



Claremont Secondary School students Gordie Bishop, left, Asya Kiernan, Joseph Reyes and Victoria Miller perform with carollers from two local schools in the weekly Choirs in the Courtyard event at the Greater Victoria Public Library on Thursday. Photograph By DARREN STONE, Times Colonist -

It was like a scene out of a surreal yuletide film classic downtown Thursday during an unofficial countdown to that night's much-talked-about snowfall.

Chitchat among students hoping for a "snow day" on Friday, and shoppers hoping they'd make it home in time to avoid a rush hour slip-and-slide, could be overheard everywhere.

Then there was the jolting sight of two shoulder-baring protesters urging shoppers to give wool products "the cold shoulder" in front of a Salvation Army band playing Christmas tunes outside the Bay Centre.

The scantily clad protesters weren't the only ones prompting double-takes, however. So did a group of Christmas carollers whose festive music a couple of blocks away took many downtowners by surprise.

Wearing red scarves, Santa hats and faux reindeer antlers, a Royal Oak Middle School vocal ensemble joined forces with a Claremont Secondary School choral ensemble and members of a school jazz band. They enthusiastically conjured up a festive atmosphere as part of Greater Victoria Public Library's weekly Choirs in the Courtyard series outside the main entrance to the Central Library branch at 735 Broughton St.

The Christmas chorus began delivering familiar classics, including Jingle Bells, Noël, Frosty the Snowman and The Twelve Days of Christmas, from the base of the late Victoria artist George Norris's Dynamic Mobile Steel Sculpture. The one holiday favourite they didn't sing — Frank Loesser's romantic Christmas song Baby, It's Cold Outside — aptly summed up the noontime weather conditions.

Despite the frigid temperatures, the youthful musicians guided by Chantelle Galvao band director at Royal Oak, and

Claremont music director Jessica English, warmed hearts, one beat at a time.

The temperature was a whopping 1 C under partly sunny skies made brighter by the musicians' infectious festive spirit.

"I love seeing the reaction from everyone who comes through," said Devon Tatton, the main branch librarian whose portfolio is arts, culture and music.

"As soon as they see people singing, they start smiling as they walk past or just stand by," she said before handing out tiny candy canes to spectators of all ages.

This is the first year Tatton has been involved with the popular series, which has featured school and community choirs for five years, wrapping each season with a concert featuring library staffers.

This final half-hour performance will take place on Monday at noon, with library singers accompanied by pianist, Highlands councillor and board member Karel Roessingh.

"We were going to the library to get some kids' books and saw [the musicians] when we were leaving," said Anya Rodenburgh Yang after taking a seat with 16-month-old son Griffin and daughter Serena, 3.

"Serena really wanted to stop and listen to them," she said with a smile as her daughter, bundled up in a blue winter jacket and white knit hat, nodded in agreement.

Henriette Bradford and her granddaughter Sophia Gray, 6, came specifically for the music.

Since she had a mouthful of candy cane, a smiling Sophia had to express her opinion of the concert with her mittens, giving it a thumbs-up.

Like grandma, she didn't seem to mind the cold.

"I'm from Switzerland, so it's pretty cold there. I'm used to it," said Bradford.

Friends and family showed up to support the students, including Sharon Glover, whose daughter, Grade 12 student Chynna Tran, is in the choir.

"I always volunteer for the music programs at Claremont," said Glover, who brought along a basket of homemade cream-cheese sugar cookies with maraschino centres.

Liza German, whose son, Grade 10 student Myles German, recently joined Claremont's voice club to complement his experiences as an air cadet, said she supports him with whatever he does.

Other spectators on this wintry Thursday afternoon included seniors, businessmen, bookworms, cyclists and members of the region's street community who voiced their approval.

"The courtyard is a through-way, with [provincial government] offices all around, so you can sometimes see office workers standing at their windows to see what's going on," said communications officer Jessica Woollard.

"Then you'll see people coming off the elevator who have no idea what's happening. They'll walk by and just enjoy the music. That's what really special about this."

- See more at: <http://www.timescolonist.com/life/islander/around-town-enjoying-the-sounds-of-the-season-1.4201587#sthash.PJqsOR1B.dpuf>