

Isle kids hit stage in New York City

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Cora Lau still has the time on her cellphone set six hours ahead after spending a memorable week in New York with her Niu Valley Middle School classmates.

The 13-year-old was one of about 60 students from the school's concert band to perform at Carnegie Hall this month. Cora says she misses New York so much that she can't bring herself to change the time, and still chats with her friends about the trip.

"It's just one of those things you're going to remember," said Cora, a tuba player. "Music kind of brought us together."

For LaVynder Hoohuli-Lopez, a Waianae Intermediate eighth-grader who also performed at Carnegie this month in a separate festival, the moment before performing on the world-class stage was nerve-racking, but as she and her eight classmates starting singing with the choir, "it was better because we just let the adrenaline out." She says she's happy to be home in the warm weather.

"It was awesome," said LaVynder, 13. "It's such a cool experience to see other people, and I've never experienced meeting people from other places. It was great."

Waianae Intermediate's choir and Niu Valley Mid-

dle's band joined the ranks of a few other Hawaii public schools in performing at Carnegie Hall. The Waianae students performed in the National Middle School and Children's Choir on March 12 as part of a group of about 200 students from across the country. Niu Valley's band was featured in the New York Wind Band Festival on March 14, a prestigious series which typically invites high school and college bands. Both groups had to send in audition tapes last year.

None of the students had been to New York, and for some of them it was their first time on an airplane.

Shanita Akana, Waianae Intermediate's choir director, described the night her students graced the revered stage as "magical." Akana said the group's four chaperones became hanai aunties and uncles to the other students, ushering them to the bathroom and making sure they were all right.

"I was beaming with pride. I was crying inside," Akana said. "It was the reality of the dream fulfilled in that moment. We became a family. Those children on that stage were my own."

The group toured sites

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COURTESY KEITH KOBUKE

Students from Niu Valley Middle School spent a week in New York sightseeing. The concert band was invited to perform at Carnegie Hall this month.

CARNEGIE

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including the Statue of Liberty, the Empire State Building and the 9/11 Memorial. None of the students had been to New York, and for some of them it was their first time on an airplane. They arrived home March 17 — three days later than planned due to a snowstorm and other challenges. Akana said she began to panic, but donations started pouring in. They collected about \$7,000 to pay for hotel, food and clothing ex-

penses, and on their last day were welcomed into the home of a Hawaii family living in New York.

The Niu Valley group arrived home March 18 after watching the New York Philharmonic and "The Phantom of the Opera," and having a snowball fight at Central Park — it was many of the students' first time seeing snow.

Band directors Zachary Morita and Wayne Fanning recalled that just hours before their performance, the group had to lug all of their instruments and equipment to Carnegie from their hotel after a blizzard hit. The stu-

dents looked polished in their aloha attire band uniforms but donned sneakers while trudging through the snow.

They said emotions swelled as the group hit their final notes of the 30-minute performance, receiving a standing ovation.

"It is the biggest stage in the world. We couldn't believe we were there," Morita said. "When they were done, probably half the kids were crying because they were so overwhelmed and overjoyed. That was really nice to see them connect so much emotionally with the music."



TRANSIT

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draft plan that were allocated funding include upgrades to the Waipahu Transit Center, which will cost \$3.5 million for construction and is slated to start early next year. Work would cover sidewalk widening and improved bus shelters. The city has allocated \$500,000 for the planning and design of studies to address areas with flooding and

think a lot of people going forward want to see how the community evolves with rail coming online."

Last year DPP held a meeting to gather input from residents on short-term projects. The proposals were vetted, and some were included in the draft plan. The department has a \$52,010 contract with PBR Hawaii to help with the Waipahu action plan.

Waipahu resident Walter Smith said it is not realistic to implement all of the projects in the short term due

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