



NOTLers sing their way to centre stage at Carnegie Hall

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NOTLers Daryl Novak and Laura Lynn Harry enjoy a boat cruise after their choir performance at Carnegie Hall last week. SUPP



Kevin MacLean



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For many seasoned professionals, it's the crowning touch after a lifetime of achievement.

For accomplished amateurs, performing at New York's historic Carnegie Hall is a rare opportunity, one that most can only dream of.

For Niagara-on-the-Lake's Daryl Novak, it was simply "one of the absolute most exciting things that ever happened in my life."

He and fellow NOTL resident Laura Lynn Harry joined a handful of other Chorus Niagara singers, plus members of Toronto's Amadeus choir, last week to perform at the legendary concert hall as part of a special U.S. Memorial Day program.



Carnegie Hall, Harry didn't hesitate.

"Heck, yes. My hand was the first to shoot up in the air, I'm quite sure," she told The Lake Report. "I wouldn't dream of giving up the opportunity of stepping onstage and singing at Carnegie Hall. It's a lifelong dream as a singer."

"And so the journey began: planning, organizing, practising and preparing," said Harry, a longtime jazz and pop singer who has performed all over the world and now operates a pilates studio in NOTL.

Besides singing at Carnegie, she helped work out the logistics for the New York performance.

Novak, a tenor who has been singing in choirs for more than 40 years, remarked that the Carnegie show was "highly organized."

After arriving on the Saturday morning prior to their May 25 Memorial Day performance, the Canadians rehearsed daily, including a full-dress run-through on Monday along with the orchestra prior to their 1 p.m. concert.

Back at home, Chorus Niagara usually does four major shows a year — including a hugely popular presentation of "The Messiah" — at the Performing Arts Centre in St. Catharines along with other concerts around the region.

But Carnegie is bigger and different, with so much history behind it.

Novak, who also is co-chair of the NOTL Public Library board, said he's also sung at Hamilton Place and Roy Thomson Hall in Toronto, but hitting the stage at Carnegie Hall was "really special."

The Canadians' program paid tribute to some of this country's musical heritage through the music Allan chose for the occasion.

The members of the joint Niagara-Amadeus chorus were the only Canadians on the bill, which also featured choirs and performers from across the United States.

Besides a Brahms piece, they also "proudly" sang compositions by Canadian Indigenous composers Cris Derksen and Sherryl Sewepagaham and Andrea Neumann," Harry said.

Allan advocated for that repertoire to be premiered, she added. "It was not in the original list of options for repertoire choice."





specifically about the water crisis our planet is facing.”

The choice of showcasing Derksen’s “Mass for Nîpîy” was timely and immensely significant as she was killed in a car crash in northern Alberta just a week prior.

After working closely with Derksen to prepare for the concert, in the wake of her death the show was an “**overwhelming and emotional and painful and affirming experience**,” Allan said in a Facebook post.

She felt “honoured” that Derksen’s mother travelled from Edmonton to attend the concert, Allan added.

The Canadians and Carnegie Hall both dedicated the day’s performances to Derksen, 45, a cellist and composer who was a rising star in modern classical music.

“It was an emotionally fuelled, heartfelt performance,” Harry said.

They also performed Sewepagaham and Neumann’s “Papiyahtik” (Peace Chant) in Cree.

As the chorus was led by Sewepagaham in her a cappella song and welcome chant “Tawaw,” even the New York musicians were “visibly moved by its raw, emotional power,” Harry said.

“The energy and emotion and care that we had individually and collectively on that Carnegie Hall stage was palpable.”

Overall, the concert “was a moving performance and one I will never forget,” she added.

