

Estes concert to feature commissioned work
Former Hardin County resident pens music

Sitting at the piano, Elaine Hagenberg tickled out the concept for her song “The Sweetest Music Softly Stealing” in about 30 minutes. The next roughly 11 hours involved the details of editing: the typing, phrasing, dynamics, layout, formatting and final decisions. “I could edit a piece forever. You can always change things and make it better,” said Hagenberg, a Hardin County native. “I’m somewhat new at this. I’ve always been kind of composing, but just now starting to get commissions to write with a specific group or audience in mind.”

In this particular case, Hagenberg’s audience is her former home, after the Simon Estes Committee commissioned her to create a piece of music for world-renowned opera singer Simon Estes, who will perform at Iowa Falls-Alden High School Nov. 28 at 2 p.m.

Hagenberg, the daughter of Tom and Marlene McDonald, was contacted earlier this year by Patrick Gagnon, who is vocal director at Eldora-New Providence High School and also serves on the Estes concert committee. With a Hardin County venue, Gagnon said he figured it only reasonable that there be Hardin County artists involved.

Approximately 100 people will perform Hagenberg’s song, Gagnon said. That includes students from Iowa Falls-Alden and South Hardin high schools and Ellsworth Community College, as well as an adult choir of community members. “Obviously I was excited and honored,” she said. “Anything that promotes the arts in Hardin County I am proud to be a part of.”

Hagenberg graduated from Eldora-New Providence High School in 1998 and Drake University in 2002 with a degree in music education. She is married with three boys: Ian, 6, and 3-year-old twins Luke and Joshua. Besides composing, she started this fall as choir director at Iowa Christian Academy in Des Moines.

According to Hagenberg’s Web site, she was the 2010 Pathway Series winner for Imagine Music Publishing and also earned the Award of Distinction for the Longfellow Chorus International Composers Competition for her compositions “It Is Not Always May” in 2009 and “A Day of Sunshine” in 2010. “A Child of Peace” received second place in the 2010 Orange County Choral Society Magnum Opus Choral Composition Competition.

She said she started the process of getting music published and available for performance two years ago. The Estes concert is her fourth commission. "Music only exists in your head so it is nice to give it life," she said. To create this particular music, Hagenberg said she searched through poetry in the public domain, looking for holiday text. She decided on G.W. Brindley. "He wrote the words and I wrote the music," she said.

Hagenberg said she wanted to make the piece special for the event, but also something she was proud of. "I'm really looking forward to hearing it," she said. "It's fun when you have something in your mind and sit down to the piano and play it, or the computer plays it back to you, but it's never the same as when you hear it live."

Christie Pence, chairperson for the Hardin County Simon Estes Committee, said having an alumna write music for the concert is fitting. "I think that for this concert the ultimate goal is to raise funds for arts and culture in Hardin County," Pence said. "Simon Estes has given us an opportunity to highlight artists in Hardin County and she is definitely one of them. So I think it means a lot for those of us on the committee who are working to bring arts and culture to the forefront of the county."

Estes' "Roots and Wings" tour benefits the Simon Estes Iowa Educational Foundation, which is an Iowa nonprofit corporation. Its dual purpose is to provide scholarships to graduating Iowa high school seniors with financial need and performance experience to aspiring young musicians with college degrees. The concert will also raise funds for a permanent Arts and Culture Endowment Fund through the Hardin County Community Endowment Foundation. The fund will provide the opportunity for residents to contribute to a permanent fund that will support and enrich programs, events and performances in the county.

Estes will perform both Christmas music and his signature song, the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" at the November concert. Hagenberg's published works are available through Imagine Music Publishing and her Web site www.elainehagenberg.com.