

# LAST-PODCAST-FINAL

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

capella, group, people, side hustle, winter blues, sad, resonate, student, singing, singers, rehearsals, sing, lifestyle changes, person, note, sunlight, record, studies, campus, called

## SPEAKERS

Lyara Malvar, Anrita Grewal, Andrew Yang, Mahdis Habibinia, Susanna Lee, Mansha Sharma, Max Marshall, Caroline Cachero, Maya Abramson, Dani Sarieva, Merrill Ferrao D'Souza, Racy Rafique, Justin Rosos

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- R** Racy Rafique 00:03  
Welcome back to the On The Record podcast. In this semester's final edition of TMU Week in Review, we're speaking with students and a member of the On The Record editorial team about a case of the winter blues sweeping campus, or at least that's what we thought it was.
- M** Maya Abramson 00:20  
And this week we get a glimpse into the world of TMU a capella, learning how some of these groups came to be and how they prepare to be pitch perfect calm competition season. I'm Maya Abramson.
- R** Racy Rafique 00:31  
I'm Rafique
- A** Andrew Yang 00:33  
And I'm Andrew Yang. Welcome to this semester's final episode of the TMU Week in Review.
- R** Racy Rafique 00:41  
It's that time of year where the weather becomes blisteringly cold, puffy winter jackets make their yearly debut and the days are getting shorter and shorter.

M

Mansha Sharma 00:51

Like, it affects like the morale and emotions a lot when you're going home and you're like, it's five o'clock, but it's technically the end of the day because the sun's not there and you can't really go out or do anything else. So it's very much like, you come to school in the morning and then by the time you're out your day is done.

R

Racy Rafique 01:06

Mansha Sharma is a second-year journalism student at Toronto Metropolitan University. She says her commute in the cold weather can make staying on top of academics particularly difficult.

M

Mansha Sharma 01:18

It is a lot of a pain because sometimes it affects the trains and the subways. So today, I had to delay so I had to walk. And I was about like 15 minutes late to class. So I'll start going to class a little bit less just because I don't want to deal with the weather. And you know, taking an hour in the freezing cold.

R

Racy Rafique 01:34

Second-year psychology student Anrita Grewal says she sometimes feels stuck in a depressing cycle during this time of year.

A

Anrita Grewal 01:34

I can't focus on anything, I kind of like go into like a state of limbo, you know, like, where I don't want to do anything. Or like, even get out of bed for classes. It's like you, you feel like once you get home, you don't want to do assignments. And then once you're at school, like you don't want to just sit and listen to a lecture for three hours. You know? It drones on, but that's just like seasonal depression, so.

R

Racy Rafique 02:01

Grewal mentions Seasonal Affective Disorder, also known as SAD. About 15 per cent of Canadians say they experience SAD. That thing you thought was just another case of the winter blues could actually be something bigger than that.

R

Racy Rafique 02:19

Here to speak with us today is Mahdis Habibinia, one of On The Record's very own editors. Mahdis has done some reporting of her own regarding the phenomena of SAD.

A

Andrew Yang 02:30

Mahdis, welcome to the show.

M

Mahdis Habibinia 02:31

Thank you for having me.

A

Andrew Yang 02:32

So how can people differentiate SAD with the seasonal blues, and are they linked at all?

M

Mahdis Habibinia 02:37

So it really comes down to behavior and how it affects your life. The winter blues are very common, it's a mood shift during the colder and darker days of the year. There's less sunlight, it's pitch black out by 6 p.m. So you feel more lethargic and generally more down. But those things may not necessarily affect your behavior, relationships, daily responsibilities, or your general ability to enjoy life and get things done. So that's winter blues. But if you're winter blues, quote, unquote, start dictating all or most aspects of your life. So, work, studies, personal relationships, and even things like your weight and appetite. You may be experiencing Seasonal Affective Disorder, which is what we call SAD. So again, it goes back to your behavior. And the three doctors I spoke with TMU's Dr. Diana Brecher, and U of T's doctors Richard Horner, and Roger McIntyre, all said SAD is basically a subtype of depression. It's depression with a seasonal pattern, in other words. So for many people, symptoms usually start in the fall and continue into the winter months. And seasonal depression is meant to be more of a descriptor of people who have depression, and that's the key difference. They have depression, winter blues is not depression.

