

Iqaluit Exchange: Ottawa visit April 23-28, 2013¹

In March and April, 2013, The YMCA Youth Exchanges Canada program sponsored an exchange between students from The Leading Note Foundation's OrKidstra Program (Ottawa, ON) and the Iqaluit Fiddle Club (Iqaluit, NU). Fifteen students with adult leaders flew north for five days in the first phase of the exchange. Eighteen IFC students, with two leaders, came to Ottawa in late April. The following notes were sent to parents to keep them updated on a daily basis. A final page transcribes some of the kids' thoughts about their experience.

Tuesday, April 23, 2013: Migrating geese were startled this afternoon by a flock of young fiddlers who seemed to be flying higher than their plane! The group of 20 landed safely and excited, though a little late, at Ottawa airport and were met by some OrKidstra folk, and by sunshine and +16C temperatures. Nobody lost bags or violins or themselves along the way so within the hour, IFC and OrKidstra Exchange kids were reunited at the Bronson Centre to enjoy a Welcome Potluck supper. OrKidstra students had made a large WELCOME poster and written welcome in several languages (even syllabics) on the board. When flying North in March, Orkidstra kids were a bit apprehensive about being served caribou eyes or seal liver. Foods on the Ottawa potluck table were pretty exotic in their own way: pita & hummus; potstickers; home-made onion bread; pork & berry hotpot; peas & noodles; but also a pizza or two and some scalloped potatoes. Patrick even made us all a lemon meringue pie!



The door to the patio was open and the kids spent most of their time out there, running around and enjoying the springtime. A few found creepy crawlies in the flower beds. Despite shrieks, I think the bugs were the most frightened—turning in on themselves while being passed hand to hand, then dashing for cover when they fell to the ground. The kids explored their welcome bags (in hindsight perhaps the police whistles were not such a good idea) and met some of the many people who have been working behind the scenes at OrKidstra to prepare for the week.

But mostly they just reconnected with their buddies and chattered away together. Noisy, for sure, but heart-warming. Then we cleaned up, put the violins into the Office for safe-keeping and took the bus and the bags off to home base. Roberta seemed to hit the nail on the head. When asked what she was looking forward to, she said simply, "EV-ER-Y-THING!!" Of course, we have an official schedule, but what actually happens along the way? We'll find out!

¹ Similar notes on the Iqaluit leg of the exchange are available.

Wednesday, April 24: Well, I'm afraid the children have learned a new four letter word: walk. They learned it the hard way, walking to the ByWard Market and then all over the network of streets and courtyards in search of elusive answers to 22 scavenger hunt questions. Faves were "Who put the front of building on the side of a building in between buildings in a courtyard?" And "Take a photo of your group with someone in uniform". Each team managed to find all the answers!! Most impressive!

The Market provided all sorts of new things. Mary and Colby were taught how to juggle tennis rackets by Shimeon Sharar, an Israeli busker who earns his money standing stock still till someone puts a few coins in his pot. Then he juggles and tosses the rackets while twisting his body into different, seemingly unbalanced, positions. Mary achieved in four goes what Shimeon said had taken him 33 years!



Ready? And.....



...oops!



Let's try this one.

We found out Grace S is a great reader, stopping by every historical marker to pore over explanations of courtyards, fountains, and old buildings. In response to a suggestion on the scavenger hunt (extra points for composing a song or poem about the Market), JJ wrote the lyrics for a song and Kaitlin, Andrew, Hayden & Serena made up a quick poem: "Roses are Red, Violets are Blue, ByWard Market, We love you!"



A creative answer!



Playing Tourist

The hunt led us to the Peacekeeping Memorial for a snack and then over to the National Gallery for a photo under *Maman*, the giant spider sculpture by Louise Bourgeois. Off again into Major's Hill Park to look west along the Ottawa River (you can see Victoria Island, the Museum of Civilization and the Library of Parliament). We stopped at the statue of Col. John By ('cos now we knew who he was) and took photos. We were there just at noon to hear the chimes of the Peace Tower and then the Carrillon

playing. The main attraction was a large black squirrel who had his photo taken more times than he ever will again in his little life. If any squirrel could feel like a celebrity, this is the one!

