

CHOIR DIRECTOR COMES FULL CIRCLE

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Music Former Saint Johner brings Toronto-based women's choir she founded back home for concerts



Kelly Galbraith knows a lot about the Imperial Theatre. In 1983-84, as a music student at Mount Allison University, she spent the summer poring over microfiche in the New Brunswick Museum archives, researching for an exhaustive report she wrote on Saint John's music history from 1800-1900, a time when top acts would to play Saint John en route between Halifax and New York.

They'd have all of these funny references, from what people were wearing to the calibre of the performance," she said during a recent phone interview from her home in Toronto, where she works as a music producer for the CBC.

The 200-page report included lots of details on the Imperial Theatre's history. But it wasn't until last summer that Galbraith finally set foot in the building. On July 5 she will realize a long-held dream of performing at her hometown's venue when she leads a concert by Cantores Celestes, the Toronto-based women's choir she founded 20 years ago.

To play the Imperial now in front of old friends and family "is overwhelming." The show, part of the choir's The Circle Never Ends tour, includes performances with old musical friends. "Part of how we came up with the title is how life is like a circle, and everyone is connected, past and present," she said. Saint John singer and "dear friend" Tracy Friars will join the show at the Imperial Theatre. Galbraith says she first met Friars at Park Avenue United Church at age 15, when she was an organist and Friars was in the choir.

Galbraith says she used to fill in at churches across the city in the summer, when the regular organists were on holidays.

"I would play three or four services on a Sunday," she says. Also singing at the Imperial Theatre show is Christopher Lane, Opera New Brunswick's executive director, and another former Saint John choir member who Galbraith remembers from her organist days.

In Fredericton, July 4, when the choir presents a lunchtime show at 12:10 at Christ Church Cathedral, Galbraith will get to see Dr. Willis Noble, her former music professor at Mount Allison who gave her her first opportunity to conduct when he handed her the baton to lead the women's choir. She was instantly "bitten by the bug" to conduct, she says.

Cantores Celestes celebrates its 20th anniversary next year, but Galbraith decided to kick off the celebration early. "I thought, 'What a perfect opportunity to bring the choir back home.'" The tour also includes a July 3 concert at All Saints Anglican Church in St. Andrews.

The concerts will be broken into four sections, starting with classical pieces, including a couple of ancient chants. After that is a selection of Canadian songs such as The Log Driver's Waltz,

followed by pieces from opera composers. The show ends with a series Galbraith calls "global influences," with music from around the world.

And, not surprising, the show wraps with an a capella version of the bluegrass Will the Circle Be Unbroken. Around eight Maritimers are among the 38 of Cantores Celestes' 48 singers who have committed to the New Brunswick tour. The singers are all volunteers and each is paying her own way. Money raised by each of the shows will go towards a local cause: the Ministers Island Restoration Project in St. Andrews, the music program at Christ Church Cathedral in Fredericton and Opera New Brunswick in Saint John.

In Toronto, the choir has raised more than \$20,000 for charity since it formed. After a celebratory brunch the day after her last show, Galbraith will head to her trailer in Coles Island for the month of July, where she plans on walking by the river with her husband and her dogs, and tucking into a stack of good books. "The mountain is going to have to come to Mohammed," she says. "I'm not moving."

Cantores Celestes performs at All Saints Anglican Church in St. Andrews July 3, 7:30 p.m., tickets, \$20, available by calling 529-3978; July 4, Christ Church Cathedral, Fredericton, at 12:10; admission is a freewill offering; July 5, Imperial Theatre in Saint John, 8 p.m.; tickets, \$20, available at the box office or by calling 674-4100.