A

Andrew Yang 03:40

For students at TMU, what resources are there that can help them with dealing with SAD?

M

Mahdis Habibinia 03:45

The Center for Student Development and Counseling has free confidential counseling services for those who have insurance through TMU, as well. There are Toronto based therapists and counselors that will just fill the insurance company. There are also doctors or offices who may offer their services at a discounted price if you're a student, but people should keep in mind that those options require a bit of homework on their parts, since each therapist office and doctor does things differently. But I want to highlight that counseling or therapy doesn't always have to be the first option. There are far more inexpensive and timelier ways to mitigate SAD's effects and they involve some lifestyle changes.

A

Andrew Yang 04:19

And for people who don't have the time or the money to seek professional help, is there anything people can do to combat SAD by themselves?

M

Mahdis Habibinia 04:26

Definitely. So as I mentioned, it all focuses on lifestyle changes, some basic and others not so basic, depending on your schedule, and well, how you generally live your life. So doctors Horner and Brecher explained to me in my interviews, that combating SAD starts with getting plenty of exposure to the cheapest type of treatment option, and that's actually sunlight. So that means being awake when the sun's up trying to be near a window if you're indoors, trying to be outdoors some of the time, pushing yourself to exercise if at all possible to because it's like you got to get the motor started so that then you increase your energy so that you don't need to sleep as much and you do eat better. If you're on campus, most of your days, the Student Learning Center is a place that's fairly well lit. Or alternatively, you can purchase an SAD lamp or light box and they come in various brightnesses or prices. But this is called light simulation or light therapy because you are literally simulating the effects of the sunlight. And you'd basically sit in front of the lamp for about 30 minutes to an hour every morning, which, yeah, might mean waking up earlier. Now, why is this important? So Dr. Horner basically said that what it does is whether through an SAD lamp or sunlight exposure earlier in the day, is it moves the hands of your body's clock earlier. So come evening, your body recognizes it's night time since it was so strongly influenced by light in the morning, so you're tired, and you can get a longer night's sleep. But a good night's sleep is also dependent on so many other things. Waking up and sleeping at the same time every night. If you nap, making sure you're keeping your naps under one hour and preferably before 3 p.m. So you can actually get sleep at night. Avoiding blue light is another big one. So before you sleep, try to avoid your phone screen or TV screens. And I know so many people who fall asleep with the TV on but what that does is screens emit blue light. And blue light actually suppresses the body's release of melatonin, which is a hormone that makes you feel drowsy. Diet is another big one. If your diet mainly consists of carbs, sugars, starches and fat, well, that's a problem because those foods do not stabilize and support mood. In fact, they do the opposite. So you want to make sure you're eating well. And my story discusses this in one of its sections. The last thing I want to highlight on this is what Dr. Brecher explained to me about how it's all circular. These lifestyle changes sleep, diet, sunlight, and a couple others I mentioned in my article, they're all connected, they impact one another. And the best defense is a good offense. So don't just consider these lifestyle changes in the winter or when symptoms surface as well. Or when they're at their worst. They really should be year round practices. And there's a degree of consciousness that goes into it. And Dr. Brecher said it best when she stated that you have to be aware and not to let SAD be this undertow that drags you in.

A

Andrew Yang 07:01

So what are some common misconceptions surrounding treatments for SAD and similar disorders? And what do people get wrong about treatment methods, and how long they need certain forms of treatment?

