

Opera for Everyone at Sunday concert

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GEORGETOWN — Think you don't like opera? Think again. Most people are won over to a new appreciation of opera by the antics of opera singer Darby Tench, who will bring her humorous and singular act to the Georgetown free Sunday Concert Series on July 27.

Tench, who is both an opera singer and a University of New Hampshire professor, is really looking forward to winning new converts in Georgetown while bringing a satisfying opera performance to local opera buffs as well.

Described by critics as “part Dame Edna, part Anna Russell, and part La Professoressa,” Tench is an acclaimed musician. One enthusiastic comment, from a concert director in Portsmouth, N.H. was “You shook the dust off the chandeliers!”

Tench, an imposing, six foot tall opera singer, is humorous and energetic, describing her mission in life as “To get people to go to, watch, and listen to opera – not to miss this glorious music before they die. I start them on the road to loving opera.”

Tench uses her audiences a lot, incorporating them into her act with improvisational comedy. The reason many people dislike opera is because they do not understand what is going on in the plot and Tench makes sure this does not happen by filling her audience in on everything that is happening in the story.

“It's so important that people understand what people are singing,” says Tench.



As an example, she says an opera audience might just see a woman on stage singing to her husband about the existence of love after death. The pathos is lost if the audience fails to realize that this is the ghost of a dead wife singing to her husband.

“My little cog in the opera wheel is to reach opera buffs but also people who think they don’t like opera,” says Tench. “I use humor to get them into such an attentive state that they actually listen. A lady came up to me after one of my shows and said she had to drag her husband to my performance. When they got back home after the performance he went straight to his computer and ordered two operas.”

Tench finds moments like this validation that she is fulfilling her mission of bringing new fans to opera. Her mission has led her to leave audiences in stitches and yearning for more opera in Brazil, Argentina, China, Maine, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts.

As time passes, Tench faces the same reality as other opera sopranos.

“The reality for any soprano is you get older- so you find a way to stay in the game, and comedy is a wonderful way to do it,” says Tench. “I’m six feet tall and I won’t see 17 again, so I set my Madame Butterfly in Sweden where people are tall and middle-aged people make love all the time.”

Tench knows many people are stuck with the old concept of fat opera singers just standing there and singing in a foreign language - “the Park ‘n Bark technique.” Opera has changed a lot since then, and are now full of attractive people who fit their roles and move gracefully.

Even Tench’s friends have been known to opt out of an evening at the opera.

“I was once trying to get a friend to come see an opera with me and the friend said, ‘I’m sorry. I have an appointment to stick needles in my eyes that day.’”

A Yale grad, Tench is married to John Leicht, who plays jazz trumpet every week in Durham, N.H. She teaches Italian at the University of New Hampshire, and is the author of “Fictive Mediation and Mediated Fiction in the novels of Giovanni Verga.”

“I don’t go by my married name, because Darby Leicht would sound like some kind of light beer,” laughs Tench.

Joining Tench in Georgetown July 27 will be tenor Alan Schneider, who is active in the Boston opera scene.

“He’s the sexiest tenor alive,” enthuses Tench.

Their accompanist will be pianist Bradley Pennington of the Bel Canto Opera Company in Boston, where he teaches the Italian method of opera singing “with the voice placed forward.”

She says she is really looking forward to performing in Georgetown.

“I’m just so thrilled to be performing an outdoor concert in this beautiful setting,” says Tench.

Residents are invited to enjoy this Sunday’s July 20 performance by the band “Don’t Call Me Shirley” at American Legion Park, and then come back on July 27 for a fun-filled and unforgettable evening of comedy and opera with Darby Tench. The free concerts start at 5 p.m. and run through to 7 p.m.

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