

Brooks Center showcases voices

By Paul Hyde

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The Brooks Center's 2011-12 season celebrates the human voice.

"The entire season showcases voices," says Lillian "Mickey" Harder, director of Clemson University's Brooks Center.

Featured this year will be "operatic voices, soulful voices, choral voices, funny voices, jazzy voices, bluegrass voices and even dramatic voices," Harder says.

"The human voice is powerful," she says. "This season we will feature it in all its glory."

Among the many performances will be touring productions of two Tony Award-winners for Best Musical: "In the



Vocal group Sweet Honey in the Rock is part of a Brooks Center season that showcases the human voice. COURTESY PHOTO

Heights" (Oct. 7 and 9) and "Spamalot" (Feb. 14).

As always, a wide array of other performers will be featured this year.

Bluegrass legend Ricky Skaggs and family will pay a visit on Nov. 28, and the inter-

nationally renowned African-American a cappella ensemble Sweet Honey in the Rock will perform on March 8.

Other performers include jazz ensemble Cyrus Chestnut Trio (Oct. 27), modern dance group Nai-Ni Chen Dance

YOU CAN GO

For a full list of performances or to purchase tickets, call the Brooks Center box office at 864-656-7787 or see the website www.clemson.edu/Brooks.

Company (Nov. 14), the all-male vocal ensemble Cantus (Feb. 7) and the German orchestra Nordwest Deutsche Philharmonie (March 9).

"I strive for variety and artists and attractions that will benefit our students at Clemson University," says Harder, now in her 16th year as director of the Brooks Center.

Opening the season on Sept.

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8 will be Neil Berg's "101 Years of Broadway," a chronological tour of more than a century's worth of Broadway songs, featuring five singers.

"We pick for our first show something all of our patrons will enjoy," Harder says.

The admission-free and award-winning Utsey Chamber Music Series returns to Brooks for its 26th year with four solo and ensemble performances. On the Utsey series are violinist Bella Hristova (Sept. 20), baritone Mischa Bouvier (Nov. 8), cellist Joshua Roman (Jan. 19) and Alexander Fiterstein's Zimro Project, which is dedicated to incorporating Jewish art music into concerts (Feb. 16).

Last year's 25th annual Utsey series saw its strongest attendance ever, Harder says.

The Family Series offers four performances including magician Mike Super (Sept. 16) and the acrobatic troupe Golden Dragon Acrobats (March 27).

Last year's main series of performances filled an average of 74 percent of the 986-seat Brooks Center, Harder says. That's a strong attendance record, given the weak economy, she says.

The Brooks Center also finished its 14th straight season in the black, she says.

Harder designs the season primarily with students in mind.

"We are an educational institution first, so we really want to appeal to students," Harder says. "Everything we do here has an educational purpose."

Many of the performers throughout the year offer master classes for performing arts students.

Ricky Skaggs, for instance, always enjoys giving a presentation for Clemson students.

"He is mesmerizing," Harder says.

Harder is particularly excited about the educational possibilities of "In the Heights." The production by the New York-based Work Light Productions will be in residence at the Brooks Center for two weeks for final technical and dress rehearsals before the show begins its nine-month, na-

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» Oct. 7 and 9: "In the Heights." The 2008 Tony Award winner for Best Musical explores three days in the lives of several characters in the New York City Dominican-American neighborhood of Washington Heights.

» Oct. 11: Clemson University Symphony Orchestra.

» Oct. 20: The Dallas Brass.

» Oct. 25: Clemson University Singers.

» Oct. 27: Jazz ensemble Cyrus Chestnut Trio.

» Nov. 4: Clemson University Percussion Extravaganza.

» Nov. 8: Baritone Mischa Bouvier, part of the admission-free Utsey series.

» Nov. 14: The modern dance ensemble Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company.

» Nov. 14-20: "The Children's Hour." Lillian Hellman's 1934 play,