M

Mahdis Habibinia 07:10

So whether it's the lifestyle changes, or somebody decides to pursue professional help, like a form of psychotherapy, it's really important to keep in mind that habit formation is key. So I know several people and other sources that I've spoken with who said, you know, I've tried this a couple times, whether it's cognitive behavioral therapy, or eating better for just two weeks, and they say it didn't work. Well, the thing is, is that what's key about treatment options, both the inexpensive ones, and the ones that do require money is consistency. You simply cannot do something once, twice, or even 10 times and unequivocally claim it does not work. However you choose to treat your SAD, you have to make it a habit before you see results. Getting sunlight should be a daily thing, eating well should be a daily thing. Wendy Wood is a psychologist and researcher in the field of habit formation that Dr. Brecher told me about who wrote a book on this, and she has conducted research where they've actually tried to ascertain, you know how many days it takes for you to form a habit to eat healthy meals or to drink water regularly or go to the gym. And the number of days will vary. But what she does say is that it's not two or three times it may be 40, 60 or 90 times. And this even applies to the most severe cases where, for example, should you choose antidepressants are involved. Dr. McIntyre pointed out the antidepressants take four to six weeks to reach maximum effect. So you can't take it every day for just two weeks and conclude it doesn't work. But this is assuming there aren't any external stressors involved, like negative side effects. So again, consistency is key and habit formation is also really key in mitigating the effects of SAD.

A

Andrew Yang 08:41

Thank you for joining us today, Mahdis.

M

Mahdis Habibinia 08:42

Thank you for having me.

A

Andrew Yang 08:44

For more on SAD check out Mahdis' article in our print issue available on campus and online at [ontherecordnews.ca](http://ontherecordnews.ca).

M

Maya Abramson 08:59

Some students are struggling with the change in season and others are singing away the winter blues. TMU has not one, not two, but three a capella groups on campus. Two compete against other school groups in the region and one is non competitive. First is RESONATE, TMU's oldest group, formerly known as Ryenamics.

M

Maya Abramson 09:27

RESONATE has 19 members with singers from bass, the lowest voice type, all the way to soprano, the highest. Executive director Caroline Cachero says the group's rehearsals provide

soprano, the highest. Executive director Caroline Cachero says the group's rehearsals provide an escape from her schoolwork in the sciences.

**C** Caroline Cachero 09:40

What I love most is that because I'm in biomedical sciences, it's a really nice break from like, learning about the sciences because as much as I love it, and as much as I love learning about healthcare and like medicine, it's a lot, it's really taxing on my mental health. So it's really nice to be able to, like set apart from my studies and do something that I love by like singing so I like being part of the a capella group.

**M** Maya Abramson 10:11

Group number two is On That Note, a group created in 2020 specifically for women and queer singers. Music Director Lyara says they created the group to fill a void in the TMU a capella community.

**L** Lyara Malvar 10:23

OTN, On That Note is a group for women and queer people. And as like a queer person myself, I kind of wanted like a space for that where it was more welcoming and still, like skilled and like still competitive, but you know, kind of highlighting those voices and stuff.

**M** Maya Abramson 10:40

Justin Rosos a third-year student in Early Childhood Studies does double duty. He sings with On That Note, but in 2019 started the non-competitive group, TMU's third a capella troupe called B-Side Hustle. He wanted to bring a capella to more students in a more relaxed environment.

**J** Justin Rosos 10:57

I formed B-Side because I wanted to introduce a capella to more people who didn't want to be in a competitive setting, just wanted to like sing and have fun and make virtual covers on the internet for their voices to be heard, for the community, for the vocal community here at TMU.

**M** Maya Abramson 11:16

RESONATE, On That Note and B-Side Hustle are represented by the Toronto Metropolitan A capella Collective or TMAC. This means they can jointly coordinate auditions and put on events to create a greater sense of community. Community is essential to the a capella experience, which made operating during pandemic lockdowns tough. While some campus groups managed to find new life online for singing groups, adapting to online was especially difficult.



**M** Maya Abramson 11:42

Susanna Lee, leader of On That Note says many groups took breaks.

**S** Susanna Lee 11:46

A lot of groups did go on hiatus and like honestly, I understand why because it was like, such-- we all had to, all of the execs had to basically take up all these new skills because doing a capella online like what does that even mean, Right? So for us, we made a lot of virtual videos as did like many a capella groups. So basically, all of us would record separately in our homes, and then splice together our videos and I have to give a lot of credit to Lyara actually because they actually learned a lot of the new skills that we needed, like video editing, sound mixing, all of these things that you would normally not have to do in a real life setting was things that we had to learn on the spot basically to be able to continue being a group.

