whereas* OCSM-OMOSC recognizes that the nation has been enriched by its diverse cultures and traditions;

*Whereas* within our own lifetimes, Canadian society has grown increasingly pluralistic, multicultural, and inclusive; and

Whereas symphonic music, while historically rooted in Western Europe, has increasingly incorporated cultural traditions from around the world; and

Whereas we recognize that further progress on diversity issues would benefit orchestras and allow them to better serve their communities; and

Whereas Orchestras Canada has recently developed a Declaration on Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) which seeks to advance those principles within Canadian orchestras; therefore, be it

Resolved that the Delegates to the 2017 OCSM Conference officially adopt Orchestras Canada's IDEA Declaration; and be it further

Resolved that OCSM Delegates advocate for the broadest possible adoption of the IDEA Declaration, and the principles and practices it endorses.

**Carried unanimously**, August 18, 2017.

## Resolution no. 2

**Subject:** Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace

Whereas one in five Canadians faces mental health issues;<sup>1</sup> and

Whereas musicians may be up to three times more likely to suffer from anxiety and depression compared to the general public;<sup>2</sup>

Whereas mental health issues seem to be accepted longer in artists than in "normal" society; and

Whereas a psychologically healthy and safe workplace is one that promotes workers' psychological well-being and actively works to prevent harm to worker psychological health, including in negligent, reckless, or intentional ways; and

Whereas providing a psychologically safe workplace is increasingly becoming a legal imperative; and,

Whereas *The National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace* specifies requirements for a documented and systematic approach to develop and sustain a psychologically healthy and safe workplace, and provides complementary information, therefore be it;

Resolved that Delegates to the 2017 OCSM-OMOSC Conference encourage orchestra managers to become familiar with *The National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace* and work towards its implementation.

**Carried unanimously**, August 18, 2017.

## Resolution no. 3

**Subject:** OCSM Status of the London Symphonia

Whereas the musicians of the former Orchestra London Canada and former #We Play On orchestra have re-branded as the London Symphonia; and

Whereas OCSM-OMOSC bylaws, revised 2016, allow orchestras to be grandfathered in to OCSM-OMOSC; therefore, be it

Resolved that the London Symphonia be included as a Class A Member of OCSM-OMOSC as a successor organization to Orchestra London Canada with all duties and responsibilities as defined by the OCSM-OMOSC bylaws.

**Carried unanimously**, August 18, 2017.

## Cloud

National Arts Centre



OCSM conference attendees turn on the lights.

*Cloud* is a large-scale interactive work sculpted from 6,000 everyday domestic light bulbs by Canadian artists Caitlind r.c. Brown and Wayne Garrett. The piece incorporates hundreds of pull-strings to create a simple, bright, and playfully collaborative work.

Based in Calgary, Brown and Garrett combine divergent aesthetics and industrial methods to create transformative public sculptures and installations. They use mass-produced objects to reference the idea of a city as an immeasurable quantity of materials, people, and situations. Their previous works have appeared internationally in Minneapolis, Moscow, Istanbul, and Seoul, and at over fifteen Festivals of Light throughout Europe and Asia. For more information, see [incandescentcloud.com/2014/09/20/two-years-of-cloud/](http://incandescentcloud.com/2014/09/20/two-years-of-cloud/)

OCSM conference attendees were treated to a tour of the National Arts Centre, which has been recently reno-

<sup>1</sup> Source: Mental Health Commission of Canada.

<sup>2</sup> Source: *Help Musicians*, University of Westminster, UK, Survey (2016) of 2,211 musicians.

vated. We enjoyed being part of the this art installation. As the artists explain: “People are necessary to complete the piece. By standing beneath the raincloud, pulling its chains, viewers cause lightning to flicker on the surface of the sculpture, unwittingly staging an electrical storm for the audience beyond the periphery of the rainfall. Without people, *Cloud* is only half complete.”

## Conclusions of the 4th International Orchestra Conference

The International Federation of Musicians held its fourth International Orchestra Conference in Montreal in May 2017. The following is a statement produced at the end of the conference.

