

Kyle Weary's students pose with him outside Carnegie Hall just prior to taking the stage for the premiere performance of *Paradise Lost: Shadows and Wings* (inset).



# A Night at the Opera

Maryland choir travels to New York City for a grand premiere

Last fall, shortly after being hired as lead vocal teacher at the new Barbara Ingram School for the Arts in Hagerstown, Maryland, Kyle Weary received a forwarded message from a friend. It was a call to vocal groups around the world to apply for a performance spot in the concert premiere of lauded choral composer Eric Whitacre's new opera, *Paradise Lost: Shadows and Wings*, at New York's Carnegie Hall. "I sent in a recording of my students—grades 9-12—in late October," Weary says. "At that point they had only been singing for a little over two months together. I wasn't sure if they'd be invited, but I thought it couldn't hurt to send in the CD."

It certainly didn't; Weary soon got an official invitation. For teacher and students alike, the prospect was both

thrilling and scary. Whitacre was still working on the music, so they would only be getting the score in bits and pieces. In the meantime, Weary had a Big Apple trip to plan. He did this largely on his own, although the concert producer made some hotel suggestions. "We did have to raise funds throughout the year," he reports. Between a singing Valentine fundraiser, a spaghetti dinner, and a benefit concert, "enough funds were raised so each student got a credit of \$150 off the trip."

The week before the June 15, 2010, performance, four final pieces from the composer arrived, leaving students only a couple of days to learn their parts. Luckily, they were up to the challenge. "Most of them were freshmen, and they acted like true profes-

sionals," Weary says. "I was so proud."

Finally, 38 Ingram students, accompanied by 17 adults, climbed on a Manhattan-bound charter bus for the final phase of their operatic adventure. They stayed in the city for four nights and five days, three of which were taken up by rehearsals. The students were just one part of a 425-piece choir, including people of all ages from three countries, but Weary recalls that "the first time they sang together, it sounded like they had been singing together their entire lives."

The group did find time to visit some famous New York sights, but trumping all that was the experience of performing on the Carnegie stage—which none of the students had seen before. "It was just amazing," Weary says, "an incredible success." —Mac Randall

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF KYLE WEARY