On the walk to lunch we gawped at the seven locks that take boats down from the Rideau Canal to the Ottawa River, and stopped at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the War Memorial, along the Sparks Street Mall to see two-level glass elevators rushing up and down on their cables with people inside studying their papers and waiting for their floors. Across the way is a huge glass building with what looks like an older building reflected on its face. Surprise! The older building is actually *inside* the new glass one: no one wanted to tear down the original Bank of Canada, so they built a huge airy atrium around it and connected the new offices to the old with glass and steel bridges. The atrium is filled with tropical plants and has a chain of small fountains and pools with fish. The verdict? “Cool!”

On our “W***”, the kids noticed all the things that make Ottawa so different to Iqaluit: streams of traffic; cars that don’t stop if you step off the curb; miles and miles of cement sidewalks; tall trees with leaves just coming into bud; double-decker & articulated buses; thousands of red bricks on hundreds of houses; mansions as big as hotels; glass office towers that reflect each other and make you feel insignificant; coffee shops on every second corner; traffic lights and beeping crosswalk buttons; sparrows, grackles & seagulls; sow bugs, worms and spiders; and thirty-storey construction cranes.

Then on (beginning to think seriously about the new four letter word), down to Chinatown along quieter streets. Molly was amazed to learn what goes on under the streets and sidewalks beneath all the manholes we crossed. We passed under the red, gold and blue Chinese Royal Archway and eventually reached the Oriental Chu Shing restaurant, where we sat at huge, round tables, watched over by writhing golden dragons and ate enormous quantities of egg rolls, noodles, shrimp rice and dumplings which were placed on spinning centrepieces so we never had to pass anything, just keep turning till what we wanted came to us. (Now *that’s* a sentence.) We stuffed ourselves. We earned it!



Then (w-a-l-k) along to St. Luke’s Anglican Church where the kids set up tables, chairs and laid places for supper. Sixty appreciative guests of the church’s meal program came in and, in teams of three, the Iqaluit Fiddlers, joined by their OrKidstra buddies, served salad, spaghetti and took turns playing music for the diners—to thunderous applause. It was pouring outside, but inside it was warm and bright.

So, after cleaning up at St. Luke's, the kids were able to (you guessed it) !!!! back to the hotel. Conveniently, it had stopped raining but some of the kids wore their clear plastic rain ponchos anyway. They blew in the warm wind (it went up to 17C today) and the kids looked like so many soap bubbles drifting up Bronson Avenue in the early evening light.

Thursday, April 25: Overnight, everyone completely recovered from the long **** yesterday and greeted the cool sunny morning with enthusiasm. A medium walk brought us down to the castle-like Museum of Nature. After playing with baby mammoths in the grounds, we entered the vast central entrance hall and split into small groups to explore the many galleries. Joy, Sinisiaq, Roberta and Peter (from OrKidstra) all agreed the Blue Water Gallery was first pick. There we saw live lime-green and neon pink sea anemones, greenish eel-like gunnels and orange starfish. Joy was fascinated by the



time-lapse film of tide entering and leaving a cove—you turn a dial to make it speed through the tidal day. The skeleton of a blue whale dominated the gallery, stretching way off into the adjacent hall. All ribs and massive jawbones and tail, it looked more like a dinosaur than an existing sea creature. There were cases and drawers of water bugs and lifelike models of fish and frogs (fish eating frogs and frogs eating dragonflies...) and this was just the first gallery. Off to birds next, where we learned some rather personal information: Joy weighs 438 blue jays, Andrew weighs 7 wild turkeys, and I weigh 16 000 ruby-throated hummingbirds! Who knew? So much nicer than boring old kilos.

