



One musician reminds us of the power of music to help save lives. Brian Shaheen tells us about his performance at Carnegie Hall in “Requiem for Darfur.”

By BRIAN J. SHAHEEN

400,000 people killed. With over 2 million people in camps with barely any food or water, this sounds reminiscent of the Holocaust or the Rwandan genocide. Only it's happening today. Since 2003, the Sudanese militia, which is being funded by the Sudan government, is fighting two rebel groups in Darfur: the Sudanese Liberation Army/Movement and the Justice and Equality Movement. The sprawling refuge camps make distribution of food and water difficult, and the safety of the innocent women and children nearly impossible. Despite peace agreements from the United Nations and other efforts to stop the genocide, the killings continue to plague the area, backed by the Sudanese government, who are refusing the entry of U.N. peacekeepers. Mass starvation, hundreds of rapes and killings are happening right now.

I received an email from my choir director announcing placement for the “Requiem for Darfur.” At the time, I knew virtually nothing about Darfur. There were signs on subways around the city of New York saying: “400,000 killed, millions uniting to SaveDarfur.org.” Posters in Harlem and Chelsea promoting the “Requiem for Darfur” concert, showed an African-American girl walking towards a camera. The concert program was Guiseppe Verdi’s “Requiem” to be performed in Carnegie Hall on Monday, January 22nd, with acclaimed instrumentalists from around the world: Mia Farrow was the host, along with the concertmaster from the New York Philharmonic, six first chair upright bassists from various prominent international orchestras, students from the Manhattan School of Music, and the powerful conductor, Maestro George Mathew, who had previously performed Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony in a benefit concert for the victims of the 2004 South Asian tsunami. I was eager to join

the cause, both to be able to sing in Carnegie Hall again and to join others in working against a catastrophic genocide occurring right now in Africa. With only three days of rehearsal, including the concert, we had a lot of work to do.

The rehearsals took place for 3 hours on Saturday and Sunday before the concert. Justin Bischoff was the assistant conductor who guided us meticulously through the entire work, focusing especially on the difficult fugues that ran through the piece. With only a short amount of time to prepare, all of us were under a great deal of pressure. When I finally met our conductor, Maestro George Mathew, I was struck by his passion for music. It was astonishingly contagious, as well as reminiscent of the late Leonard Bernstein. We were all captivated by his powerful intensity and charisma on stage yet surprised by his humble meekness offstage. The concert at Carnegie Hall was amazing, considering the little time we’d had to put everything together. The sound shook the audience while pictures of Darfur were shown behind us. The soloists were powerful, especially the bass, Morris D. Robinson, whose speaking voice resembled James Earl Jones, and the soprano, Alexandra Deshorties, whose voice soared to a high C with ease and stunning force at the climax of the last movement. The silence before the thunderous applause was all we needed to know that, in some small way, we had helped the refugees in Darfur.

The concert aimed to raise \$280,000, and this money went to help the refugees in Darfur. To learn more about Requiem for Darfur, go to requiemfordarfur.org. To learn more about the ongoing tragedy in Sudan, go to savedarfur.org, unicefusa.org, or amnesty.org. By aiming our minds toward peace in this nation, we are taking steps toward achieving peace in the world.