

# THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

MUSIC

OPINION

## Hamilton Music Collective HQ is set to reopen after \$2.5 million transformation

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What started as a wistful daydream about some basement office space in an attractive historic building in Hamilton’s downtown has turned into a \$2.5 million renovation and a spanking new cultural centre.

The Gasworks, newly constituted as a multidimensional, comprehensive music and arts hub, will be officially launched next week, with tours and talks for the media, and Astrid Hepner, founder/CEO of the Hamilton Music Collective, says, “I still have to pinch myself to believe it’s real.”

She’s referring to the magnificent building at 141 Park St. N., near the centre of the city, which is hardly recognizable as the modestly handsome pale brick building with the distinctive window trim that HMC moved in to in 2014.

The building, which is owned by the Voortman family, a longtime supporter of HMC activities (such as the An Instrument For Every Child program), will host concert space, recording studio space, classrooms, offices and much else.

The recently completed renovation, undertaken by Hamilton firm Thier + Curran Architects, has been going on since 2017, says Hepner.



“It’s beyond my wildest dreams. Ten years ago (when HMC was in other offices) we went to look at the building, when it still belonged to the church and we were thinking, ‘Wouldn’t it be great if we could have some office space in the basement’ of this interesting historic building.

It used to be a gasworks, but in the 2000s it was at the centre of controversy, having been owned by a cult. Once the Voortmans acquired it, they became more and more committed, through The Voortman Foundation, to the idea of it becoming a non-profit musical focal point in the city, especially as they became acquainted with Hepner and the HMC.

“At first, the renovation was supposed to be an updating of the building,” says Hepner, “but once the architects became involved and had a vision for it, the project kept growing and growing.” However big it grew, she added, the Voortman Foundation was there to meet the needs.

The Gasworks, in the original building, made a lot of strides, putting on jazz concerts, housing classes but there was much that couldn’t be done, she explained. There were building code and zoning issues. They couldn’t get a liquor licence. All those barriers have been cleared away, which is a theme for the programs at The Gasworks, as all of them are meant to be inclusive and designed to enable anyone, from any background, regardless of financial need, to have a place and “belong.”



Bill Curran, of Thier + Curran says the architectural conception was to “wrap a building around a vision, a vision of a not-for-profit community cultural centre.” The new design features a grand lobby with high ceilings and loads of light, upper floors projecting into the open heights in places, and an attractive covered walkway along the side of the building which connects the street to the front door at the back of the building.

Of course, everything is built with acoustics in mind. It was an enormous undertaking as there was much disrepair and little interesting left of the old building (except for parts of the front facade) which had been left to languish during the cult years.

Now the place jumps out at you with its striking angles, contrasting materials, projections and window treatments.

The building, with its spacious rooms, is already in use for some classes and band practice, all conducted under strict COVID response guidelines, says Hepner.

She is hoping that The Gasworks can gradually reintroduce every aspect of its work, concerts and programming as the situation allows over the coming months.