Then through the gallery of Mammals: life-size dioramas, including a huge polar bear taking a swipe at a seal; a moose much bigger than anyone thought it would be; tiny mice and a star-nosed mole; buffalo and bats, and time for just one more gallery. Three of the four wanted to see Animalia (bugs & things). Sinisiaq said a flat NO and decided to wait outside....but then who was the first person in the door? Sinisiaq, who later claimed her most favourite animal of the whole morning was the cockroach (a tropical one, shiny like polished wood and almost two inches long) with the hairy tarantula a close second. These were live, mind. Brave soul!

Grace Bruno (Ottawa Co-Leader) had invited everyone back to her house for a BBQ lunch and heavenly cherry cheesecake and then we were driven to the Agriculture Museum. This was a real hit, with huge carthorses (Maria is 14 hands high, though Grace N comes in at only 13). We saw a calf born on April 14, and huge cows waiting in the 'maternity ward' to deliver their new babies.



Two-week old Kasha



Is that the Queen?



Hog's Back Falls

Grace S nearly jumped out of her skin when a large Holstein moo-ed about a foot from her ear. Ducks, roosters, rabbits and llamas preened, pecked, snoozed and grazed as we walked by snapping photos of everything. The kids took turns trying to spot the Queen bee in the live hive (behind glass, fear not) and clambered into a full size John Deere tractor cab that bounced and jolted as if it were crossing a ploughed field (a sort of flight simulator for farmers). The goat & sheep shed had new lambs and kids aplenty, baa-ing and bleating. Roberta, Julie and Joy got to hold baby goats and feed them with a bottle! Grace was entranced by the velvety softness of the black goat's gray ears. We all sympathized with the black sow who tried in vain to bat her greedy piglets away when they started climbing all over her tender teats with their sharp little trotters. What to do with 12 babies at once!

On the way back from the Farm to the Bronson Centre a few stopped to watch the rush of water over Hog's Back Falls—in full and violent spate at this time of year. One group drove back via Quebec (across the Ottawa River)—just a *slight* detour.

There was an intense rehearsal with OrKidstra and KidSingers for Saturday's NAC performance and then out came the largest boxes of pizza Ottawa can produce—about 20 of them, which disappeared at a stunning rate. Not content with all the activity so far today, Olivia Pelling (the luthier who travelled to Iqaluit with OrKidstra in March) brought along her Celtic band, *The Wayward Sound*, and all the kids took turns clapping and line dancing. Meanwhile, Peter (OrKidstra) and Grace N (IFC) were interviewed by a CBC reporter for a short story that aired the next morning.



They are all back 'at home' now and possibly fast asleep already. No mention of yesterday's four letter word...except whenever I stand up and say "So, guess what we're doing now?" They all chorus "WALK!!" Well, that's how you get around a city like Ottawa.

Tomorrow is a bit more serious a day, with tours of the Parliament Buildings and the Supreme Court and attendance at Question Period in the House of Commons. But frankly, with this lively group there is never a fully serious day. Just ask Kaitlin about the rocking pig!

Friday, April 26: "Well, it's bigger, so it's going to be better than the Leg² in Iqaluit. Everything that's bigger is better. Just like the rides at Disneyworld." That was Colby's expectation as we waited in the damp queue to go through security at the Parliament Buildings. The Fiddlers met eight OrKidstra kids (who had taken the day off school) at the Centennial Flame at the foot of Parliament Hill at 9 o'clock and we just about made it under cover as the mist turned to mizzle and then rain. We met Will, who guided us round the Rotunda, down along the yellow-gray Gothic cathedral-like passageways to the Library of Parliament. Like any Library we had to be silent, but this was unlike any other Library. For a start, it was the only part of the Parliament Buildings that survived the fire of 1916, with beautiful inlaid wood floors, and tier upon tier of bookshelves that rose up floor upon floor—all in elaborate, honey coloured, carved wood to the very top: it was like being inside an elaborate crown with books and pendant lights for jewels. This High Victorian style is very different indeed from the austere, echoing interiors of the rebuilt Parliament. We walked into the Senate and sat on red leather benches to look at the gold-leaf ceiling, the red upholstered thrones and carved wooden desks with leather tops (red, of course). Every corner had its story. Did you know that the stone-carvers played a joke when no one was watching? Instead of finishing off the tops of pillars in the hall outside the Senate with the faces of early explorers, they carved their own faces—complete with spectacles!

