

Music to their ears

Thanks to a 'sizable' donation from two longtime patrons of the NAC, Harvey and Louise Glatt, hard-of-hearing orchestra fans will be in for an aural treat the next time they take in a NACO show, writes Tony Lofaro.

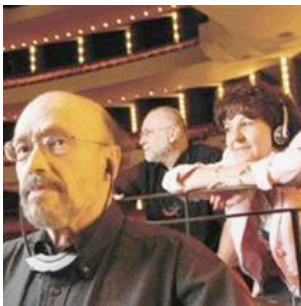
Tony Lofaro, The Ottawa Citizen

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When the National Arts Centre Orchestra plays its first few notes tonight, Louise Normand will be hearing them for the first time.

Ms. Normand, partially hearing impaired since birth, will hear the crisp sounds of the orchestra using the NAC's new infrared assistive learning system for hard-of-hearing patrons.

The infrared transmitter system is being installed in Southam Hall, the theatre and the smaller studio space, replacing a wireless FM system that has been used since 1983.



NAC patron Harvey Glatt, front, Michel David, centre, and Louise Normand, executive director of the National Council of Federal Employees with Disabilities, test the new Sennheiser assistive learning system at the National Arts Centre. Mr. Glatt says the new listening unit is 'much better' than its 25-year-old predecessor.

Chris Mikula, The Ottawa Citizen

"I'm so excited about going to the concert," said Ms. Normand, 58, an executive director of the National Council of Federal Employees with Disabilities, as she tested the system at the NAC yesterday.

The system is compatible with all types of hearing aids, and allows listeners to use a Sennheiser headset, or bring their own headphones to plug into the Sennheiser system.

It all was made possible thanks to a "sizable" donation by longtime NAC patrons Harvey and Louise Glatt.

Mr. Glatt has long felt the NAC should upgrade its system to take advantage of improvements in sound technology. Now, the new system is opening up a whole new world of theatrical performances to Mr. Glatt.

"I'm a typical older male rock 'n' roll-damaged (guy) who has poor high-frequency, so my hearing aid automatically boosts the high-frequency without boosting the mid and low (frequencies) as much," Mr. Glatt said.

"When I turn this on, my hearing (aid) is going to adjust for my particular type of hearing. It's a much better system."

Ms. Normand wore hearing aids until seven years ago, when she had surgery to implant an electronic device to help her hear. She'll bring her own headphones to the NAC and plug them into the new system.

Mr. Glatt said the system is a wonderful "enhancement" to NAC performances, and allows for a better appreciation of the music. He said the placement of better quality microphones throughout the three NAC venues also contributes greatly to better sound reproduction.

"Many people don't come to the theatre, because they think they won't be able to hear," said Mr. Glatt. "But this might open it up for a lot of people to come back and give it a shot."

After testing different systems, the NAC decided to go with Sennheiser because it is becoming the standard in concert halls around the world, said David Ship, the NAC's manager of production services.

The NAC will have 50 receiver units available to patrons.