Arts

Greenville Opera plays Artisphere

Debut involves 3 staged scenes

By Ann Hicks
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Artisphere, Greenville's excitement-filled May 7-9 arts weekend, will offer not just more visual artists than ever before, but also performing arts events that include a debut performance by the city's newly minted Greenville Opera Company.

The company will present staged scenes from Verdi's "La Traviata," Puccini's "La Bohème" and Mozart's "The Magic Flute" in a free performance Friday.

While founder/lyric tenor Jim Broussard calls the effort to start an opera company in the Upstate "a daunting task," he feels the time is right. It's an idea he's nurtured since 1996, when he and his lyric soprano wife, Tina, moved to Greenville from Switzerland. Broussard is the music director at Christ Church Episcopal. His wife is associate director and teaches vocal performance in her own studio.

For many years, the couple performed in the European opera system that is all state-run, a far different way of paying and supporting artists than exists in the United States, where arts organizations survive on the largess of mostly private and some public contributors.



KEN OSBURN / File

Jim Broussard believes the time is right for an opera company in Greenville.

As for why he wants to establish an opera company in Greenville and why now, Broussard says there's no question the talent is here, along with the desire to perform. The Greenville Opera Company's trial balloon got its first lift with a gala performance in February that featured 14 Upstate singers.

"It was a great chance for us to introduce ourselves to the people we invited," Broussard says. "There's a lot of musical theater in Greenville, but this art form is not available here."

In addition to its Artisphere appearance, the company also will perform Leonard Bernstein's jazzy one-act opera "Trouble in Tahiti" at the Cascades' amphitheater May 15 and will appear there again with "Con Amore" May 23.

Broussard says financing for the nascent company will have to come through grants, corporate sponsorships and ticket sales. He wants to start "very small."

"We don't want to go out in our first season," laughs Tina Broussard, while acknowledging that the company can't pay its professional singers more than a small honorarium. The good news, she says, is that these emerging artists are "dying to sing because they need the experience to build a résumé."

Jim Broussard says his audition notice in Classical Singer Magazine brought an avalanche of interest from across the nation.

The company's upcoming full productions include Mozart's "The Magic Flute," with an Aug. 5 gala performance/silent auction, and additional performances Aug. 6-7; and Rossini's "The Barber of Seville," in spring 2011.

Those performances will be held in Christ Church Episcopal's Finlay Hall, which has a stage, dressing rooms and space for a small orchestra. All the hall needs is some "cosmetic work," Broussard says.

The Greenville Opera Company also has commissioned an opera from composer Arlen Clarke, who resides in Greenville. Tina Broussard came up with an idea of children's opera — sung by children — whose libretto will be based on author Linda Kelly's "Mice on Main" book, illustrated by sculptor Zan Wells.

The Greenville Opera hopes that the hunger in the Upstate for opera will match the support it needs to survive and prosper for years to come.

■ Arts writer Ann Hicks can be reached at 864-298-4004.

YOU CAN GO

■ **What:** "A Night at the Opera," The Greenville Opera Company's debut
■ **When:** 7:30 p.m. May 7
■ **Where:** Christ Church Episcopal, 10 N. Church St.
■ **Tickets:** free and open to the public
■ **Information:** 616-3231