Most of the group chose to ride the elevator to the top of the Peace Tower for a brief glimpse of Ottawa from above, passing by the Carillon and bells on their trip. Then off to the House of Commons where we met Paul Dewar, the Member of Parliament who had invited us to attend Question Period. We were ushered into two adjoining galleries (Senate & Speaker's galleries) which overhang the Opposition benches. Later Colby said that it was indeed better than the Leg if only because you could hear what was going on. There was a bit of disappointment that neither Justin nor Stephen was there, but there was plenty of toing and froing without them. However, although we could hear everything clearly, some of us *still* didn't understand what, if anything, had actually transpired.

How lucky that the rain stopped as we emerged from the Centre Block. So it was off to the lookout behind the Supreme Court for a sandwich and fruit picnic overlooking the Ottawa River with views back to the National Gallery, Parliament, The Museum of Civilization across the water, and Victoria Island—a proudly held site of the Algonkians on whose territory Ottawa has grown up. A few hardy souls ran over to the Currency Museum but most sat and sunned themselves on the steps of the grand Supreme Court Building. Shortly thereafter someone produced a bright green Frisbee and several kids tossed it around

² Legislative Assembly

while we waited for the tour to begin. How wonderful to live in a country where kids are welcome to play Frisbee in front of one of the most august buildings in the nation.



Eric, a law student and our guide, emerged and invited us in to start our tour early. This meant there was time for more than just a walk and show & tell in the Federal Court of Appeal and the Supreme Courtroom itself. In the Federal Court, after an explanation of why issues would come this far through the justice system, we held a mock court. Mary was the accused, with Sinisiaq as her black-robed Counsel; Maria, the victim, with Pauline, also in robes, as her Counsel; and Roberta, in a third black robe, mounted the dais and sat in judgement at the top of the Court on the central chair reserved for Justices! Complaints and defence were heard and the jury (all the rest of us) were so split in our decision that Roberta had to make the final judgement. (And we are all pretty sure it will be appealed!)

There were lots of questions after the brief visit to the Supreme Courtroom and then.....what next? *Nothing?* So, dear Reader, we draw a veil over the day as the kids go off in small groups to explore the pleasure palace that is the Rideau Shopping Centre. They rejoin OrKidstra kids at the Bronson Centre later tonight for Arts & Kraft² with Tegan, Yolande and various other students who are taking the load off the Co-Leaders for a few hours.

Saturday, April 27: A secret emerged from last night's Art & Kraft² night: no less than **twelve** boxes of KD were devoured by two dozen kids. Ooooooff! What else they did was not revealed till the very end of the day (no fair skipping to the end of this note.)

You might call today Fiddles and Frisbees: bizarre, but true. We had been told to be at the National Arts Centre by nine o' clock, and as we had to stay through till about five, we anticipated a really boring day. Tegan and Yolande had several games in mind. But we didn't need them.

We entered the NAC through the Stage Door, like real professionals. In Rehearsal Room A, the Iqaluit Fiddlers joined the OrKidstra exchange group, plus KidSingers (younger kids in the same program) and a few members of Hillcrest High School. We could hear other performers practising down the hall. At about ten o' clock, before anyone got too restless, we were called to Southam Hall (capacity 2323) and sat in the empty seats to watch the other performers rehearse. We heard Susan Aglukark sing *O Siem* and *Hina Na Ho*. It was interesting to hear her call for the sound system to be adjusted here and there to make sure that her voice wasn't drowned out by the drums & guitars of her band and the full National Arts Centre Orchestra behind her. Then Simeonie Keenainak came on to practise *Avaala* on his red button accordion. The orchestra had difficulty keeping up with his jaunty rhythms. The Orchestra played a piece about the North composed by Alain Trudel which included long stretches of throat

singing by Evie Mark and Akinisie Sivuarapik. Finally, The Fiddlers and the OrKidstra exchange group, and the choir, practised coming on stage and performing *Amazing Grace* with the Orchestra. Then back to a huge sandwich & fruit lunch in our very own Rehearsal Room A.