1. Public Value of Orchestras
  - a. It should be the right of every citizen to have access to live orchestral music. To help achieve that goal, every child should receive exposure to and education about music.
  - b. It is essential to engage in vigorous advocacy for orchestra institutions within political frameworks at every level, from local to national.
  - c. The exceptional skills and creativity of the musicians constitute the core value of the orchestra.
  - d. Symphony and opera orchestras as well as radio ensembles, which are a part of our common cultural history, can play a prime role in promoting social cohesion in a fast-changing society.
2. Business Models of Orchestras. What’s Working?
  - a. There is no “one size fits all” business model. Various governance and funding models thrive in different social, historical and political environments.
  - b. Orchestras should not be expected to be profit-making enterprises. However, they have a positive economic impact that extends far beyond the investment.
  - c. Good governance is essential to the orchestra fulfilling its mission. All important decisions should be made with the musicians’ involvement.
3. Orchestras Integrating Digital Tools and New Approaches
  - a. Some orchestras integrate digital tools successfully and use them to increase the size of their audience (for instance, the Berlin Philharmonic digital concert hall); however, the impact of similar digital policies may vary a lot from one orchestra to another.
  - b. Digital tools cannot replace the unique experience of live performance, which remains the *raison d’être* of orchestras.
4. Responsibility and Accountability: Role of Musicians on Orchestra Boards
  - a. The voice of musicians is irreplaceable in shaping the decisions of the orchestra board or other governing bodies. It should not overlap the crucial role of the trade union as a legitimate negotiating party.
  - b. Potential conflicts of interest should not be used as a pretext to exclude the musicians from the decision-making process.
5. Bullying and Harassment. Respective Role of the Trade Union and the Management
  - a. The close collaboration and emotional engagement required of orchestra musicians may also leave them vulnerable to those who might exploit any real or perceived imbalance of power to bully or harass.
  - b. It is the responsibility of the orchestra management to ensure that the orchestra workplace is free from bullying and harassment but managers should involve unions in the process of developing policies and procedures to prevent and remedy such exploitative conduct. Unions should also be prepared with the skills necessary to represent musicians when conflicts arise.
  - c. The establishment of policy alone is not sufficient; rather, policy must be put into practice through effective training in interpersonal communication for all organisational constituents and through early intervention when conflicts arise.
  - d. Trade union representatives are particularly vulnerable potential targets of bullying or harassment and should therefore be adequately and efficiently protected against such abuses.
6. Practical Aspect of Outreach and Education
  - a. For many years, reaching out to the variety of audiences and educational activities have formed

part of the orchestras' daily work. Orchestras may also face new expectations of a social nature. Although their motivations may be legitimate, they should not undermine the achievement of the core mission of the orchestra.

- b. Any activity that does not directly involve the act of performing should only be carried out on a voluntary and paid basis.
7. Recorded Broadcast and Rights of Musicians
    - a. Recordings and broadcasts have an economic value that must be shared with performers fairly.
    - b. No recording or broadcast should be used without the musicians endorsing the quality of the recording.
    - c. Although in some cases, promotion may carry a value for the orchestra or its musicians, this should not be used as a pretext to deny the right of musicians to a fair remuneration. The possible benefit of promotion for the orchestra as an entity may be irrelevant to individual musicians, who are not necessarily permanent members of the orchestra.
    - d. The gradual substitution of traditional broadcast with new forms of online music distribution will not generate fair revenues to performers unless the exclusive right of making available is complemented with a statutory, unwaivable right to equitable remuneration.
  8. The Role of Trade Unions in Safeguarding the Future of the Orchestra
    - a. Trade unions fight to improve the musicians' working conditions and salaries, but also to preserve the quality of orchestras. This requires innovative approaches, a constructive relationship with the management and a higher involvement of trade union members.
    - b. Circumstances can place the very existence of the orchestra at risk. In a time of crisis, musicians are generally the first victims. If cuts happen, equality of sacrifice between the musicians and the rest of the institution should be paramount.
    - c. Crises in orchestras are never caused by quality issues. Trade unions have a crucial role to play in influencing and educating politicians, decision makers and the general public of the value and the importance of securing a positive future for our orchestras.

### General Remarks

1. Although the situation of some orchestras may have improved since the last IOC, sadly, it has significantly deteriorated in many places, hence damaging the musicians' lives, sometimes with violence and brutality.

2. International solidarity campaigns are an essential tool to address these challenges.
3. Permanent employment is key to building long term and high quality artistic projects, as well as offering access to the broadest possible variety of repertoires.

