

The Heart of the North

Celebrating Red River Métis Heritage Through Opera

Red River Métis Camryn Dewar is disrupting the norms of classical music, preparing to shine in *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North* at the Manitoba Opera.

The rippling notes of a practiced coloratura emerge from New Jersey's Montclair State University rehearsal studio. They belong to Camryn Dewar, a rising opera star disrupting the norm with her combination of Red River Métis and Scottish/Scandinavian roots.

Dewar, 22, originally from Stony Mountain, Man., brings a potent cultural blend to opera, traditionally known for its European popularity. Growing up, she said, her father played the bagpipes and sang; something she became familiar with and drew inspiration from.

Dewar later received her undergraduate degree in music from the University of Manitoba and her journey continues as she undertakes her master's degree in music, focusing on vocal performance, at Montclair State University in New Jersey. Her initial plunge into opera was at age 13 with the children's chorus at the Manitoba Opera.



Li Keur: Riel's Heart of The North can be seen at the Manitoba Opera on November 18, 22, and 24, 2023.

Dewar reminisces, "I remember standing on the concert hall stage, singing, and looking at the thousands of people in the audience and thinking "this is what I want to do."

Upon realizing her passion as an opera singer, Dewar honed her craft at the Royal Conservatory of Music, sharpening her voice and piano skills.

Then, through the *Believe – Elite Athletic and Artistic Support Program* delivered by the Manitoba Métis Federation's (MMF) Métis Employment and Training (MET) - Youth Programming department, Dewar

trained at the heart of the art form, Florence, Italy, which she credits for deepening her understanding of both the Italian culture and her Red River Métis heritage.

"The connection of people to their music in Italian culture reminds me of the culture of Red River Métis people," shares Dewar. "For us, it's not just singing or playing an instrument, but also about honouring the historical and cultural significance of music."

Now back in Canada, Dewar is preparing for an upcoming opera that has already stolen

Dewar's diverse heritage and passionate artistry infuse her music with an exceptional resonance, proving that the future of opera can be as harmonically rich and diverse as its complex past.

"It's going to be such a ground-breaking step for Manitoba Opera, Canadian Opera, the Red River Métis, and telling the stories of our ancestors in a way they've never been heard before," predicts Dewar.

Dewar's soprano voice, coupled with her dedication to her craft, serves as a poignant reminder that opera can and should embrace diversity and inclusivity. Her voice, enriched by her experiences and Red River Métis heritage, offers a refreshing perspective and narrative, paving the way for a more diverse and representative future of opera as she charts her path in the music industry.

As Dewar continues to make her mark on the operatic world, it's evident that the future of opera is in good hands, a bright and vibrant future that celebrates and embraces her Red River Métis culture and influence.



her heart – *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North* – which can be seen at the Manitoba Opera, November 18, 22, and 24, 2023.

Dewar jettisoned her master's degree for a year to serve as the understudy for the lead female role in this opera about Red River Métis leader Louis Riel, and particularly the female influence that helped shape his movement.

Li Keur, among the first Métis operas to be featured on a main stage in Canada, is an amalgamation of history, mysticism, and a host of themes critical to the heritage of the Red River Métis.

Marking Dewar's first time performing in a role that shines a spotlight on her Red River Métis heritage, she shares, the experience itself has been an awakening to a legacy more complex than she had ever imagined.

"Li Keur is breaking traditional norms. It's creating space for Indigenous people to talk about our culture while singing in an art form that is new to many people," says Dewar.

"One of the most exciting things about this production to me is hearing the female voice and the female perspective," she explains.

