

Symphony N.B. comes Home for the Holidays

■ Eleanor McCain performs with orchestra in holiday concert tonight

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Have you been naughty or nice? That is the question Symphony New Brunswick is bringing to the Delta Beausejour on Monday Night.

The symphony's annual Christmas show features the talented Eleanor McCain performing songs from her *Holidays* album which have been re-arranged for the symphony.

"Our Christmas show is usually a little lighter than our regular concerts," explains Michael Newnham, musical director and conductor of the symphony. "It has a little more of the pops feel to it, and we are very lucky to have such a talented artist coming to help us out."

Eleanor McCain was born in Florenceville, and first studied voice in Fredericton, then went on to complete a degree in music from Mount Allison University before heading to Ontario to continue her classical music training. She has released crossover CDs in which she sings lullabies, Celtic-influenced music, and now Christmas songs.

"I have been thinking about a Christmas CD for most of my life," says Eleanor. "I love Christmas and I was also very inspired by my mother who loves the season more than me. So I dedicated the CD to her."

Eleanor made a list of her 19 top Christmas songs she wanted to record, then went into the studio to work on them. John Bailey was the engineer, and when it was time to start cutting so they could pick which songs to put on the album, neither one of them knew which ones they could cut.

"He was the one who said to me, we should just make it a double CD, and let's make one disc naughty and one disc nice, and that is what we did," says Eleanor.

"The nice side are songs with a professional choir in Toronto and with a few others; they are very traditional and quieter and more reflective. They are just nice.... And then on the naughty side, they aren't technically naughty, but they are out of a more secular, up tempo, jazzy or pop contemporary feel."

When Symphony N.B. contacted them, Brigham Young, the producer of the CD, as well as a jazz pianist and band leader, jumped at the chance to rework the songs for a full symphony. In Eleanor's view, the songs have a richer, fuller sound, and it has been a lot of fun to sing them. Admittedly, though, it was a bit of work for Brigham to arrange all the parts.

"It has been really easy to work with the symphonies, though," says Eleanor. "I have already performed the arrangements in Newfoundland and Victoria, British Columbia. It is an incredible feeling to sing



Symphony N.B. musical director Michael Newnham.



Eleanor McCain performs with Symphony N.B. at the Delta Beausejour Hotel tonight. PHOTO CONTRIBUTED

Christmas carols with the symphony backing you up. It will be even more exciting to come and sing them at home."

When asked if she has a favourite Christmas song, Eleanor finds it hard to choose. She has a philosophical viewpoint when it comes to music which suggests that every song is important.

"When music and timeless lyrics come together, it can touch something deep inside us. It can reconnect us with cherished memories, make us laugh, cry, feel hopeful or sad."

"While trained as a classical singer, I draw from several genres of music — classical, Celtic, folk, pop ballads, and jazz standards. The unifying element in my music is that it makes an emotional — and intimate — connection with your life, and those in your life," she says.

But with that in mind, one of Eleanor's favourites is definitely "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas."

"I guess I just think it speaks about being close to family and friends, and that is a big part of what Christmas is all about," she says.

"The other thing I was realizing as the show comes closer, is that I am going to be singing in Fredericton, Saint John and Moncton. Each of those cities holds fond memories for me, and I spent a lot of time in Moncton while I was going to Mount Allison,

so that will be wonderful."

As Michael explains it, the show will have a relaxed feel, and will feature not only songs from Eleanor, but also some classical pieces interspersed here and there to showcase the symphony. Then there will be an opportunity at the end for the audience to join in and sing a couple of Christmas carols.

"I really like doing shows like this," Michael says, "particularly at Christmas time. I like doing something a little bit lighthearted, the type of thing that can be done in a ballroom or some place with a different ambiance than the usual concert hall. It is fun and it feels good, it is a great way to spend time with the orchestra. It is always a really special time and I think everyone should think of it as a holiday pops family concert."