**M** Maya Abramson 12:35

Maintaining the group was tougher on that note, in particular because the group had only come together a few months prior to the pandemic.

 12:42

So I actually helped start this group with Lyara, who was the music director in January 2020 which was very interesting because, as we all know, what happened in March 2020 that made it especially difficult but very interesting feat to keep the group running when we didn't even really have a solid foundation because we had only been meeting for like a couple of months

**M** Maya Abramson 13:07

While RESONATE and On That Note are back in-person this year. B-Side Hustle has decided to stay online for now. For their relaxed non-competitive style, the slower pace of online suits them.

**J** Justin Rosos 13:17

It worked better for most of our current members. We weren't looking to transition into in-person yet, we felt like we would want to stay with the same workload as it was because it's kind of difficult to have our current members go from an online availability to finding a spot to meet in person because it's not as flexible.

**M** Maya Abramson 13:59

RESONATE's music director Max Marshall says he is grateful to be back in person.



Max Marshall 14:04

Zoom rehearsals worked while they had to but it was like, as soon as you come back in person with you know, something like a capella where it's like truly, it's designed to be in person. It's just so so much easier, but it's also just so much more fun and it, it's so rewarding.



Maya Abramson 14:20

Susanna says that leading the group through a return to in-person has been both rewarding and challenging.



Susanna Lee 14:25

Being in a leadership position for this group has been a very defining way for me to grow because balancing all of these things, especially during COVID, that added such an extra layer to the responsibility because then I now had to consider oh my god, like are my group members being safe? When we did start to meet again, I had to consider, oh my god, like who in my group is vaccinated and like, those kinds of things, especially because singing is such a, I guess like, activity where COVID could spread really easily. So I had to think about that on top of school.



Maya Abramson 14:57

Balancing school with extracurriculars can be challenging and the a capella rehearsal schedule is demanding RESONATE and On That Note each rehearse for six hours a week in the evenings.



Lyara Malvar 15:08

I'm gonna sound like a villain. But so for us, we have excused absences and unexcused absences. Missing rehearsal to like study for a midterm or do an assignment is actually an unexcused absence because it's a set time every week so we just expect people to come here and I'm not gonna say that it's like an easy thing to balance and stuff but I think our members understand the value of it.



Justin Rosos 15:36

In all honesty, it's a lot but I love it. I love, I feel like music is kind of-- it keeps me sane.




Maya Abramson 15:58

Throughout the semester, RESONATE and On That Note are preparing for the ICCA's the International Championship of Collegiate A capella.




- S** Susanna Lee 16:06  
The easiest way to explain what that is, is we always say it's just the competition that's in Pitch Perfect. It's a real thing. Everyone's like, Oh, you mean like in Pitch Perfect? Like no, the actual competition.
- M** Maya Abramson 16:17  
For RESONATE, who won their ICCA quarterfinal last year, preparing for competition again has already begun.
- C** Caroline Cachero 16:23  
Haven't really prepared our actual set, yet. So that's something we're still working on. But in terms of preparing for, in general, it's just getting the group comfortable and singing together and knowing how to sing properly in a capella because it's not something like you, it's not like, how you would sing as a soloist, for example. It's something more than just like singing a song. It's like, you know, you got to doo-wa's, you know, it's literally Pitch Perfect. So it's something more than that.
- M** Maya Abramson 16:51  
For a first time competitor like On That Note's Dani Sarieva. The ICCA's are exciting, but also overwhelming.
- D** Dani Sarieva 16:58  
I'm like, so excited, honestly, it seems like it's gonna be really cool. Definitely intimidating, kind of, because like, there's a lot to do, but it's really exciting.
- M** Maya Abramson 17:07  
A capella groups are known for having punny names, and TMU's groups are no exception. Here's president Justin Rosos on an earlier version of B-Side Hustle.
- J** Justin Rosos 17:16  
It used to be an all lower-voiced group. And we were actually called No InstruMans at the time, it was a really questionable name. But we eventually wanted to invite people of all voice types, and we decided to do B-Side Hustle, like a play off of words like, B-Side, like off like the record, the B side of a record and like a side hustle, because it's like our side hustle, you know?

