Blyth native to lead inaugural ensemble in Vancouver



Expanding their audience

Jackie Falconer, a native of Blyth, will be leading the first-ever two-spirit, trans and non-binary ensemble in Unison Festival history next year when the gathering is scheduled to be held in Vancouver. This comes after Falconer was honoured by the festival as an innovator due to her work in creating the Trans and Non-Binary Ensemble in Toronto, a first of its kind at the time. Falconer is seen above during a rehearsal with the group before its performance at the festival in Halifax several years ago *(Courtesy photo)*

By Shawn Loughlin
The Citizen

At next year's Unison Festival, set to take place in May in Vancouver, Blyth native Jackie Falconer will lead Unison Choruses Canada's first-ever 2STNB (two-spirit, trans, non-binary) Festival Ensemble in the organization's history.

Falconer - whose parents are Kevin and Lorie Falconer of Blyth - was honoured by the organization several years ago with its first-ever Unison Innovation Award for her creation of the Trans and Non-Binary Ensemble, which is a complementary choir to Singing Out - Toronto's 2SLGBTQQIA+ Choir. Falconer was awarded when the festival - known casually among attendees as that realm's Olympics, as it's only held every few years - was held in Halifax and now it's heading out west in 2026.

"It's such an honour to be presented with the inaugural award for innovation from Unison Festival for my role in creating the Trans and Non-Binary Ensemble with Singing Out," Falconer said in an e-mail to *The Citizen* after the win. "I saw a space for something new to exist here that had been lacking in the past and made it happen. Our ensemble performed at the festival to rousing standing ovations. The need for this kind of art space is clear and their excellence only propels us to keep going."

That innovation, she said, has a definite place in the world of music, as evidenced by the rapid growth of the group. She said it made sense to create the ensemble to provide a unique opportunity to those from the trans and non-binary communities that broke down some of the traditional groupings often associated with choirs.

"Choirs often are broken into gendered voice parts - men's and women's, or soprano, alto, tenor and bass. These binaries or sections aren't applicable to many trans and non-binary people," Falconer said. "Our voices are one of the most gendered features. For example, when you hear someone over the phone, your brain will categorize their gender based on pitch and how they sound. That often gives you a number of assumptions about the person you're speaking to. These assumptions, even when well meaning, don't always align with the realities of who is on the other side.

"I proposed that we create a small ensemble where singers could explore their voices outside of those boxes. They could sing the parts that felt right - in their voice or in their hearts - and the result has been incredible. This ensemble grew from six members in our first performance in 2022 to 20 members in our third term. This show, the group sang beautifully in a capella with only the blend of their true voices and brought the audience to tears and to their feet," she said. "Trans and non-binary people have exceptional talents and perspectives to offer to our choir and our communities, all we need to do is to make space and listen."

In that story, Falconer said that many other festival attendees approached her and other members and expressed an interest in creating similar programs in their home communities. The growth from then to now is evident, as dozens will come together to be part of the ensemble at the festival, under Falconer's direction, for the very first time.

Speaking with *The Citizen* again earlier this week, Falconer said that the event itself is growing and gaining exposure. Whereas there were 16 choirs in the festival when it was in Halifax, 26 choirs will be in Vancouver next year, nearly double. Now, those choirs, she noted, could come from a small town and consist of about eight or 10 people, or they could have over 100 members, like Toronto's Singing Out.

After winning that award and being recognized in the field of innovation for the festival, Falconer was then asked to lead next year's ensemble, which continues to build on the momentum from her Toronto-based project creating, if for just one performance, a national choir.

Falconer says there will be a handful of online rehearsals with the participants leading up to the festival, followed by two in-person rehearsals in Vancouver and finally the ensemble's performance, which will be part of the festival's closing ceremonies.

The 2STNB Festival Ensemble will be a national chorus that uplifts trans and non-binary voices with affirmation, artistry and joy, according to the festival's website. Those are all points that Falconer hopes to hit as well. She said that she hopes to program the music with a lot of joy, celebration and jubilation; really, just a wave of positivity that will include arrangements written by trans and non-binary composers and arrangers, some of which has not even been released yet, meaning that the ensemble will debut the piece to the world.

Falconer says that more than just music, the festival and the ensemble specifically are a way to harness a safe and encouraging place for the 2STNB community and almost as an environment in which they can leave their worries and the increasing level of discrimination of the outside world at the door and just feel safe, seen and supported at the festival.



Pictured on left, Don Dodds is presented his 2024 Citizen of the Year award from North Huron Publishing editor Shawn Loughlin.

40th Annual Citizen of the Year Award Nominations Open

There are so many people out there who do so much to improve their community. This is your opportunity to show your appreciation for all they do.

Each year a committee chooses an outstanding citizen from each of the Blyth and area and Brussels and area communities and wider Huron County area to receive an award for contribution to the community. If you know someone you think should be honoured, please fill in the form and send it in. You may attach a longer explanation of why you think your nominee should win, if you like. If you have nominated someone before and they didn't win, we encourage you to submit again. Emailed submissions can be sent to Shawn Loughlin at editor@northhuron.on.ca

I nominate _____

as Citizen of the year for ☐ **Blyth & area** ☐ **Brussels & area** ☐ **Huron County**

I feel she/he deserves this award because _____

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Nomination Deadline September 26, 2025.

Name and phone number of nominator _____

Fax: 519-523-9140 Box 429, Blyth, ON N0M 1H0

Sudoku Solution

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6	2	3	4	7	5	8	9	1
1	7	4	6	9	8	3	5	2
3	6	9	7	5	4	1	2	8
5	8	7	1	2	9	6	3	4
4	1	2	8	6	3	9	7	5
7	5	8	3	1	6	2	4	9
2	4	6	9	8	7	5	1	3
9	3	1	5	4	2	7	8	6