

Musical Messenger

Harpist Amy Kortuem tells the story of the Virgin Mary on her new CD 'The Light and the Lady'

By Joe Tougas
Free Press Staff Writer

MANKATO — One sign that musicians have become “accomplished” is when their main interest in making a CD is something other than showing how swell they play.

If so, harpist Amy Kortuem has arrived.

Kortuem doesn't even like placing classified ads promoting herself, but sees them as necessary to get jobs playing harp at banquets, weddings, restaurants and even bars.

She makes an ill noise — as though she's recalling plumbing disasters — when she talks about the creepy feeling of tooting her own horn. Or more specifically, strumming her own glissando as it pertains to her first venture into the recording business.

“There's one glissando in the whole piece, and that's because my mother made me,” Kortuem laughs.

The idea of message-before-messenger is all over “The Light and the Lady,” a CD of Kortuem's solo harp playing. For starters, she argued successfully at getting her picture off of the cover.

But the modesty is in the music. Kortuem, who enjoys a good regional reputation for her harp playing, could easily have filled the disc with various selections of her playing that would make for wonderfully acceptable mood music in aromatic gift shops and rattan furniture stores everywhere.

Instead, she saw the production of a compact disc as a vehicle — something to get across her own fondness for the story of the Virgin Mary. Kortuem was inspired by the story of Gabriel coming to Mary, asking her to take on the responsibility of bearing the Christ child.

“It's a musical meditation on Mary,” Kortuem said. “She said yes, knowing it's not going to be easy, but is it for the higher good?”

At the core of the story, she said, is a theme that permeates her own work, an encouragement of people to find the talents within themselves and bring them out from hiding.

Her harp playing is a good example.

Not a student, or even a particular fan, of the instrument growing up in Mankato, Kortuem was introduced to the harp by a friend while in college, where she was studying mass communications. Kortuem took an immediate liking to the instrument and for the past 10 years has become a pro.

From playing in Renaissance trios to solo workings of medieval music, Kortuem's relationship with the instrument this year reached the inevitable — a time to record. She worked with



Carynn Modory

Harpist Amy Kortuem has released a compact disc of her playing, recorded in the Good Counsel Chapel in Mankato.

Carl Menk, head of Syn-trak Studios in Le Center, who recorded her for six hours in the Good Counsel chapel.

“I didn't want this to be Amy showing off what she can do on the harp. I wanted it to reach and affect people,” she said.

“I wanted to do something that's fulfilling in my personal life, and I know my harps allow me to be a messenger of this. I know my harps affect people.”

“The Light and the Lady” contains music based on Gregorian chants and traditional European melodies, accompanied on the CD sleeve with lyrics of those works, all of them pertinent to the promotion of Mary's story.

She includes the lyrics for those interested in taking up the meditation on Mary's life. In an essay on the back, she describes saying “yes” to the call of using the harp music as a messenger of the Mary story.

I could have kept the harps in the living room and maintained my anonymous, comfortable routine. But what good would that have done? Instead, I listened to the gentle whispering of Spirit (and the not-so-gentle prodding of family, friends and fans) and put myself into this recording.”

The 55-minute disc was recorded Sept. 29 during the course of six hours.

“I was prepared,” she said. “I just wasn't prepared for how easy it was to make a beautiful sound in that place.”