Two time Grammy Award winning mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato makes local debut.

The Joyce of Opera
EVENTS CALENDAR
4  Friday, April 13, through Thursday, April 19

MUSIC
5  Joyce DiDonato, acclaimed mezzo-soprano makes her Santa Barbara debut for her only west coast recital date of the year
6  alt-J, British indie rock sensation returns to the Bowl in the wake of its strong third album, “Relaxer.”
7  A Perfect Circle performs first new album in 13 years, “Eating the Elephant” at the Arlington Theatre.
25  Sounds of the Scene

STAGE
8  “Crimes of the Heart,” Director Michael Gros brings this Pulitzer Prize winning play to SBCC’s Jurkowitz Theatre along with its strong female led roles
26  Movie Trailers brief descriptions of movies playing locally

SCENE TV
9-24  Channel Overview April 13 – April 19

ART
27  “ReOpening the Book,” a second, larger and more diverse group exhibition of the loosely-defined medium of book art.

CONCERT REVIEW
28  Judge for Yourself News-Press entertainment critic Josef Woodard

THE ART SCENE
29  Local gallery events receptions, exhibits and more

SPOTLIGHT ON SANTA BARBARA CHORAL SOCIETY


L

ast weekend, choral music lovers were lavished with Haydn, in the form of his 1789-vintage “Missa Angustis (Mass for Troubled Times),” by the Santa Barbara Choral Society. This weekend, the traditional springtime choral spotlight swings over to another end of the 18th century and legendary composer from the “H” category of great composers, Handel, via his epic 1743 oratorio “Samson,” as presented by the other major choral group in town, the Santa Barbara Master Chorale. Although it is an oratorio and not officially part of Handel’s formidable opera oeuvre, “Samson” — telling the tale of Samson, his power-diminishing haircut from his wife Dalilah, and vengeance on the Philistines — is widely considered one of the Baroque master’s greatest dramatic works. SBMC performance of “Samson,” seldom heard in the 805, features Brian Lane in the lead role. 7:30 p.m. Saturday at 7:30 p.m. and 3 p.m. Sunday. First United Methodist Church, 305 E. Anapamu St. Tickets are $22, $20 for seniors and disabled, $12 for college students and free for children K-12. sbmasterchorale.org.

— Josef Woodard

SPOTLIGHT ON IMARHAN


The band known as Tinariwen, which played at Campbell Hall in 2004, took the world music world by storm with its striking Saharan desert blues sound, mixing electric guitars and rhythms familiar to rock fans with indigenous sounds linked to their nomadic people known as the Tuaregs. On Thursday, the Algerian band Imarhan, another important figure in the modern Tuareg cultural music scene, promises to charge up the intimate downtown Goleta ambience of the Mercury Lounge. With a leader, Sadam, related to a member of Tinariwen, Imarhan (translating to “ones I care about”) is out on tour to promote its latest album, “Temen,” teeming with the hypnotic melodies and rhythms, and blues riffs in the margins which have been building the band’s global fan base and critical cred since its formation in 2008. 9 p.m. Thursday, Mercury Lounge, 5871 Hollister Ave., Goleta. Tickets are $15. 967-0907.

— Josef Woodard
ACCLAIMED MEZZO-SOPRANO Joyce DiDonato makes her Santa Barbara debut for her only West Coast recital date of the year

By Josef Woodard, News-Press Correspondent

Joyce DiDonato, mezzo-soprano
When: 7 p.m. Sunday
Where: The Granada Theatre, 1216 State St.
Cost: $44-$125, 519 UCSB students info: www.artsandlectures.ucsb.edu or 893-3530, granadasb.org

Apprently, April is the kindest month, from the perspective of significant local performances from globally noteworthy singers who happen to be American. Last week, the remarkable soprano Julia Bullock gave her local recital debut at Hahn Hall, an enthralling evening of Schubert, Barber, Fauré, Albert Hunter, Nina Simone and other blues-tinged vintage artists, with a depth and flair that only this artist could deliver.

That Tuesday night spectacular came courtesy of UCSB Arts & Lectures’ “Up Close and Musical” series. On Sunday night, a high profile operatic singer continues with the local recital debut of the much-buzzed-about mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato, accompanied by pianist Craig Terry. This time in the less “up close,” but no doubt supremely musical setting of The Granada Theatre. The big house context suits her lofty stature, as one of the most critically acclaimed and go-to mezzos of the operatic day, not to mention the fact that this appearance is her solo west coast recital this season. The performance is also courtesy of UCSB Arts & Lectures.

