

Local opera singer involved in Métis production

Celebrating Red River Metis Heritage through opera

By Jennifer McFee

A Stony Mountain songstress has embarked on an apprenticeship opportunity with Manitoba Opera for a production that focuses on Louis Riel and the central role of the women in his life.

As a member of Red River Métis Nation, Camryn Dewar has always felt a connection to *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*, written by Métis poet and librettist Suzanne Steele with music from Métis composer and fiddler Alex Kusturok and composer Neil Weisensel.

The 22-year-old operatic soprano has been pursuing her master's degree in music at Montclair State University in New Jersey, and she is currently taking a year-long leave of absence to get involved in Manitoba Opera's production of *Li Keur*.

She approached Manitoba Opera CEO Larry Desrochers and composer Neil Weisensel to discuss possible opportunities.

"I really love the music and I know it super well because I've been involved in this opera since 2021 when I was in the chorus with my dad," Dewar said.

"I basically pitched it to the CEO of Manitoba Opera to create an opportunity for me."

After some discussions, Dewar now has the chance to be the section leader of the chorus as well as a production ambassador for the show. In addition, she has mentorship opportunity with mezzo-soprano Rebecca Cuddy, who

is performing the role of Josette La-grande. As part of that arrangement, Dewar is serving as the unofficial cover, or understudy, for the role.

"Rebecca Cuddy is also Métis and she's actually been one of my career mentors for a few years. I did a fellowship at the Association of Opera in Canada and she was assigned to be my mentor so I got to learn from her for a full year," Dewar said.

"Now I get to go to all the rehearsals and learn from her. I get to learn from all of the professionals about their process and rehearsal conduct and understand what it takes to put on a modern opera like this. It's a fully new process that I've never done before."

Through her involvement, Dewar had the chance to perform the role of Josette at a workshop with the cast in August when Cuddy wasn't available. She also had the chance to sing the role with the symphony during a rehearsal with the composer.

"That was really exciting to sing the full role in the workshop because I got to be with all these professionals who are well into their careers and really established," she said.

"And I'm so thankful that I had the experience to sing with an orchestra, which is not something many 22-year-olds would have been able to do."

Adding to the excitement, Dewar secured funding through a fellowship with Montreal-based N'we Jinan Art-Works Program, which provides support for Indigenous artists.

"It gives us entrepreneurship experience and training," she said. "It's a year-long fellowship, and we get paid for all the training that we do — and then they had an extra opportunity to get paid to do an internship."

As for *Li Keur*, which means "The Heart" in Michif, Dewar feels there's



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Camryn Dewar, Red River Metis Nation member has embarked on an apprenticeship opportunity with Manitoba Opera for a production that focuses on Louis Riel and the central role of the women in his life.

something for everyone to enjoy.

"It's going to be so cool. We call it an opera, but it's really a piece of musical theatre. It's got the traditional operatic singing but it's also got fiddling and jiggling. There are operatic things like love triangles and attempted murder and big dramatic moments with the orchestra, but then we also have kitchen parties and a boxing match in it. For the full adult chorus, we have about 75 people in total that are all going to be on the stage. We've got a children's chorus as well," she said.

"It's so dynamic and interesting. I would love it if people from the Interlake would come out. All my family and friends from the Interlake are coming, which will be really mean-

ingful to me because it's literally me seeing myself being represented on stage. I think about my grandma and how happy she would be with the Métis folk songs in Michif. It's going to be a really powerful experience."

Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North will take the stage at the Centennial Concert Hall in Winnipeg on Saturday, Nov. 18 at 7:30 p.m.; Wednesday, Nov. 22 at 7 p.m.; and Friday, Nov. 24 at 7:30 p.m. There will also be a student night during a dress rehearsal on Nov. 16, which coincides with Louis Riel Commemoration Day in recognition of the day he was executed.

To learn more or to buy tickets, visit the Manitoba Opera website at mbopera.ca.