### Resolution

The representatives of orchestra musicians assembled in Montreal for the 4th IOC reaffirm the importance of democratic values and human rights to resist the critical threat that populisms pose on peace, access to culture and freedom of expression in several countries.

## Europe and Israel – an Unforgettable Tour

by Leslie Dawn Knowles

Toronto Symphony Orchestra

May 2017 was a very special month for us at the TSO as we embarked on a momentous seven-city, four-nation tour, becoming the first North American orchestra in twenty years to visit Israel.



Prague.

The TSO has long been a touring orchestra, with regular trips across Canada as part of our legacy, along with excursions as far abroad as Australia and China. But as Konstantin Moritsch of Germany's Schmid agency, organizer of this year's tour, explained, rising costs have significantly reduced the number of European tours in recent years by all but a few North American orchestras. Indeed fundraising is a challenge and we are very fortunate to have the inspiring and dedicated donors to help us bring our music abroad. Our lead patrons for this tour were The Renette and David Berman Family Foundation and Rags and Indra Davloor. They along with many other supporters accompanied us on this tour and it was a wonderful opportunity for us all to get to know one another better while sharing some unforgettable experiences.

Also along on this tour were filmmakers Vikram Dasgupta and Francesca Cimolai who are producing a documentary on the Israel portion of the tour. Several of us were being closely followed, both on and off stage, as we explored and enjoyed ourselves. I was fortunate to be invited to a backyard party jam session in Tel Aviv for a fun evening of Gypsy Jazz, which was filmed.

We began the tour with a small group of us being taken to the residence for children either waiting for or recovering from lifesaving cardiac procedures and surgeries provided by the Save a Child's Heart Foundation. It was wonderful to be able to play for and interact with these young patients who are brought from areas where there is no appropriate care for them. Here they are treated free of charge, and this wonderful organization also trains medical professionals with a view to providing much-needed care and expertise in those areas lacking such services. A very impressive and inspiring beginning to be sure! The next few days saw us settling in Jerusalem, where we were treated to the first of many excursions in Israel led by amazing tour guides. We were joined by many of our patrons along for the tour who made this historic trip possible. The visits to the Old City, the Wailing Wall, the Masada, Dead Sea, the Holocaust Museum were experiences that I am sure none of us will ever forget. We then went on to perform full orchestra concerts to very warm and enthusiastic audiences.

Next, the we travelled to Vienna, Regensburg, Essen, and Prague, as part of the famous Prague Spring International Music Festival. Playing in some of the great concert halls of Europe was certainly a thrill and we wound up playing as many as three encores for each concert. Here are the concert dates and repertoire.

**Thursday, May 11, 2017, 8:00 p.m., Sherover Hall, Jerusalem Theatre, Jerusalem**

- Jordan Pal: *Iris* (TSO Commission)
- Brahms: Violin Concerto (Vengerov)
- Dvořák: Symphony no. 7

**Saturday, May 13, 2017, 9:00 p.m., Charles Bronfman Auditorium, Tel Aviv**

- Jordan Pal: *Iris* (TSO Commission)
- Brahms: Violin Concerto (Vengerov)
- Dvořák: Symphony no. 7

**Tuesday, May 16, 2017, 7:30 p.m., Konzerthaus, Vienna**

- Boulez: *Le soleil des eaux* (Huhtanen, Wien Singakademie)
- Brahms: Violin Concerto (Vengerov)
- Bartók: *Concerto for Orchestra*



*Smetana Hall, Prague.*

**Wednesday, May 17, 2017, 8:00 p.m., Audimax der Universität Regensburg, Regensburg**

- Morawetz: *Carnival Overture*
- Schumann: Piano Concerto (Lisiecki)
- Rimsky Korsakov: *Scheherazade*

**Friday, May 19, 2017, 8:00 p.m., Smetana Hall, Prague**

- Morawetz: *Carnival Overture*
- Brahms: Violin Concerto (Vengerov)
- Dvořák: Symphony no. 7

**Saturday, May 20, 2017, 8:00 p.m., Smetana Hall, Prague**

- Smetana: Overture to *The Bartered Bride*
- Schumann: Piano Concerto (Lisiecki)
- Bartók: *Concerto for Orchestra*

**Sunday, May 21, 2017, 8:00 p.m., Philharmonie, Essen**

- Morawetz: *Carnival Overture*
- Schumann: Piano Concerto (Lisiecki)

It is very rewarding and inspiring to have a music director and a CEO who see the value in touring. It was Oundjian who had persuaded our initially reluctant

board to fund the 2014 tour at a break-even level, and the board, with the help of the Canada Council, has done so again, supporting a tour budget of \$2.25 million. “What we have witnessed is the extraordinary impact touring has on the artistic level of an orchestra,” said interim CEO Gary Hanson.

