

Bows at the ready, Tiger cellists conquer in the spirit of Carnegie

By Tisa Mason

You know the old joke: How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Practice, practice, practice.

It is a great metaphor for the payoff of hard work and determination – strong characteristics of Fort Hays State University. I am so proud of how our faculty and staff stay focused and put in whatever effort is required to stay the course to see our students reach their level of success. We invest everything we have in our remarkable students, preparing them to excel throughout their lives and careers.

Amidst the multitude of illustrations of how we prepare our students, one recent example of the Carnegie Hall expression came to fruition both metaphorically and, well, literally!

It was Tuesday, Oct. 30, and the Russian String Orchestra was on its way to Fort Hays State as part of our Encore Performing Art Series. They arrived in the United States late Monday night, but without the cellists. Apparently, they missed their flight due to some unfortunate ticketing problem. As Ben Cline tells the story, flying with a cello is harder than flying with unhappy children!

Cline, chair of the Department of Music and Theatre, went on to share with me that there was a lot of concern and angst – a missing section of the orchestra, Cline said, is like missing your running backs or defensive line. How would the show go on? Of course the show must always go on – right? And after all, this is Fort Hays State University. Determined. Resilient. A deliverer.

As the evening unfolded, our music chair and our guest conductor put together a plan to save the concert. The orchestra was able to put together enough music for the first half of the concert without the cellos. But they had to have cellos to make the second half of the concert work. Cline had an idea.

Misha (the Russian conductor), invited Cline to select students to play with the orchestra on a piece the students had worked on in the past – a very difficult work that is 30 minutes long (yes, 30 minutes, one song). Cline contacted the students on Monday night and they jumped at the opportunity. Even though they felt unprepared, they were willing to take the risk because they had the opportunity to work with a professional chamber orchestra; indeed, a once in a lifetime moment!

Early Tuesday evening, immediately prior to the performance, the students (Natalie Thomas, Stockton; Clara Kachanes, Great Bend; Jayce Milburn, Arcadia; Tanner Callis, Hays; Megan Rayl, Littleton, Colo.; and Carl Rorstrom, Hays), together with Cline, rehearsed and then performed this 30-minute piece of music with the Russian String Orchestra – all in the same evening. The audience was delighted.

Indeed, it was extraordinary!

I join Professor Cline in saying how really proud we are of these students. In less than 24 hours they helped locate the music, practiced as much as they could, and with that Tiger resilience, did their very best. Their effort and results speak volumes to their commitment and their willingness to take a chance. I am equally proud of Ben Cline.

One of the students described the experience as like “going into battle.” The students were focused. They were prepared. They were practiced.

I, however, describe the evening of Oct. 30, 2018, as a moment in time when our Beach/Schmidt Performing Arts Center was magically transformed into Carnegie Hall.