



Opera in South Carolina

By Vikki Moran

Opera in South Carolina is alive and exciting with the prolific efforts of The Palmetto Opera. The opera's motto is "See it Once, Love it Forever."

The Palmetto Opera began in 2001 with a group of motivated aficionados dedicated to bringing professional opera to South Carolina. TPO delights South Carolina enthusiasts and novices alike, showcasing highly skilled and much-admired local performers and local orchestras, as well as acclaimed international opera soloists to create varied performances.

Opera Thursday is held once a month at The Villa Tronco Italian Restaurant in downtown Columbia and may be extended to two evenings a month.

Revitalization of Columbia's downtown and Villa Tronco's Italian cuisine is a reason enough to attend. The addition of the lively performance makes for a unique and entertaining evening. Local Midland Opera singers perform famous operatic arias as well as some Broadway classics. These performances offer a relaxed venue where everyone can eat and give opera a chance.

Operatic baritone and voice teacher Peter Barton is the opera's director. He says the mission of The Palmetto Opera is to promote and provide opera to the citizens of greater Columbia and South Carolina to enrich lives culturally and educationally and encourage a love of opera in future generations of artists and audiences from the diverse communities it serves.

He is grateful for the advocacy and city

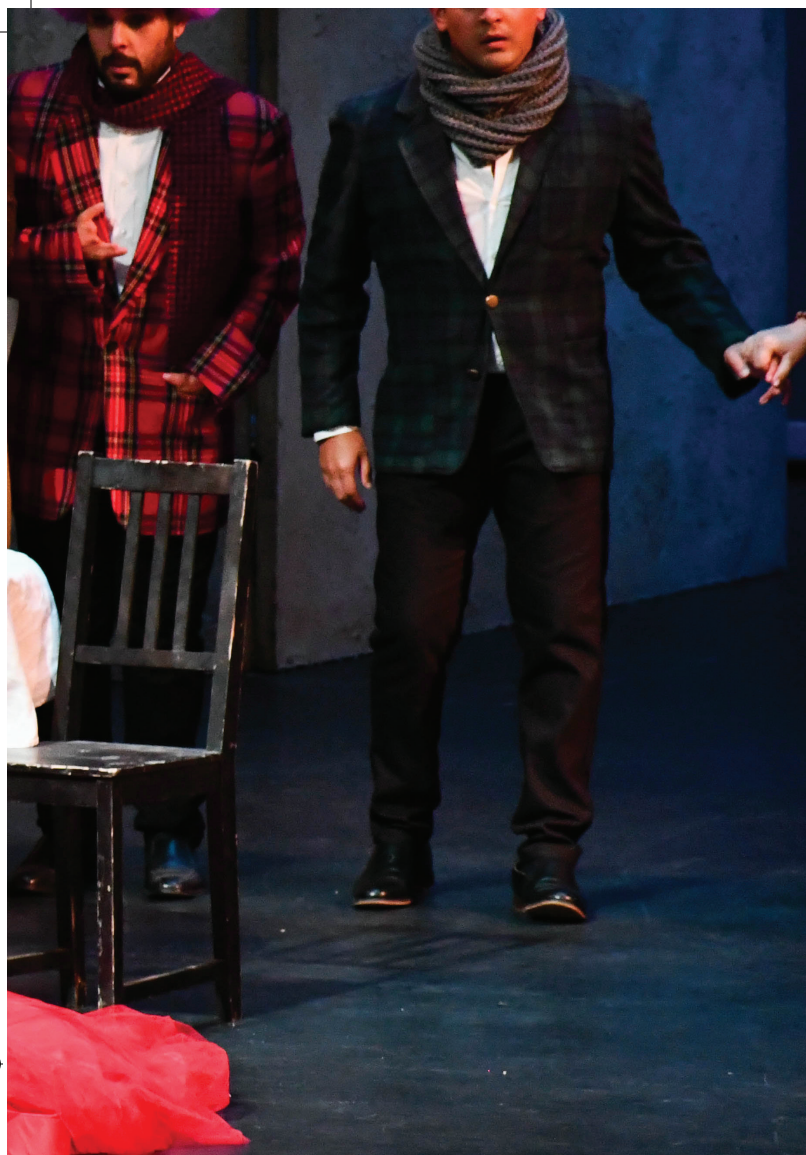
officials who always support Palmetto Opera in "a big way," he says.

The Future

Peter is looking forward to the presentation of "Rigoletto" in the 2021-2022 season, leaving behind the bizarre limbo of the performing arts during the pandemic.

Before this year's operas, there will be lectures for those interested in a conversation about what will be performed. The "Rigoletto" performance is January 30 at Koger Center for the Arts, University of South Carolina, 1051 Greene Street, Columbia.

"Great Moments in Italian Opera" will liven Koger Center with a great evening of opera June 5.



THE PALMETTO OPERA PRESENTS:
Giuseppe Verdi's
Rigoletto
Featuring
Teatro Lirico d'Europa

**SUNDAY
MATINÉE**

JANUARY 30, 2022 | 3:00 PM
KOGER CENTER FOR THE ARTS
Purchase tickets at palmettooperasc.org
or the Koger Center Box Office: 803-251-2222

Performers have been entertaining South Carolina audiences since The Palmetto Opera's inception in 2001. *Photo credit for left image*

The Present

TPO is in fundraising mode. Donations are used to support performance costs of productions, offset performance fees for monthly Opera Thursday performances featuring local opera singers and to cover fees for opera students to perform in an educational outreach program for high school students called Opera is Awesome.

Opera is no stranger to the South, but like much of the United States, it has suffered from a lack of enthusiasm by younger Americans.

In a 2020 article for OPERAWIRE titled "How Young People Can Get Interested in Opera," writer Alkis Karpaliotis sheds light on positioning opera to young people.

"It is a journey through which one's deepest emotions reveal themselves," he says. "With opera, we can immerse ourselves in the drama, crying and laughing and gasping in sweat along

the way, more than we can with any other form of art. There are operas that make us cry—for how could a cathartic combination of theater, dance and music not bring fire to one's heart—and others that make us smile. Few, if any, art forms can bring such a wide range of feelings to our bodies."

Perhaps, if stated in these terms and followed through with opera performances, young people with raging and ranging emotions could become hooked on the craft.

The Past

After receiving a music degree from Furman University, soprano opera star Sarah Reese from Pelzer, South Carolina, made her New York debut in 1981. Since then, Sarah has performed with the world's most famous orchestras and conductors. She also became the principal artist with New York Metropolitan Opera and

artist-in-residence at Opera Company of Boston.

However, it was not an easy success as Sarah encountered racial bias while earning her music degree. Her journey, and her great success, helped forge racial progress.

The 2010 Candace Bailey book "Music and the Southern Belle: From Accomplished Lady to Confederate Composer" outlines a rich classical culture of the past. It highlights five early female composers of the 1800s, illustrating the long connection to opera and classical music.

Southern states, especially South Carolina, have an applaudable classical music history. Whether listening to Sarah Reese recordings, catching virtual performances in theaters or at home, or venturing to Columbia to enjoy enthusiastic live performances of this art form, everyone is invited to give opera a try. ■