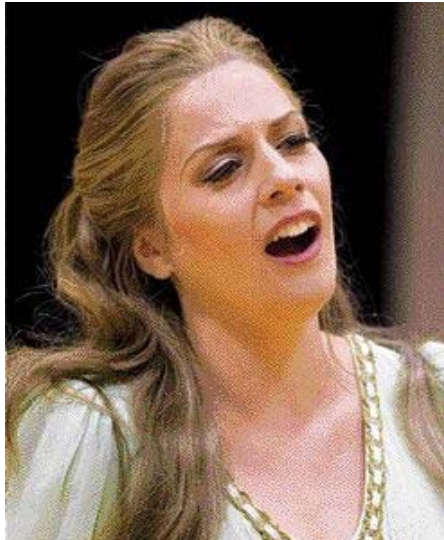


## Helping young singers get to Washington Soprano lends voice to fundraiser

By Steven Mazey, The Ottawa Citizen February 11, 2010



I remember the joy that came from knowing you all shared in the love of singing and music,' says Shannon Mercer, explaining why she's happy to help the girls' choir. Photograph by: Wayne Cuddington, The Ottawa Citizen

She has sung at Carnegie Hall and Royal Albert Hall, she's been a soloist with orchestras across North America and she starred as Pamina in Opera Lyra Ottawa's production of *The Magic Flute*.

Ottawa soprano Shannon Mercer says she owes at least part of that success to the inspiring musical experiences she had as a girl. When she was growing up in Manotick, Mercer sang at events organized by Ottawa's Welsh community and was also a member of the Nepean Youth Choir.

"I remember the joy that came from knowing you all shared in the love of singing and music and that you didn't feel out of place or different, like you might at your school," Mercer recalls.

"Knowing that I wasn't alone in my somewhat unusual passion gave me the confidence to pursue my dream of having a career as a singer. The choral experience is an essential part of being a well-rounded singer. It strengthens your music reading, makes you aware of blending and colour, and allows for magic music-making by collaborating with others."

That's one reason Mercer was happy to lend her voice to a fundraising concert Saturday with Ottawa's Christ Church Cathedral Girls' Choir that will help pay for the choir's trip to Washington in July with conductor Timothy Piper. The choir, made up of girls aged eight to 18, will perform as part of two services at Washington's National Cathedral and will present additional concerts in the area.

Piper says it's the most ambitious trip the choir has taken since he founded the ensemble in 2001.

At Saturday's concert, Mercer will be soloist in Vivaldi's *Gloria* with the choir and an orchestra, conducted by Piper. Mercer is featured on a recording of the piece with Ensemble Caprice that won a Juno Award last year.

In the second half of the concert, Mercer will sing pieces by Purcell, Fauré and others, accompanied by pianist Matthew Larkin, the music director at Christ Church Cathedral. The choir will also perform Piper's settings of poems by W.H. Auden, one of them featuring Mercer as soloist.

Piper invited Mercer last fall, after she befriended two girls from the Christ Church choir who were part of *The Magic Flute* with her at the National Arts Centre.

"Because the girls got to know Shannon through the opera, when we were thinking of people we could ask to perform, she jumped immediately to mind," Piper says.

"I thought she would be a good role model for the girls, who are all interested in singing. To work with a singer of Shannon's calibre is going to be great for them."

In Washington in July, the choir will be filling in for the resident girls' choir there. To get the invitation, Piper first had to send a recording of the ensemble for approval.

"The girls are very excited about it. We're hoping it will be inspirational for them. It's a big deal, because we are the national cathedral of Canada and this is the national cathedral there. The girls will see another major cathedral at work."

At Saturday's concert, Mercer will donate part of the proceeds of sales of her CDs to the trip fund. When she was a member of the Nepean Youth Choir, Mercer travelled with the ensemble on a concert tour of England and Wales. She says it was a memorable experience, and she hopes the girls get as much out of their trip as she did. "The ability to be an ambassador for Canada at such a young age was something that really stuck with me," she says, along with "the proud feeling you get from representing your country and your talent."

Shannon Mercer

With: Christ Church Cathedral Girls' Choir

When and where: Feb. 13, 7:30 p.m., Christ Church Cathedral, Sparks Street near Bronson Avenue. Silent auction starts at 6:30 p.m.

Tickets: \$35 general; \$30 seniors; \$25 students; Free for children under 12.