

Local opera singer performs at Carnegie Hall

By Jennifer McFee

A Stony Mountain opera singer always aspired to perform on stage at Carnegie Hall — and last month, her dream became a reality.

Camryn Dewar, 23, has been pursuing her master's degree in music at Montclair State University in New Jersey. This school year, she took a year-long leave of absence to get involved in Manitoba Opera's production of *Li Keur: Riel's Heart of the North*.

After a successful run, Dewar returned to New Jersey in January for an opportunity to perform in a production by one of her university professors, Scott Davenport Richards. For his new opera, called *Blind Injustice*, Dewar performed in the chorus while also serving as the chorus section leader and the understudy for the lead female role.

For Dewar, it was an awe-inspiring experience.

"Lots of the singers were all from the Metropolitan Opera," said Dewar, an operatic soprano. "I'd be there with them all day every day for a month, getting to know them and being in rehearsal and getting to sing for them."

She also connected with the production's musical director, Ted Sperling, a Tony-award-winning Broadway conductor. She approached him when she learned that his next project would be a Carnegie Hall performance of *The*



Camryn Dewar on the Carnegie Hall stage.

Grapes of Wrath, based on the novel by John Steinbeck, with music by Ricky Ian Gordon.

"We developed a rapport. I spoke to him at the cast party for *Blind Injustice*. I asked him if we'd be able to talk about me being involved in *The Grapes of Wrath*. We worked out a collaboration," she said.

"He said that I could be his assistant at Carnegie Hall and I could be in the



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Stony Mountain opera singer Camryn Dewar performed in *The Grapes of Wrath* at Carnegie Hall on April 17.

chorus."

She started going to rehearsals in March for the 120-person chorus, as well as principal rehearsals in New York.

"I was living in Jersey and commuting to New York City every day on the train and going to rehearsal. Everybody in the Carnegie Hall show was super high calibre — mostly Metropolitan Opera legends," she said.

"We were in the Ripley-Grier Studios, which is where lots of Broadway shows do their auditions and rehearsals. It's one of the spaces in New York City that has pianos, practice rooms and dance halls. I ran into so many famous actors and actresses because they were all in the building that we were rehearsing in. It was just so surreal for me to be there with all of these Broadway and opera greats and I'm just this little girl from Manitoba."

The Grapes of Wrath took the stage at Carnegie Hall for one night only on April 17. For Dewar, it was the realization of a lifelong dream.

"We didn't even get into the venue until the day of the show. Usually, you have a dress rehearsal two days before and then you have one day of rest for the opera singers' voices and then you have your show, but it was all the same day," she said.

"We had a huge orchestra with the 120-person chorus. We had a featured ensemble as well, and I performed as a waitress in the small ensemble. There's a little truck stop scene where there are truck drivers and waitresses, so I got to come right up on the front of the stage at Carnegie Hall to do our little ensemble feature."

Adding to the excitement, the enthusiastic response from the audience

brought Dewar to tears.

"I fully cried because we got a standing ovation. I'm right in centre stage and I'm looking at Ted, the conductor, and we got a standing ovation at Carnegie Hall," she said.

"I just started crying and I thought to myself that this is the best moment of my life so far. Nothing could top this. It was the most incredible experience. I can't even actually believe that it happened to me. Did I dream this?"

She credits her professor, Scott Davenport Richards, for opening the door that led to her involvement in both *Blind Injustice* and *The Grapes of Wrath*.

"My path at Carnegie Hall was all thanks to one of my professors in Jersey who gave me one opportunity that seemed like a small thing at first," she said. "But it's always one opportunity that leads to the next and the next."

Looking ahead, the opportunities continue for Dewar, who is in Manitoba for May. She will perform in the Women's Musical Club of Winnipeg competition on May 11.

Then, in June, she received a scholarship to spend the month at Banff Centre for the Arts to workshop a new Métis opera called *Indians on Vacation*. The show, composed by Ian Cusson, will be an operatic adaptation of Thomas King's comedic novel.

"It's going to be super fun. I've heard it's a *National Lampoon's Vacation* type of thing but Métis, which is super interesting and I'm really excited for that," said Dewar, who is proud of her own Métis roots.

"I'll be workshopping that opera with one of Canada's biggest Métis classical composers. That's going to be really cool too."