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## Shelby County teacher sings at Carnegie Hall

By Glen JenningsThe Sentinel-News Jul 15, 2019 Updated 7 hrs ago

Although the opportunity to perform at such a venue as New York's Carnegie Hall may be rare, that's not why Courtney Sturgill chose to make the journey.

Sturgill, a choral teacher at Shelby County High School, was more interested in reuniting with an old mentor who had a profound impact on her own journey, both as a musician and as an educator.

"It actually wasn't the opportunity to sing at Carnegie at all," she said. "It was the piece we were doing and the opportunity to sing with my choir director again, who is one of my biggest inspirations in my own career."

It all started when Sturgill noticed a Facebook announcement from Western Kentucky University Director of Choral Activities Paul Hondorp.

"He got invited to conduct at Mid-America Productions. They are a production company that goes through multiple venues and Carnegie is one of them," Sturgill said.

She said Hondorp invited not only his current students, but also alumni to perform.

"He is just so passionate about what he does," she says. "He really challenged us all as musicians in a very warm way. He's very encouraging and he highlights your strengths. He's always been a sounding board for me and someone I aspire to be like."

And Sturgill said that she couldn't pass up the chance to perform with him one more time, especially after she learned what they would be performing.

The piece she sang was Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Dona Nobis Pacem*, and both the music itself and the story behind it had a strong resonance for her.

"It means Bring us Peace in Latin," she said, adding that this was not the first time she sang it. "I had never sung with full orchestra until I got to college. This was probably my second year of doing this."

Sturgill said the history of the piece also interests her. Williams, she said, was an English composer who composed *Dona Nobis Pacem* during the 1930s, in the gap between the world wars.

"He was seeing the tensions building in the world toward another war," she said. "He had all this anxiety about it because they had just barely gotten through the last war, so he took text from the Bible, Walt Whitman and a political speech...and put it all together in this major work."

She said the piece has a really powerful emotional arc to it.

"You can hear the whole timeline of a war," she said. "You hear the world crying for peace, then you hear the drums coming and you hear how raw this war wrecks through this town, and then you hear the aftermath."

Sturgill said that although the piece was difficult, especially since she didn't have the opportunity to rehearse much before performing, it was amazing to perform it again, especially alongside old friends and mentors.

And even though it wasn't the main draw for her, she also deeply appreciated the chance to perform in such an iconic venue.

"Standing in the room, you were thinking about all the people that have been on that stage and all the history that's been through it," she said. "It's pretty incredible to think about being a part of that."

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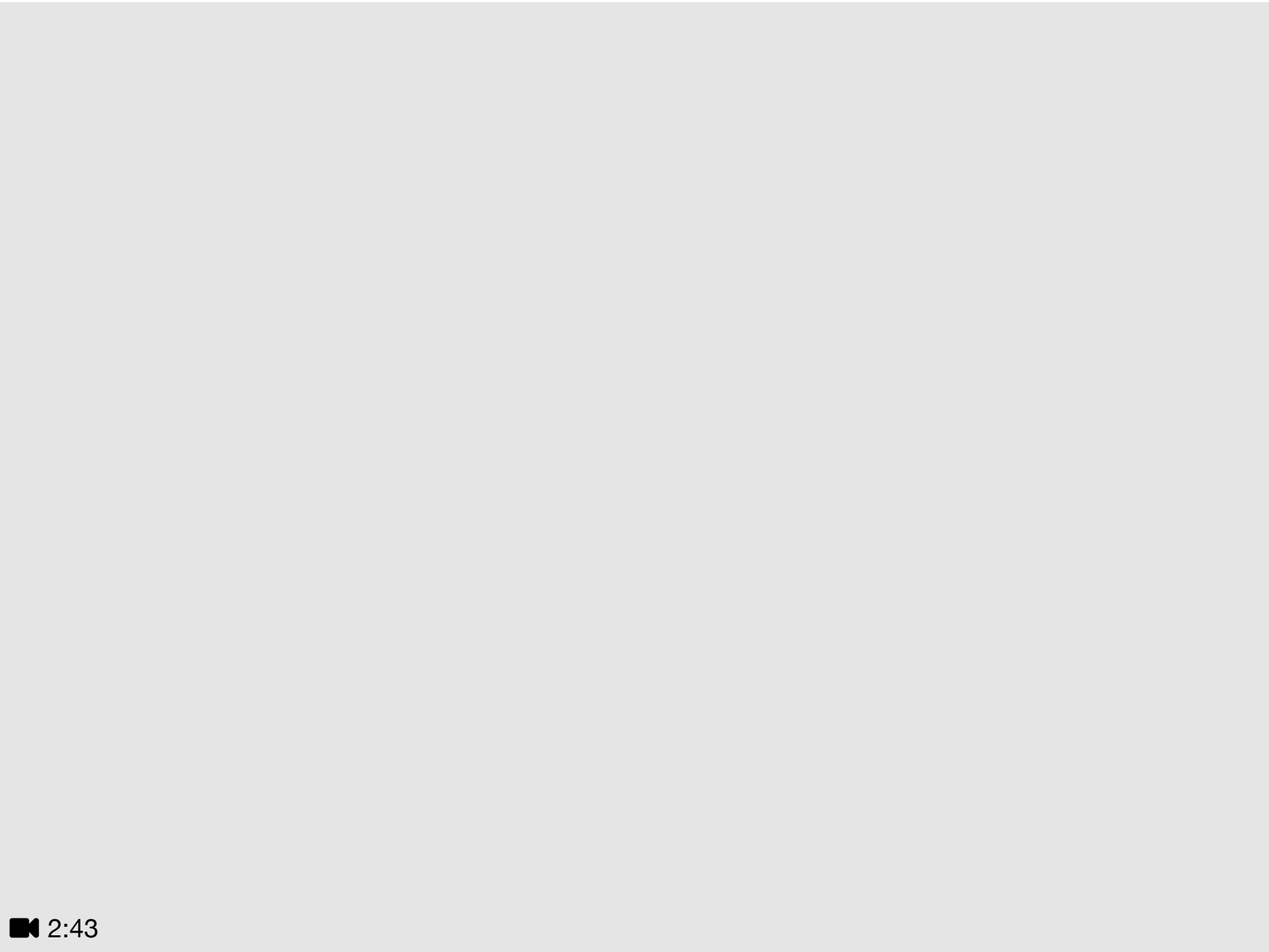
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