

In sharing her music, local harpist seeks to touch others

Applauze High Note Series

by Doreen Tyler

For Amy Kortuem, playing the harp is an amazingly intense experience.

“There is a musical state I reach when practicing or performing,”

Amy described. “It’s like the music

causes time to stop and creates a separate space of its own. It’s very intimate because the harp rests against my shoulder in a kind of embrace. The vibrations of the music go through my whole body.”

In 1988, Amy’s friend Jack McGowan released the “harpist trapped in a pianist’s body” when he bought her a harp. A gifted classical pianist raised in rural Mankato,



Amy became entranced by the harp the moment her fingers were placed on the strings. “What exactly Jack saw in me that told him I was a harpist is a mystery!” she

laughed. “He just has a knowing about most things. And he was certainly right about this one.”

“I just love making music (on the harp). I love the sound. I love the physical pull of the strings. I love the effect it has on both me and the audience.”

One of Amy’s favorite performances is her “To Drive the Cold Winter Away” holiday concert scheduled for Saturday, November 26 at 7:30 p.m. at Good Counsel Chapel in Mankato. She said she created the concert

performance, first presented in 2003, as a way to help people celebrate the holiday season by creating an experience that brought “light into the darkest time of year, warmth in the coldest time of year.” “I wanted the concert to be a space for reflection and inspiration on the year past and the coming year — and on the season itself,” Amy explained. “And on all the ways we create warmth for each other.”

Amy said she has been absolutely struck by the array of emotions her music created in the audience attending last year’s concert. “Finishing the last piece, I looked up. Some people had their eyes closed; some people had tears coming down their faces; some were smiling beautiful smiles. I knew in that moment I had truly done my work in touching people with my music.”

Amy will be donating a portion of the concert’s proceeds to VINE Faith in Action. She says that is her part in driving the cold winter away for those in need of assistance locally.

As a performer, Amy said she is down-to-earth, very approachable. She connects with her audience through her music as well as by sharing stories and information about the songs that she performs. “I want my music to be accessible to all people of all ages,” Amy said. “Part of what makes my music accessible is having it performed by an approachable harpist.”

Amy’s most memorable experience while performing this past year was that of a little girl so taken by her music that she was clapping even before Amy finished playing. “Her mother apologized afterward,” Amy said. “But I told her that (the daughter’s clapping) was the best compliment.”