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New troupe is ready to GLOW

Organizers bringing operettas back to the Upstate

By Ann Hicks

Arts writer

Two sopranos, engaged in a lively duet, argue about which is the true diva in Mozart's hilarious one-act work "The Impresario." The comic opera also is the calling card of a newly formed performing arts company that will present "The Impresario" at 8 p.m. April 29 and 30.

Thanks to recent efforts by two newcomers to the Upstate, Dr. Christian Elser, a member of Presbyterian College music department, and his fiancée Jenna Tamisiea, a musical theater actress, the area's arts scene now boasts **GLOW**, or Greenville Light Opera Works. The company plans to specialize in European operettas and American musical theater.

While "The Impresario" is GLOW's introductory performance in the Upstate, it is not one of the troupe's planned main-stage productions, which will be produced at Centre Stage. Instead, Elser calls it part of the company's off-stage series, performed in collaboration with other arts organizations.

For example, "The Impresario" at Warehouse will serve as of the theater's June main-stage production of the drama, "Amadeus." Later, in May, **GLOW** will perform at Pickens' Pumpkintown Opry with musical theater selections from such evergreen shows as "Oklahoma" and "Annie Get Your Gun."

Greenville Light Opera Works' two main-stage productions at Centre Stage will be Gilbert and Sullivan's "Trial by Jury" (in November), and Johann Strauss' "Die Fledermaus" (planned in May, 2011).

GLOW is a grassroots kind of operation, says Elser, who serves as its general director. In-kind contributions have been a big help from the start, such as an entire technical crew donating its time. The company does have plans to pay its singers and the musicians a small

"I'm calling in a good number of favors from friends in the business," laughs Elser. That means some bright new names such as young tenor Hugo Vera, a recent addition to the Metropolitan Opera's artist roster, who is slated to sing the role of Alfred in GLOW's production of "Die Fledermaus."

Getting down the bones

When Elser and Tamisiea moved here a couple of years ago and asked about area opera and operetta companies, they were told none existed.

“We saw an incredible opportunity to do something about bringing professional, classical vocal performance to Greenville,” Elser says, adding that the enthusiastic responses he received have convinced him his timing is right.

The 38-year-old tenor, an experienced performer in operas, operettas and musical theater, says that as a matter of fact, Cupid’s arrow nailed him in Tulsa where he was performing with Tamisiea, 25, a musical theater actress, in Gilbert and Sullivan’s “The Sorcerer.” They plan to marry in October at the Wyche Pavilion. Tamisiea, a soubrette soprano, grew up in Arkansas. Since moving to the Upstate, she’s been teaching voice at the Greer Children’s and Clemson Little theaters and performs in Atlanta musical theaters.

One of the earliest supporters of **GLOW** was BJ Koonce, Centre Stage’s artistic/executive director, who told Elser about Greenville’s history with the beloved Savoyards, a light opera company, founded some 20 years ago by the late Douglas McCoy, that performed at Centre Stage. The company folded in the early 1990s, but the love and need for operettas hasn’t died, says Tamisiea.

“The response we have had so far has been complete and utter support, including questions of what could be done to help.”

Also good news for **GLOW**, says Elser, is the solid core of professional singers already in the Upstate. They are graduates of Bob Jones University, Furman University, Converse College and other institutions and are looking for opportunities to sing and act.

Tamisiea and Elser agree the time is right to bring operetta back to Greenville.

“People don’t generally die in operettas,” he says with a laugh. “We thought happy endings would find a good fit here.”

Additional Facts

YOU CAN GO

- What: Mozart’s “The Impresario” – a Greenville Light Opera Works production
 - When: 7:15 p.m. cocktails, 8 p.m. show, April 29-30
 - Where: The Warehouse Theatre, 37 Augusta St.
 - Tickets: \$10-\$15
 - Information: 235-6948
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