



Capturing and Sharing Canada's Musical Heritage

Toronto Symphony Orchestra helps students and teachers tune in to Canada's musical heritage with a custom-made video learning solution

Across Ontario, less than half of school-age children have access to a dedicated music teacher. To help children—and adults—gain a better musical education, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra worked with D2L to design a set of online teaching resources that uses video technology to put students at the heart of the orchestra.

Company

The Toronto Symphony Orchestra (TSO) is one of Canada's major cultural institutions, committed to innovative programming and audience engagement. In addition to showcasing the exceptional talents of its musicians, the TSO focuses on serving the wider community, with music education programs that reach tens of thousands of students every year.

AT A GLANCE

Client: Toronto Symphony Orchestra

Employees: 60+

Students: 80,000

Industry: Media & Entertainment

CHALLENGE

- Extend musical education beyond the classroom
- Empower non specialist teachers to incorporate music into lesson plans
- Engage a wider audience with the power of Canadian orchestral music

SOLUTION

- D2Ls Learning and Creative Services
- Personalized video player

RESULT

- More than 40 TSO performances have been captured on video for posterity, giving the music a life beyond the live event
- 10 teaching modules have been created for schools, helping students learn about Canada's rich musical heritage
- Over 2 million Canadians of all ages have engaged with the video content.



The Challenge

EQUAL MUSICAL OPPORTUNITIES

One of the TSO's most important missions is to inspire and educate Canadian citizens about classical and orchestral music. TSO's role is especially important because schools across the country are struggling to find the resources to invest in full-time music teaching positions. Since music can be a difficult subject for non-specialist teachers to include in their lessons, there is a significant risk that students won't receive a well-rounded musical education in school.

As part of a wider initiative to mark Canada's 150th anniversary in 2017, the TSO was granted special funding from the Government of Canada to commission new works and capture a series of concerts on video. To further its mission to bring orchestral music to a wider audience, it used these funds to give children and students an insight into the skill, coordination, and passion that lie behind each performance.

MAKING MUSIC ACCESSIBLE

Michael Morreale, director of digital content at the TSO, explains: "The best way to learn about music is to experience it, but many schools can't afford to take all their students to a concert hall to listen to a symphony. We needed to find a way to bring the concert hall into the classroom."

The objective of the TSO's project was to look for an innovative way to record new works that reflect Canada's diverse musical landscape and make them available to the public.

"We wanted the videos to be fun and approachable so that teachers would be comfortable embedding them into their lessons—even if they don't have much musical experience themselves," says Morreale.

“We wanted to give students a real feeling for the harmony that comes from collaboration, and show them that everyone has a role to play.”

Michael Morreale, director of digital, Toronto Symphony Orchestra

The Solution

INNOVATIVE VIDEO

To provide a rich educational experience, the TSO wanted to do more than just create videos of its performances—it wanted to bring the audience into the heart of the orchestra.

“An orchestra isn’t a machine for making music, it’s a collection of individuals who work together to create a unique performance,” says Morreale. “We wanted to give students a real feeling for the harmony that comes from collaboration, and show them that everyone has a role to play.”

FINDING THE RIGHT PARTNER

The TSO realized that it couldn’t succeed alone—it needed a partner with both technology expertise and educational know-how. Following a survey of the market, the TSO quickly recognized that D2L’s Learning and Creative Services had the ideal combination of skills to help bring the concept to life.

Morreale says: “We wanted a video player that would allow users to switch focus instantly between different perspectives, so they could watch different parts of the orchestra as the performance progresses. And we just couldn’t find a platform that would do that. Kudos to D2L for taking on the challenge.”





WORKING IN CONCERT

In a collaborative process, the TSO and D2L worked together to record 10 concerts from multiple camera angles, capturing the unique contribution that over 100 musicians make to each performance. The D2L Learning and Creative Services team helped create the digital design and build the video player technology. The videos were embedded in the player by developing easily consumable learning modules with integrated lesson plans on a digital learning site called Canada Mosaic.

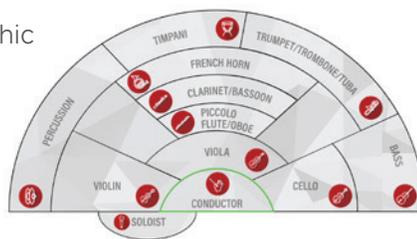
The elearning site, which is now publicly available in English and French at canadamosaic.tso.ca/elearning, provides a video stream for each of the 10 pieces, side by side, with a graphic that allows the user to click on different sections of the orchestra to select a variety of camera angles.

As the music progresses, different parts of the graphic are highlighted to show which sections are playing the melody at any given time—providing an intuitive visualization of how each member of the orchestra contributes to the overall performance.

COMMITTING TO SUCCESS

A few months after the successful launch of Canada Mosaic for the country's 150th anniversary celebrations, the TSO ran into a snag. Major internet browser vendors announced a plan to change the way videos are displayed on the web, which threatened to degrade the user experience on the TSO site.

"D2L didn't leave us hanging—they started working on a new version of the video player that uses modern HTML5 technologies to sidestep the browser issues," says Morreale. "This will eliminate any need to reload videos when the user wants to switch to a different perspective, so it will be a completely smooth experience."



Now Playing: *Inuit Games* | Conductor

“We can measure how many people are visiting our site and how long they spend viewing each module, so we have direct feedback on how useful and interesting the videos are for users.”

Michael Morreale, director of digital, Toronto Symphony Orchestra

The Results

AMPLIFYING THE MESSAGE

The Canada Mosaic project has enabled the TSO to digitally extend its reach, giving students and adults across the nation a rare opportunity to experience orchestral performance up close.

“We set a target of engaging 2.3 million Canadians with these videos, and we have more than surpassed that goal,” says Morreale. “We can measure how many people are visiting our site and how long they spend viewing each module, so we have direct feedback on how useful and interesting the videos are for users.”

HELPING SCHOOLS MAKE THE GRADE

The initiative has helped build stronger relationships between the TSO and Toronto’s teaching community. It also dovetails neatly with other outreach initiatives, such as making concerts more accessible for students.

“Students can attend a performance, and teachers can extend the experience when they return to the classroom by using our lesson plans,” explains Morreale. “Or if a school can’t afford to send students to a concert in person, they can still listen, study, and enjoy the music online.”

SHARING A MUSICAL HERITAGE

For the TSO, the videos provide a valuable archive of memorable works, ensuring that each piece of music has a life beyond the live performance.

Morreale concludes: “Looking to the future, we want to build on this experience by creating new applications that not only promote classical music online, but also help us explore and celebrate the diversity of our musical heritage. We’re delighted that D2L has helped us take the first steps to bring new musical experiences to new audiences across Canada.”