

# Carnegie Hall

When you step on stage in Carnegie Hall, you are going to want to stop and breathe in the moment. You're going to want to look around—at the ornate pillars, and at the four tiers of balconies, and at the gold-painted ceiling above you.

That's what you'll want to do, the stage manager told us right before we walked down the greenroom steps and into the Isaac Stern Auditorium.

Just don't do it.

If every person in the 208-member choir takes even five seconds to savor the moment, simply walking onstage will consume the allotted concert time, he pointed out.

So on March 21, Southwestern College's A Cappella Choir and its alumni chorus members (joined by choirs from Halstead High School, Katy (Texas) High School, and the Tucson Masterworks Chorale) filed onstage efficiently.

They had been anticipating this moment for nearly a year, raising funds and perfecting the German syllables for Brahms' *Nänie*. For many, this was the first time they had been to New York, and the city sights and sounds receded into the background for this instant of held breath.

Conductor David Gardner cued the orchestra.

Many in the choir were seasoned musicians, with decades of performance experience. But this was extraordinary, a moment of held breath and goosebumps. Then the sopranos' first notes sounded—*Auch das Schöne muß sterben! Das Menschen und Götter bezwinget...* "Even Beauty must perish, though mortals and gods it has vanquished."

The choir's Carnegie Hall performance, two numbers sung



with a professional orchestra and soloists, was a career highlight for these students, and for alumni who had dreamed of this moment for decades.

Donelle (Bergeson) Sommer '97 was a music major in college. Her mother, two aunts, and several other family members flew to New York to hand her a bouquet after her appearance on stage.

Marilyn (Powers) McNeish '54 sang with the Purple Robed Choir a half century ago; the Carnegie concert, she said, will most likely be one of the final times she can sing with a group because of advancing vocal limitations.

When the group's two numbers had ended, ushers led them past signed photos of artists who

have appeared on the Carnegie stage. Stern. Stravinsky. Bernstein. The greatest artists of the world, since Carnegie opened in 1891.

Later in the evening, when the post-concert cruise ship had pulled out of New York Harbor, SC

students and A Cappella alumni gathered on the first deck of the ship. One approached Dr. Gardner.

"As a thank-you for all you've done to make this trip possible, we'd like to sing 'Beautiful Savior,' and we'd like you to conduct."

The poignant hymn, which has pronounced the benediction on SC concerts since a choir member was killed during an East Coast tour during the '30s, rolled over the water. And once more *Nänie's* lyrics seemed eerily appropriate.

*Auch ein Klaglied zu sein im Mund der Geliebten, ist herrlich.* "To be even a song of lament in the mouth of the beloved is glorious."

Glorious.



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