 Maya Abramson 17:42

While most of these singers grew up singing on their own, many say there's a benefit to singing in a group.

 Lyara Malvar 17:47


I think when you're a solo artist, not that there's anything wrong with that, because you know, a lot of us are solo artists, as well. But when you're in a group, you really have to listen to one another, you really have to kind of match each other. And there's actually a scientific study that says when you sing with another person long enough, your hearts beat, start beating at the same time. So kind of that connection, I think, is what for, like what drives people to join groups like ours and stuff and yeah.

 Maya Abramson 18:19

Lyara is referring to a 2013 study by Swedish researchers. The team, led by scientist Bjorn Witkoff discovered that choral singers tend to synchronize their heartbeats when they sing and breathe together, leading to a sense of calm similar to yoga practice.

 18:44

RESONATE alto singer Merrill Ferrao D'Souza says the teamwork aspect of group singing makes it more meaningful.

 Merrill Ferrao D'Souza 18:49

When you're singing in a group, you have to be, I guess, a bit more mindful of the people around you. Of course, you're thinking about things like blend, tone. And it becomes really more of a group effort rather than, let me outsing everyone else. Because you're all working together to create that nice, beautiful sound, makes it really special.

 Maya Abramson 19:12

For many, being a part of TMU a capella has fundamentally improved their university experience. RESONATE rehearsals kept Max going through COVID, and he says the group means so much to him.

 Max Marshall 19:23

Oh, my goodness, it means everything, I think, especially in COVID, I mean, even before COVID But especially through COVID. At a time when we were, you know, all sitting behind screens, we still have rehearsals once a week, which as you can imagine looked a little different, but just

the opportunity to connect with people and to sing with each other and to see each other on a weekly basis is such a privilege and I truly try and you know, count my blessings for it and in all the ways that I can because being a part of this group has really changed my university experience in meeting new people and having that time to connect with people who care about somewhere things that I care about.

**M** Maya Abramson 20:03

For Susanna a capella has meant better self confidence.

**S** Susanna Lee 20:06

I feel like everybody here is so supportive of each other and everybody just loves music and nobody is judging each other. When you do sing in front of us, everyone's just here to have a good time. So and to enjoy music together. So I feel like the person I was when I started doing a capella and versus now is just the hugest differences in my self confidence and being okay to sing in front of other people.

**M** Maya Abramson 20:31

And as winter descends, the singers say they're grateful for the warmth of rehearsals.

**S** Susanna Lee 20:35

Every time we hear even someone just riff a little, or do a little side thing, like everyone's always like, Yes, like that was so good. And like, even the littlest things, it's just so fun. And again, it really makes your confidence grow. Because singing is scary. And I think a lot of people have experiences with singing where like singing teachers, or just other people will criticize. And so having a space where you can come and have other singers, like validate you. It's just a really powerful and it's really fun.

**M** Maya Abramson 21:03

As they prepare to graduate Lyara reflects on the impact of the TMU a capella community and the legacy they want to leave behind.

**L** Lyara Malvar 21:11

I'm in my final year here, like, probably ever so for me right now, it's about kind of setting them up for success and like making sure that this thing we have going on, kind of keeps keeps continuing and stuff. And at the same time, it's been a huge part of my growth as a musician and stuff and I'm hoping that same growth, people can apply that to like their lives and yeah.



Maya Abramson 21:35

In addition to performing at the ICCA's, audiences can also catch these groups at their holiday concert. TMAC will be hosting their first Snow Concert at the end of the month to celebrate the holiday season. The first round of tickets sold out really quickly, but additional seats can be purchased if you head to [tmu.acapella](https://www.instagram.com/tmu.acapella) on Instagram.



Andrew Yang 22:07

Thank you for joining us on our final TMU Week in Review for this semester.



Maya Abramson 22:11

For On The Record, I'm Maya Abramson.



Racy Rafique 22:14

I'm Racy Rafique.



Andrew Yang 22:15

And I'm Andrew Yang.



Racy Rafique 22:16

Thank you for listening.