

Vyhnalek Makes All State Choir

by Max Novak

Being the best in a small school is a magnificent accomplishment. Rising to the top of a large school, with a much larger group of students is an even greater achievement. However, to be selected to All State Music is considered one of the most accomplished honors a musician can attain while in high school.

Sophomore Ella Vyhnalek realized that sought-after privilege that so very few high school musicians are able to experience. She was chosen to participate in the Nebraska All State Choir.

Making it to the Nebraska All State Choir was a process. To prepare, Vyhnalek met a couple of times weekly for over two months to practice the songs with Steve Jirsa, the school's music teacher.

"Students only get three months to learn the music, and then have only two days to perfect the selected excerpts that they will use for the audition," Jirsa said.

Finally it was time for the hardest part, the audition. "It was tough trying to get everything perfect; it took lots of practice," Vyhnalek said.

Students auditioned by creating a recording. When they thought they had the best version of their singing, it was uploaded and judged.

"It was hard to figure out which one was my best performance," Vyhnalek said. "Eventually I felt pretty good about it, and Mr.

Jirsa and I decided it was good."

The sheer amount of talent and the amount of people trying out makes it very tough to be chosen. Each year, approximately 5,000 of the best high school musicians in the state of Nebraska audition for the Nebraska All-State Band, Chorus, Jazz Band and Orchestra which are sponsored by the Nebraska Music Education Association.

It's always stressful waiting to see if you are accepted to something you've tried out for, especially when it's something as exclusive as All State Choir.

"While I waited I worried that I didn't do it well enough. I wish I would have practiced even more than I did because it took me a lot of tries to figure some of the notes out," Vyhnalek said.

Only about 440 out of the more than 5000 students that audition for All State are chosen.

"When I found out I made it, I was sitting in Spanish class. Mr. Jirsa, our music teacher, popped in and said I made it. I was so shocked and surprised because I didn't think that my audition was the best it could have been."

The person who really made All State memorable for the musicians was the director, Dr. Pearl Shangquan, Director of Choral Activities and Professor of Music at Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

"She was wonderful. We all called

her 'Choir Mama.' Without the director, the choir would have just been students singing, but with the director the choir was together and made everything sound fantastic."

After three days on the UNL campus, the All State Music Ensembles performed on November 22nd at the Lied Center for Performing Arts Center.

"It was amazing to hear so many talented voices come together for our performance," Vyhnalek said.

Vyhnalek made many memories during her time at All State.

"Meeting new people and hearing so many voices in sync and listening to everyone was my favorite part of the experience. We had to sing a song without the director because that's how the song was originally written."

One of the most memorable moments didn't even happen at UNL, but in a hotel nearby.

"One of the traditions is for the All State members to go to the Embassy Suites and sing down the stairs and on the balconies. It's almost magical," Vyhnalek said.

Overall, making All State was a huge accomplishment and something Vyhnalek is very proud of.

"All State Music is something that I will remember forever. It was an amazing experience and an honor to be included in such an exclusive group. I hope I can make it every year and not just my sophomore year."