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Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra's concert of gratitude for healthcare workers

On the foot of Table Mountain, against the backdrop of the iconic old main building of Groote Schuur Hospital, sat the 48-musicians-strong Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra (CPO) as they prepared to play for their first outdoor audience in almost two years.

The occasion was the Concert of Gratitude, a tribute by the CPO, the Western Cape Department of Health (DoH), Groote Schuur Hospital, and Hospital Heroes, to South Africa's frontline health and medical workers and, more broadly, to healthcare workers across the world for putting their lives on the line throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

The concert took place during staff's lunch hour on Wednesday, 15 September, in the hospital's palm court. Staff, many of whom are from the University of Cape Town's (UCT) Faculty of Health Sciences, were invited to take the hour to relax and enjoy the world-class symphony orchestra's tribute. Those who couldn't leave their desks or wards could hear the music travelling down the hospital corridors or were able to live-stream the performance through CPO's YouTube page.

The concert is one of the initiatives headed by Hospital Heroes that focuses on the mental and emotional well-being of healthcare workers. Video [Penny Lane Studios](#).

In addition to paying tribute to those who, after 18 months of working on the frontlines, continue to give their all for the public, the concert was also a moment to honour and remember the 193 healthcare workers in the Western Cape who died during the pandemic.

"We are sad, indeed, about the pandemic [that] has claimed the lives and livelihood of so many," said Louis Heyneman, the chief executive of the CPO.

"We are, however, so grateful that, thanks to the staff of hospitals throughout the Western Cape, in particular, we are still here. The concert of joyous and inspiring music is a celebration of life, a salute to the health workers, and a mark of our profound gratitude."

Western Cape MEC of Health Dr Nomafrench Mbombo was also in attendance and expressed gratitude for the performance but also reflected on the exhaustion experienced by healthcare workers.

"We never went home; we have always been working ... We don't want a fourth wave because we, as healthcare workers, are tired; we have been working throughout."

Mbombo called for citizens to get vaccinated to keep the COVID-19 transmission rate down, and thereby protecting not just one another, but also healthcare workers.

Dr Bhavna Patel, the chief executive of Groote Schuur Hospital, said the hospital was "extremely grateful" and honoured by the CPO's performance. She added that, at the time of the performance, there were 143 patients with COVID-19 in the hospital – less than half of what they had seen two weeks ago.

"So this honour is not only for the staff at Groote Schuur but for all health workers nationally and internationally who are offering and dedicating their lives to the service of others."

One such healthcare worker is Dr Abhaya Karki, a senior family medicine registrar from UCT and part of the team that built the [Hospital of Hope from scratch in 2020](#).

He was encouraged to witness the CPO performance by his colleagues who "ran down" in excitement to hear the tribute. Karki welcomed the gesture.

"People get motivated ... It's really lifting, especially for the staff and for the patients who can hear it from the wards."

As for the current state of affairs since vaccinations were rolled out to over-18s, Karki noted that "there is still a lot of mis- and disinformation about the vaccine".

"So we are seeing people who are not vaccinated, who are really very sick," he said.

Karki drew hope from a recent pharmacy visit where many young people were lining up for their jabs.

He added that since receiving their vaccines as healthcare workers, staff feel much safer to work in wards, compared with the experience of the first and second waves.

Written by Carla Bernardo, UCT News



Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra

Photo (s): Lerato Maduna/UCT

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