

Tulane SoPA grad student leads Super Bowl choir

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Editor's note: This report appeared first on Fox8live.com on Feb. 5, 2024. Jessica Harvey is a graduate student in the Tulane School of Professional Advancement's Master of Arts in Teaching program.

A phone call in early January changed everything for Jessica Harvey, the choir and vocal music instructor at KIPP New Orleans High Schools.

"We were coming off winter break and I get a phone call from a Super Bowl official saying we want your choir from KIPP New Orleans to sing. And I was like, ok great, let's go. And then they said we need 125 voices and that's when I knew this was so much bigger than me, than my school," said Jessica Harvey.

Now, Harvey holds another title—director of the Greater New Orleans High School Choral Collective, a 125-student choir made up of singers from 12 different schools. Their voices will unite on Super Bowl Sunday, performing "Lift Every Voice and Sing" alongside New Orleans native and Grammy Award-winning artist Ledisi.

"The song that they are performing is a song, a hymn, of their background, their ancestry," said Harvey.

The moment, and opportunity to sing to an international audience, didn't seem to be lost on any of the choir's members. Wesley Whitsett is a senior at McDonogh 35. He started singing two just years ago.

“All I can do is thank God the father for this opportunity, because without him I wouldn’t be here. I always wanted to perform on the Super Bowl stage and now I get that chance,” said Whitsett.

Damyri Bickham attends John F. Kennedy High School. She believes this will be a big moment for her community.

“It motivates others to follow their dreams and stuff. I think we’re setting a good example for other kids around the city,” Bickham said.

“This is one of those moments where you prove to them that the sky is truly the limit. This is one of those moments that proves that anything is possible,” said Harvey.

During a rehearsal Wednesday at Landry Walker High School on the West Bank, Harvey emphasized to the members of the young choir that they not only needed to sound good but also look good. Only blue or black jeans, no rips or holes and tennis shoes only. Harvey says the directors and students have worked too hard to have the audience distracted by attire.

“We did this with such dedicated choir directors. People are passionate, they love what they do. These kids sacrificed. When it snowed in New Orleans, we were on Zoom calls having rehearsal. So, these kids have been putting in the work,” said Harvey.

Everyone associated with the collective choir had to swear to some secrecy and had to sign a non-disclosure agreement. That agreement included a clause that prevents any recording of their performance of the song from airing before the Super Bowl. But after hearing the choir’s rehearsal, we have no doubt they’ll bring their A-game on Super Bowl Sunday.

Reporting by Thanh Truong, WVUE New Orleans.