Let us hope that this tour will serve as inspiration for many more to come!

## A New Artistic Team for the TBSO

Michelle Zapf-Belanger

Thunder Bay Symphony Orchestra

The Thunder Bay Symphony Orchestra is set to begin their 2017–18 season with two new artistic leaders.



Paul Haas.

After a two-year-long search process, American conductor and composer Paul Haas was appointed as Music Director. He also holds the music directorship of the Symphony of Northwest Arkansas and Sympho, a New York-based contemporary music ensemble. Haas is a graduate of Yale University and of the Julliard School.

As a composer, he is known for incorporating the performance implications of unusual venues and acoustic spaces into his works. “My work always celebrates space and our place within it. So many of us are disconnected from our surroundings, and it can be profoundly healing to become aware of – and even celebrate – where we are and how we fit in.”

His debut as Music Director will be on October 20th, conducting the Overture to Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*, Dvorak’s *New World Symphony*, and Prokofiev’s Third Piano Concerto, performed by Charles Richard-Hamelin.

Quebec conductor Simon Rivard will begin his tenure as Resident Conductor on October 25 with “Symphony Virgins,” an outreach concert aimed at newcomers to the orchestral genre. A graduate of the Conservatoire de Musique in Montreal and McGill, Rivard was recently named one of the “30 hot Canadian classical musicians under 30” by CBC music. An experienced vocalist, Rivard has also assumed directorship of the TBSO Chorus, which will be singing Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony this season, as well as Handel’s *Messiah*.

## Book Review: The End of Absence

by Lisa Zeidner

Reprinted with permission from *The Washington Post*, August 15, 2014.

*The End of Absence: Reclaiming What We’ve Lost in a World of Constant Connection*, by Michael Harris

On a recent panel about the creative process, several writers of a certain age were reminiscing about the Olden Days, when we penned first drafts longhand, then moved to serial drafts on typewriters and were thrilled with the sexy new technology of the IBM Selectric’s built-in correction tape (no more messy, smelly bottles of liquid Wite-Out!).

Fast-forward 30-odd years from our first Kaypro word processors, when you had to input an MS-DOS command to make a phrase miraculously print in italics. Canadian journalist Michael Harris watches his puzzled two-year-old nephew turn from his iPad to toy with a curiosity: a print magazine. The toddler fixates on a photo of a face in *Vanity Fair* and keeps fiddling on the page with his fingers, very much like the toddler in a video that recently went viral; “it dawns on me that he’s attempting to zoom in,” Harris writes. “At last, [he] looks over at me, flummoxed and frustrated, as though to say, ‘This thing’s broken.’”

Fear of absence is the surest sign that absence is direly needed.

— from *The End of Absence*

In *The End of Absence*, Harris’s premise is a simple yet enticing one. He isn’t purely nostalgic for the good old days – obviously, there’s no more going back to the pre-e-mail, -cellphone and -Google world than there was returning to the monk-drawn illuminated manuscript after Gutenberg. But Gutenberg’s revolution was “a slow-blooming era that took centuries before it was fully unpacked.” Our technological revolution has burgeoned with astonishing speed. And Harris notes that we are the last generation that will have known life both before and after the digital revolution, with its promise of instant connection with anyone and everything, anywhere. This gives us a singular vantage point to consider what we’ve gained – and at what cost.

Harris wonders whether all of our fact-gathering on Google and Wikipedia, our hookups on Tinder, our mountains of posts and texts and selfies, have made us dumber, less authentic. Because of the ease of our con-

nectedness to information, we remember less and thus live with an “intellectual paradox – we know everything and we know nothing,” a condition that the futurist novelist Douglas Coupland calls feeling “smupid”: smart and stupid at once. Harris further wonders whether future generations will be trapped in the “restless idleness” of endless distracted browsing, whether they will still be able to “access absence and solitude” of the kind that made Thoreau’s time at Walden Pond so rewarding.