Born in 1969 in Prairie Village, Kan., Ms. DiDonato came up through the Houston Opera out into the broader opera world. A multiple Grammy winner and member of the Gramophone Hall of Fame, Ms. DiDonato has established herself as an artist of great insight and also flexibility, who has traversed the worlds of Rossini, Handel (and other baroque opera), with mezze to tend to) to Heggie, being composer Jake “Dead Man Walking” Heggie, whose new project “Great Scott” is another DiDonato-collaborative vehicle.

She has also been part of the epic Berioz opera “Les Troyens,” on a lengthy list of roles taken on, and conquered.

At present, she is currently at work at the Met in Rossini’s “Cinderella” (appearing at The Granada between performances tonight and Tuesday), after having won over audiences and critics in last fall’s Met production of Bellini’s “Norma.” In his review of that production, the New Yorker magazine’s Alex Ross, who might well be considered “America’s critic,” had some reservations about the whole, but couldn’t help but gush about Ms. DiDonato. “Joyce DiDonato, who sang Adalgisa, has the kind of voice which bel-canto composers dreamed. Her technique is immaculate, and she has the preternatural ability to invest turns, runs, and trills with psychological significance, so that it seems entirely in character for a Druid to sing in rapid-fire Italian.”

Among her celebrated albums have been the gender-bending “DIVA Divo,” 2016’s “In War & Peace,” and the 2015 recital recording “Joyce and Tony: Live at Wigmore Hall.” The program on that recording gives us a taste of what we are in store for with what can be called “Joyce and Clark: Live at The Granada Theatre” on Sunday, a blend of Handel and Rossini, Ravel, Enrique Granados and others, with possible show tune fare in the encore zone.

In an interview with London’s The Guardian newspaper, Ms. DiDonato projected what has often been noted as a conscientious and self-reflective approach to what she does, for a living and for love. Looking at the performer-audience relationship, for instance, she pointed out that “the elephant in the room for opera singers, and classical musicians, is that we are competing against ghosts. Some of the audience might as well be listening to you through the earphones of their favorite recording. If you don’t hold a note in the same way, or don’t make an inflection in the same way, they notice. A performance can become as much about what you don’t do, as what you actually present.”

Her attraction to contemporary opera has much to do with the challenge and excitement of creating something anew and bringing the participing audience along for the journey. “There is an obvious thrill in presenting something that people are coming to for the first time”, Ms. DiDonato told The Guardian. “You want that same level of listening for ‘The Barber of Seville,’ for music that might have been forgotten or in something like the baroque, where there is often very little guidance on the printed page.”

“Coming from Kansas City, I have a sensibility to jazz, and there are similarities — you have to infuse the music with variation and color and you are given huge license to leave your artistic fingerprint. Of course, there is a certain amount of risk involved, but it is worth it.”

Interestingly, her perspective on the renewed focus on the role of women in society, including the arts, is flavored by an institutional advantage as an opera singer.

“In opera, the woman has always been celebrated, elevated and admired,” Ms. DiDonato told an interviewer in the British paper The Daily Telegraph in February. “We are always being given the white-glove treatment, given the last bowl. I play astonishing women. Rossini’s women are feminists. They are like, ‘Honey, I am not taking any of that. It’s true that we don’t have many women conductors or directors, but in the spotlight, where my life has been, it is easy to lose your perspective a little bit.”

Viewing her present, matured career broadly, she is actively engaged in finding the common threads and pathways between the range of operatic projects she gets involved in, noting, in The Guardian, that “there is also a bridge between those worlds. How we get from Handel to Rossini is something that interests me a lot at the moment, and I pinch myself that I am in a position to pursue that interest. It wasn’t until my late 30s that I finally told myself that this opera thing was working and was sustainable, so there will always be a little bit of ‘I’m just Joyce from Kansas, don’t tell anyone this is happening.’”

“But now, when I was given permission, and gave permission to myself, to be ‘that girl. Having come this far I would be so angry with myself if I didn’t enjoy it. So I do.”