We practised and tuned and warmed up some more. The kids played random music in every corner and then it was the REAL THING. All the coloured and black T-shirts lined up and marched through the long underground passage to Back Stage. By this time a few of us had sneaked up into Southam Hall and were sitting in the audience, alongside well over two thousand eager music lovers of all ages. Although we had seen the rehearsal, the show itself was way better as everyone was in costume and the music didn't stop and start. We listened to all the artists but really only had ears for the most important group of all: our own kids!

Then OrKidstra/Iqaluit Fiddle Club were introduced. Time to bite our nails. While the kids filed onto stage, the Conductor, Alain Trudel, interviewed Rinila & Ngoc Kim, then Mary and Grace S, asking them what it was like to practise long-distance (via that broadband connection back in November) and what they thought of going North or coming South. What confidence to speak up with that many in the audience. Congratulations! But *Amazing Grace* (orchestral then in Inuktitut) stole the show. Molly Ell, resplendent in her hand-made butterfly coat and seal & rabbit kamiks, slowly played her drum to the side. The audience sang along as Susan Aglukark led them in the words, enthusiastically supported by the KidSingers, Hillcrest, the Fiddlers and OrKidstra. Our young musicians were strung out in a line right across the front of the stage and not one missed a beat.

Later on, Serena admitted to being really scared at first (as did many others). Some thought it great fun, and Hayden said "I just felt like playing." There were two identical performances that afternoon and high spirits throughout. Such a glorious focal point of the week in Ottawa. Darlene was beaming from ear to ear to see 'her' kids doing so well. Who would have thought this spectacular event lay in store for any of them. Similarly, Tina was practically in tears to see 'her' kids strutting their stuff in such an exalted setting. Hard to beat that!

And so back to Mac Hall at the Bronson Centre, with more music, lashings of food on the potluck table, hilarious circle games, and music. Some of the kids played fiddles on stage while others played a wild game of Frisbee across the rest of the room.



Fiddles & Frisbees



Unique—like the kids that made them

When we settled down, there were a few speeches of gratitude and gifts all round. That's when the adults found out what had been going on Thursday evening during the Art & Kraft² night-- Kraft Dinner and crafts. Each kid had painted a coffee mug to their liking and made extras for the adults who had helped organize the Exchange. What a lovely memento. And what next? Well, some parents had thought supper would be later, so *more* food arrived. Nothing for it but a second sitting! It was really hard to part the kids from each other, but it had to be. There was one last rendition of Ode to Joy with players from both sides and others listening, elbows on the stage. What a farewell. Hugs, laughter, promises to keep in touch and Tina suggested OrKidstra and the Iqaluit Fiddle Club should become sister organizations. What a great idea. Who knows where that might lead!



At the end of their visit, the kids from Iqaluit answered a few questions about their experiences. Here is a selection of answers, in their own words [with explanation where needed].

What were the highlights?

- I liked going to the farm; I really loved going to the Supreme Court; and I loved the Parliament
- We performed (best day EVER!)
- Shopping, shopping, the mall, shopping and shopping [nine mentions!]
- We got to see everyone from the exchange; we got to do and visit new places and things; had lots of fun

What could have made it better?

- If it lasted longer
- If we could have spent more time with the kids from Ottawa
- If we could have gone to Sugar Mountain [a candy store]
- Going swimming

What did you learn about yourself?

- I love to do new things and the more I do exchanges and activities like this I learn more and more about myself
- That I don't have performance anxiety anymore
- That I can make friends with little people
- I don't like walking

Other comments.

- I really enjoyed the trip experience, and I can't wait till I have another trip.
- I had so much fun I forget what the days were!
- I would like to do the exchange again.

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