Of course, Harris is hardly the first to pose these questions. There’s a solid body of writing on technology and its discontents – books like Neil Postman’s *Tech-nopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (1992), James Gleick’s *Faster: The Acceleration of Just About Everything* (1999) and Nicholas Carr’s *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (2010). Harris quotes many of these writers, as well as a range of psychologists, philosophers, neurologists, and tech gurus, as he explores subjects as diverse as our mania for self-documentation and the nature of our relationships in the time of Internet dating.

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The spaces in our lives that technologies filled in were never such barren places after all. Those spaces were where we stored our magic, our hope, and the longing that drove our striving souls.

— from *The End of Absence*

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His far-ranging research provides a wealth of thought-provoking statistics and details, and *The End of Absence* has a kinetic energy well-matched to our jumpy attention spans. His excellent chapter on the evolution of memory ranges from 2,000 years ago, when wealthy Sabinus trotted out his slaves at dinner parties to recite memorized passages of Homer and Hesiod, proud to own what were basically human search engines; to Proust; and then to Lifelogging and Timehop applications that promise to help people organize and keep track of their pasts. Along with research, Harris muses on his own experiences, like his arduous attempt to escape “the culture of distraction” to read *War and Peace*.

If he has a theory, it’s that absence makes the heart grow fonder. You need to long for a person intensely to feel deeply in love, and longing requires distance, not the instant hookups promised by applications such as Plentyoffish. “Online technologies promote us towards a state of constant intimacy, and that’s not necessarily an ingredient in erotic desire.” That may be true for online shopping as well as for love – at least for those of us who remember the thrill of discovering a long-sought volume at a used bookstore while traveling, as opposed to doing a global online search and pressing “buy now.”

Occasionally Harris hits on his need to “slip away from the world again” a little too insistently, exhorting

us to acknowledge that we are, like Neo in *The Matrix*, in “servitude to a larger technological intelligence.” At the end of the book, he embarks on an “analog August” – an entire month without cellphone, e-mail or Internet. He admits that, even after his withdrawal, he doesn’t exactly experience an epiphany. Neither do his readers, who have been hearing about similar experiments for enough years now to feel that they’ve been there, done that. But in Harris’s defense, maybe they haven’t done that personally. Perhaps they’d dare to “take the challenge” proposed by his publisher and return to 1983 for an August weekend. As an enticement to unplug, the publisher will even cough up a free copy of *War and Peace*.

\* \* \*

Lisa Zeidner’s last novel was *Love Bomb*. She teaches in the MFA program at Rutgers University in Camden.

## UNA VOCE

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Unless otherwise stated, the opinions expressed herein are those of the individual authors and not necessarily of OCSM.

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### **OCSM Executive Officers**

(term of office in parentheses)

President (2017–19)	Robert Fraser
1st Vice-President (2016–18)	Matt Heller
2nd Vice-President (2017–19)	Brian Baty
Secretary (2016–18)	Faith Scholfield
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### **Current OCSM Orchestra Delegates:**

Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra	Michael Hope
Canadian Opera Company Orchestra	Mark Rogers
Edmonton Symphony Orchestra	Edith Stacey
Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra	Elsbeth Thomson
Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony Orchestra	Michael Macaulay
London Symphonia	Shawn Spicer
National Arts Centre Orchestra	David Thies-Thompson
National Ballet of Canada Orchestra	David Pell
Niagara Symphony Orchestra	Brian Baty
Orchestre Métropolitain	Monique Lagacé
Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal	Stéphane Lévesque
Orchestre Symphonique de Québec	Marie-Julie Chagnon
Regina Symphony Orchestra	Peter Sametz
Saskatoon Symphony Orchestra	Melissa Goodchild
Symphony Nova Scotia	Ken Nogami
Thunder Bay Symphony Orchestra	Michelle Zapf-Bélanger
Toronto Symphony Orchestra	Leslie Dawn Knowles
Vancouver Symphony Orchestra	Vince Vohradsky
Victoria Symphony	Paul Beauchesne
Windsor Symphony Orchestra	Greg Sheldon
Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra	Arlene Dahl

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