

KINGS COUNTY ADVERTISER REGISTER

The Register/Advertiser > Opinion

REVIEW: Evangeline premiere sells out



[Wendy Elliott](#)

Published on August 25, 2015

Proud American composer Gwyneth Walker was on hand Aug. 21-23 when her work had its Canadian premiere locally and sold out for all three performances.



© Wendy Elliott

The cast of Evangeline sang powerfully when American composer Gwyneth Walker's new chamber opera had its Canadian premiere locally.

The choral work was based on the iconic poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow as adapted by Walker. The world premiere of the short chamber opera *Evangeline* actually took place in a workshop setting back in March at Southeastern Louisiana University.

Walker had been in Baton Rouge for a composer's residency last year and visited the town of St. Martinville, La. While there she saw the famous *Evangeline Oak* and was introduced to the legend based on the poem.

The tragic love story captured her imagination, she said, and the resulting work was completed last fall. Months ago, Walker sent off an inquiry to Orchard Valley United and in time the Covenanter committee jumped at the prospect.

Hearing it performed was a rewarding musical experience. As one retired guide from the Grand Pre National Historic Site said afterward,

"I have told this story hundreds of times and seen the play a multitude of times, so I was not particularly enthusiastic to go, but I must say it's one of the best."

The production in a hot church was moving, despite the heat. Longfellow's tale simply never

gets old. Furthermore it was meant to come to life in a sacred place like the 210-year-old Covenanter Church. The four singers moved around the historic church and even used a box-like pew to represent Gabriel's deathbed.

Acadia University music student Meggie McKay was a lovely Evangeline, and Patrick Simms sang a robust Gabriel. Charlotte Embree was excellent in the role of the mother Benedicta, and Andre Gaudet of Halifax inhabited one of his ancestors as the priest. Two young local musicians, Sarah McLeod and Chantal Peng, were fine accompanists on fiddle and piano.

Peter Oleskevich of Port Williams did a superb job of preparing the singers, directing and as narrator.

The production of Evangeline marked the 250th anniversary of the arrival of the exiled Acadians in Louisiana, a decade after their deportation, but it ought to be performed on an annual basis in Grand Pré.

The production was dedicated to the memory of Gwen and Doug Archibald. He was organist for many years at the Covenanter Church, but they both loved the rich strains of music and history in the village.

Your weekly flyers

[SEE ALL DEALS](#)[VIEW MORE](#)

Powered by

