

LOCAL NEWS

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Symphony, students take centre stage

LAURA JEAN GRANT
The Cape Breton Post



Glace Bay High School students, from left, Felicia Headley, Brandon MacDonald, Jaime Toomey, Scott Cuzner and Catherine Hurley, performed Friday morning at Baddeck Academy with renowned Nova Scotia composer Scott Macmillan, far right on guitar, and Symphony Nova Scotia, conducted by Cape Breton native Martin MacDonald, in back. Laura Jean Grant - Cape Breton Post

BADDECK — With Symphony Nova Scotia behind her and her entire school in front of her, it all began to sink in for Kendall Cogan, Friday morning. After months of practice and preparation, she and fellow Baddeck Academy students Kathryn MacIntyre and Robert Chapman performed with Symphony Nova Scotia, in front of their schoolmates and special invited guests. "It was really setting in when the people from our school came in and sat down. It was like, oh wow," she said. Wow indeed.

A group of 20 local youth from five Cape Breton schools — Baddeck Academy, Glace Bay High School, Cape Breton Highlands Academy, NDA in Cheticamp and Waycobah First Nation School — had the rare opportunity to perform with Symphony Nova Scotia as part of the Sky's the Limit-Centennial of Flight Youth Education Project, co-sponsored by the Silver Dart Centennial Association and Parks Canada, Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site of Canada.

The project was facilitated by renowned Nova Scotia composer Scott Macmillan, who met with the students earlier this year leading them through exercises to explore, through music, the creative and inventive mind of Bell and the Silver Dart flight. The result was the creation of five new musical works, one from each participating school.

Macmillan followed up with the youth at their schools, arranging and orchestrating the students' pieces to be performed by them with the symphony.

But that was just the start of the work for Macmillan who was also commissioned by the Celtic Colours International Festival, Centre Bras d'Or Association and the Silver Dart Centennial Association to compose Suite Silver Dart, a new musical work commemorating the 100th anniversary of the first powered manned flight in Canada by Alexander Graham Bell and the Aerial Experiment Association. The Silver Dart flew into aviation history on Feb. 23, 1909, in Baddeck.

That suite and the Sky's the Limit pieces created by students premiered Friday night at the Savoy Theatre in Glace Bay as part of Celtic Colours and will play again today in an encore at Strathspey Place in Mabou at 2 p.m.

But before those shows, students at Baddeck Academy were treated to a little preview of the Sky's the Limit project Friday morning with the participating students performing with the symphony at the school.

"This is actually the first time these songs have been performed in public," Macmillan explained to the Baddeck students. "So this is a world premiere."

Martin MacDonald, resident conductor with Symphony Nova Scotia and a Cape Breton native, said the symphony is thrilled to be back in Cape Breton and to be involved in a project with youth.

"It's been great working with them. We always find it fun to work with youth," he said, noting that appealing to and getting youth involved is an important aspect of the symphony's operation. "That's the primary mandate of our education program, to put ourselves out there as much as possible."

Meanwhile the young performers in Sky's the Limit were just excited to be in the symphony's company.

"We've heard a lot about the symphony and just getting to play with such a professional backing — it gives us inspiration," said Glace Bay High student Scott Cuzner.

Among the special invited guests Friday morning was Hugh Muller, Bell's great-grandson, who had high praise for the students, describing the performances as "fantastic."

"It's just great. That the symphony came here is a real coup," he added.

Tickets for this afternoon's show at Strathspey Place are still available but only through the venue itself. Suite Silver Dart features performances by Macmillan, Symphony Nova Scotia, Cape Breton tenor Peter Gillis, soprano Laurel Browne, pianist Paula Jane Francis, Scotland's Chris Stout and Catriona McKay, as well as the students.

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