

Opera singer's journey to France no European vacation

New heights: Local vocalist off to perform at prestigious French opera school

Peter W. Rusland
News Leader Pictorial

Opera singer Barbara Walton aims to make a career of getting vocally high on stage. "The adrenalin and energy is kind of addicting," said the Chemainiac who gave an educational benefit show June 26 in mural town's St. Michael's Church.

"If it's been a long time since I've sung, I tend to be nervous.

"But being on stage is about knowing those people are there to hear you, and communicating beautiful music to a group of people is great."

Boosting her aural communication skills is Walton's goal during the Franco American Vocal Academy summer opera program in Perigueux, France.

She is polishing her soprano pipes as Eurydice in the academy's operetta *Orpheus In The Underworld* by Jacques Offenbach.

"I originally had a smaller role because I applied late to fill a spot," said the former student of valley voice teacher Connie Mason.

"But the role ideal for me opened May 10 when a girl dropped out.

"Since then, I've had to learn a whole opera in a month and a half, and 40 minutes of sacred music by French composers."

Orpheus will be performed at Perigueux, in various churches, cathedrals, and during two recitals in a French castle, leaving the Queen Margaret's School grad pumped.

"I'll learn a lot about French music and French," the current Victoria nanny said.

"I stopped taking French in Grade 8 but we'll have daily language courses so that's a relief. This is summer course is also a resume builder."

Walton left July 4 for the tough 6 1/2-week course in Perigueux — about six hours by train from Paris.



courtesy Barbara Walton

France-bound singer Barbara Walton performs during a June 26 benefit concert at St. Michael's church in Chemainus.

She needed more than \$6,000 more for her course, apartment, food and other bills while in France.

Still, Walton, 23, was determined to go, perhaps with help from her parents, and generous patrons.

The Canada Arts Council paid her airfare.

The French sojourn will lend the UVic vocal graduate a career foothold after impressing university professors Susan Young and Benjamin Butterfield.

"Benjamin Butterfield sent me an email saying to apply for the French program.

"My plan is to study with him and go to different vocal coaches," said Walton, who plays piano and violin too.

"Singing's a lot more work than I thought but if you feel passionate about it, it changes from work to something you do.

"My dream goal is that I'd love to be an opera singer; that would make me so happy."

The former Cowichan Music Festival competitor cited Mozart's *The Queen of the Night Vengeance Aria* ("the power and anger in that song is fantastic"), and Liszt's "beautiful art song" *Oh Quand Je Dors* among her favourites.

Meanwhile, Walton's focused on her summer program.

"People should sing — it just makes you feel good."