

Welcome

It is a great pleasure to welcome the AIRS Research Team to the first Annual International AIRS conference held this year at the University of Prince Edward Island. We have much to celebrate and to accomplish over the next four days. This gathering is unique in bringing together so many experts to focus on challenging questions about singing. We will address three themes: how singing develops in every individual, how to teach singing and sing to teach, and finally, how singing can enhance the well-being of individuals, groups, societies and cultures.

The extraordinary opportunity before us arose through the co-operation of many individuals. I thank all of the collaborators for their efforts in helping to create a winning proposal to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Major Collaborative Research Initiatives (MCRI) Program. SSHRC's amazing MCRI program enables planning for the long term and encourages working across disciplines. I acknowledge the SSHRC Committee members and international external reviewers who saw the merit in our proposal.

A strong home base at UPEI was necessary for success in such a competition and the support of the Dean of Arts Richard Kurial, Vice President of Research and Development, Katherine Schultz, and President Wade McLaughlan is acknowledged. The team of collaborators at UPEI, from the disciplines of Music, Education, Island Studies, Sociology and Anthropology and the Library provided a strong and unique foundation, which continues to grow.

Gratitude must also be expressed to the partners who have offered to share responsibility in the support of this project. Each developed a formal letter of support for the AIRS project by the Labour Day weekend of 2008. Valued also are the many stakeholder organizations with whom AIRS will be in close contact over the course of the research program.

Attendees have travelled thousands of miles, from Japan, South Africa, Estonia, Poland, Iceland, Germany, Switzerland, France, Great Britain, and the United States and from British Columbia to Newfoundland. UPEI colleagues away for part of the summer have made special trips back to the Island for this meeting. Of critical importance to the AIRS project are the students, and we are pleased to have students at every level, undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate represented at our meeting.

On a personal note, I would like to recognize Pamela Campbell, a voice teacher in Charlottetown with whom I began taking voice lessons in my first years at UPEI. The plan had been to take a few lessons, and pick up "a few tips". Without this excellent teacher, the AIRS project would not be here today.

I am especially pleased that Lisa McClellan, a senior undergraduate from Bates College in Maine who had interests in singing and psychology, early in 2009 discovered AIRS and applied for a grant from her own university to spend time with the AIRS project in

PEI this summer. She has been an enormous help, as an example, in compiling all the materials in this document. My gratitude is also expressed to Kathy Stewart who gracefully stepped into the demanding position of Interim Administrative Project Manager of a project just getting off the ground. We were also greatly assisted by the top organizational talents of Maria Powell. Earlier, Vickie Armstrong and Emily Gallant had helped with their dedication to our proposal. Special recognition is directed to the outstanding team leaders of the research sub-themes for their time in fine-tuning the AIRS Milestone Document and for their willingness to help to lay out and guide our course for the next years.

Ten months ago we dreamed of coming together across distance and discipline to advance interdisciplinary research in singing. “Be careful what you wish for”, so they say. We have wished carefully. With our wish come true, we will break new ground in understanding how we learn to sing, how we can teach singing and teach through singing, and how we can improve lives of individuals and societies. Our aim is to improve understanding of people and to make lives better, and to do this we must remember to retain balance in our own lives. Our time together at the University of Prince Edward Island will reflect this balance. We will work hard and play hard.

The Opening Ceremony begins our first evening. The next morning, the team leaders will review the nine research sub-themes in a plenary session. The following day we will engage in sub-theme breakout groups, and will come together for the final integration of ideas and plans on our last morning plenary session. Participants will share their latest research in paper and poster sessions, and will share their amateur and professional musical talents at a public Sunday night concert and at a special reception the next day at the residence of the Lieutenant Governor Barbara Hagerman, herself a former professional choir director. She has graciously added AIRS to her list of organizations or projects for which she is a Patron throughout the remainder of her term of office.

To each of the many players in the AIRS project: welcome, thank you, and best wishes for a most stimulating and fruitful time at this first AIRS International Conference held in Prince Edward Island. Together may we be worthy of the gift we have been given.

Sincerely,

Annabel J. Cohen
Director and Principal Investigator
AIRS SSHRC MCRI