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Whirlwind concert tour ends MHS grad's MYSO career

Group takes second in world competition

By CAROL SPAETH-BAUER

Posted: July 26, 2012

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The Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra (right balcony) joins 33 other ensembles from around the world that competed Summa Cum Laude International Youth Festival and Competition in Vienna, Austria in the beginning of July.

When Mukwonago High School 2012 graduate Tamar Lascelle started playing the violin at age 8, she couldn't have imagined finishing her orchestra career in the magnificent halls of Vienna and Prague.

Yet as a member of the Milwaukee Youth Symphony Orchestra (MYSO) flagship group, the Senior Symphony, Lascelle played her last note with MYSO in the prestigious Summa Cum Laude International Youth Festival and Competition in Vienna, Austria, onstage at the Wien Konzerthaus, home of the Vienna Symphony.

The competition included 34 ensembles from 19 countries, chosen via audition. MYSO was the only American orchestra invited to compete before the internationally renowned jury, which awarded it second place "with outstanding success" in the symphony orchestra category. The

Senior Symphony performed under the batons of music director Margery Deutsch and associate conductor Shelby Keith Dixon.

Lascelle was among 108 members of the MYSO Senior Symphony and their conductors who undertook the major performance and cultural tour of Vienna, Austria and Prague (Czech Republic) from July 2-11. It was the only American orchestra invited to compete in the music festival, held annually in July in Vienna, which included performances in some of Vienna's most beautiful cultural venues including Golden Hall of the Musikverein.

Other appearances included performances in the famed Dvořák Hall within the Rudolfinum, considered one of the most significant Neo-Renaissance structures in Prague; the House of Culture in Teplice (Czech Republic) and the Great Hall of the Konzerthaus in Vienna, with additional outdoor concerts in Pötsching and in the Festsaal, Bad Tatzmannsdorf.

The Senior Symphony played to sold-out crowds, standing ovations and audiences crying because they were so moved by the music, said Lascelle. They played in some of the main birthplaces of music in the top concert halls in the world, as well as a couple of outdoor concerts where people in the audience gave the conductors chocolate and wine to show their appreciation.

"People in Europe seem to appreciate things more. Everyone goes to concerts a lot," said Lascelle. "Everyone over there listens to all genres of music. They accept classical more because it's part of their history.

"In every concert it felt like people were more engaged," explained Lascelle. "Music has emotion in it. It does affect you, and you have to move into it."

The musicians would be exhausted after playing because they put so much effort and emotion into the music, Lascelle said.

The orchestra practiced for a month to prepare for the trip, which included several hours of rehearsal to become familiar with the acoustics of the halls, concerts almost every night and sightseeing sandwiched between it all. They played in concert halls five times bigger than any they had played in before.

"It was so humbling to play in such magnificent halls," added Lascelle. "It was so surreal. Mukwonago seemed so far away."

At the last concert judges chose their favorite groups to play. Every group brought a little of their culture into the performance, and judges told the MYSO group they definitely brought a Milwaukee flair to their music.

"It was amazing to bring our music to them and their music to us," said Lascelle.

As the MYSO Senior Symphony closed the winners' concert at the competition, people hugged them and told them they were amazing. After five years playing with MYSO, Lascelle played her last note in an amazing hall, met the mayor of Vienna and helped MYSO create a bridge between countries with music.

"It's probably the last time I will have that opportunity. To play in front of 4,000 people is so overwhelming," Lascelle said. "The last song was a hymn, and everyone stood up and was singing. Everyone was crying. Music can bond people together so much. ... It was surreal to have this opportunity."

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As she heads to the University of Wisconsin-Madison to study nursing in hopes of becoming a physician's assistant, the tour made her realize the effect music has in her life and made her realize it will always be part of her life in one form or another.

"Music has been so influential to me over the years. It gets me through hard times and stress," Lascelle added. "It made me realize music has become so much a part of my lifestyle that I can't leave it alone."

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--Fran Richman, MYSO Executive Director

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