

CGOA Presents “Don’t Fear the Diva” with the Gorge Sinfonietta and Opera Cecilia

Whoever the “average music lover” is, if you asked them to describe opera they might use adjectives like “snooty,” “screaming singers,” “boring,” or “elitist.” Probably no form of music is so misunderstood. On April 1 and 2, the Gorge Sinfonietta and special guests Opera Cecilia hope to change all that with a program called “Don’t Fear the Diva: A Tour of Opera Through the Ages.”

First, said Sinfonietta conductor Mark Steighner, “an opera is nothing more than a play where everything is sung instead of spoken.” It’s an art form that stretches as far back as the ancient Greeks. It’s also the engine that powers such Broadway musicals as “Les Miserables,” “Jesus Christ Superstar,” “Hamilton” and “Phantom of the Opera.”

“Those are hugely popular musicals and not classical operas, but the principal is the same. If you love “Hamilton” and “Les Mis,” you enjoy opera.”

So, why does opera have a bad rap? Steighner says that “in the late 1800’s and early 20th century, American musical culture was very influenced by Europe. Because opera was so popular in Europe, it became a symbol for old world traditions and appealed to the wealthy. At the same time, jazz was creating a whole new form of entertainment that was true popular music. So, very quickly, opera came to symbolize outdated culture, and jazz and, eventually, rock, was more relevant.”

“To be honest,” Steighner says, “there are some operas that are more about showing off singers’ voices than the drama.” But there are many operas with incredibly engaging, relatable, moving and hilarious stories. The opera “La Boheme” by Puccini is the story of struggling young artists in Paris. It was the inspiration for “Rent’s” very contemporary drama.

Opera Cecilia is based in Washougal, Washington and was founded by Tanis and Talor Gonzaga to “deliver opera like it has never been before,” and “reject the need for perfectionism in the production of classical music, and be a part of the new face of opera.” In other words, anything but stuffy or snooty. Tanis is a graduate of Hood River Valley High School and was a participant in the HRVHS choral program.

“Don’t Fear the Diva” offers music from the 18th through the 20th century, with everything being accessible, emotional, fun and tuneful. “It’s a program for everyone,” Steighner says, “from the long-time opera lover to the total novice. There’s nothing to be afraid of...except maybe falling in love with opera!”

“Don’t Fear the Diva ” programs are Saturday, April 1 at 7 PM and Sunday, April 2 at 2 PM at the Performing Arts Center at Wy’east Middle School, 3000 Wy’east Rd in Odell.

Tickets are \$25 adults (\$15 for CGOA Members), \$5 youth ages 10-17, and free for kids under 10. Tickets are available at gorgeorchestra.org. Special \$5 tickets are available for Oregon Trail/SNAP card holders.

For information about all CGOA events, visit gorgeorchestra.org, or check out [gorgeorchestra](#) on Facebook and Instagram.