

Singing for the Escarpment

Article and photographs by Linda Lee

For many, it just isn't summer without an outdoor music festival or concert. For supporters of the citizens' group Protecting Escarpment Rural Land (PERL), it isn't summer without a new tradition, a benefit concert atop Burlington's Mount Nemo.

What began in September 2007 as a small outdoor benefit concert featuring PERL co-founder and two-time Juno winner Sarah Harmer and Grammy-nominated Barenaked Ladies, the "I Love The Escarpment" concert drew a sold-out crowd to the Johnston farm and raised funds for PERL. Gathering a year later on Sept. 20 at the same Mount Nemo farm, a larger crowd of nearly 800 music lovers tried to squeeze under a white tent for an unforgettable afternoon with Sarah Harmer and some of the nation's most respected musicians and vocalists.

Sharing the intimate stage with Harmer was a talented group of friends and industry peers that included Juno winner Derek Miller, music icon Bruce Cockburn and Grammy nominated Leslie Feist.



Down at Johnston's farm: the audience overflowed out of the tent.





From left: Juno award-winner and PERL co-founder Sarah Harmer at the second benefit concert, "I Love the Escarpment, Too!" was joint by Bruce Cockburn, Leslie Feist and Derek Miller. Below, Harmer with her band, Cockburn and far right, Feist.



The supportive audience enjoying the show.



Obvious concert highlights for the audience included Harmer's performance of "Escarpment Blues," a song penned about a proposed quarry, and witnessing music history when Harmer, Cockburn, Feist, Miller and friends took to the stage for the finale. For Harmer, PERL's executive committee and small army of volunteers, however, the event highlight most likely was the raising of funds and awareness.

Proceeds from the second annual "I Love The Escarpment, Too" benefit concert, raffle and auctions support PERL's ongoing campaign to stop Nelson Aggregates' 2004 application for a new 82-hectare quarry in the heart of Mount Nemo.

Located on the Niagara Escarpment and in Ontario's Greenbelt, the Mount Nemo area was once inhabited by Neutral Indians and is part of a designated UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve. It is habitat to such species as the threatened Jefferson Salamander, the pileated woodpecker and the endangered butternut tree. The Mount Nemo plateau is also a point of origin for more than 20 tributaries.

The proposed quarry would be south of its existing one on No. 2 Sideroad and close to Harmer's childhood Mount Nemo home, a farm where her parents still reside. Limestone mined from the proposed quarry would be used in asphalt,

buildings, concrete and roads, all required to support development of the region. PERL proposes an alternative to the new quarry: increase asphalt reuse and recycling and take aggregate from places close to but not on the Escarpment.

PERL believes the proposed quarry threatens the Niagara Escarpment. It could remove significant wetlands, groundwater and disrupt the headwaters of the Grindstone Creek's two tributaries. Some key concerns include blasting, rehabilitation, wildlife displacement and the water supply.

PERL has more information at www.perlofburlington.org. In a re-

cent community forum organized by PERL, renowned architect Douglas Cardinal spoke of a vision for the Niagara Escarpment based on a cultural and natural heritage. Sharing this vision, PERL requested funding from the Burlington Mayor's Future Green Fund to carry out a scenario planning process that would transform and rehabilitate the existing 600-acre quarry and to form the development of a Natural Heritage System.

Linda Lee is a Burlington-based freelance writer who supports PERL and enjoys photographing and exploring the Bruce Trail and the Niagara Escarpment.