

‘Different voices, different cultures’

By Tony Boom | Updated: Mar 03, 2022 04:24 PM



Anima Mundi Productions images Soprano Takesha Meshe Kizart-Thomas, left, will perform works exploring the theme of motherhood in recital with pianist Artnina McCain March 20 at Southern Oregon University.



SOU recital by women of color widens musical experience for students

Local students will get to hear new works by women composers of color for free in a March 20 recital at Southern Oregon University. Before the event they will take part in Zoom sessions which include meeting the performers and talking with a panel of women of color.

Local nonprofit Anima Mundi Productions is making the program available. The performance, titled “Maternita,” will explore the theme of motherhood through classical operatic heroines and the premiere pieces. The show will also be livestreamed.

“We have always tried to make our concerts available for students,” said Ethan Gans-Morse with Anima Mundi. “This is the first time we are sending teachers a series of mini, 30-minute classes you can attend

with students.

New operatic works commissioned by Anima Mundi from Black, First Nations and Latina women composers include “Sweet Baby” by Regina Harris Baiocchi, “Shkodeng-Kwek” by Barbara Assingaak, “Four Generations” by Carolina Calvache and “Bathed in Black Maternity” by Jasmine Barnes. Traditional works by Puccini, Bellini, Strauss, Verdi and Wagner will be included in the program.

Soprano Takesha Meshe Kizart-Thomas will perform the works in recital with pianist Artnina McCain. Kizart-Thomas debuted at the Metropolitan Opera in 2010, has performed with major companies and has appeared with YoYo Ma and Wynton Marsalis. McCain is an American Prize winner for her solo piano recording of works by Black composers.

Grants from more than 10 state, county and private foundations totaling more than \$80,000 support the effort. The grants will cover the cost of complimentary student tickets and commission of the four new works among expenses.

“Maternita” represents the first major educational effort by the group, which formed in 2014. Building up of the education program began a year ago but the grounds have been shifting frequently due to COVID, said Gans-Morse. Details of delivery and class involvement were just completed recently.

Students will come from classrooms at Armadillo Technical Institute in Phoenix and the Medford, Ashland and Phoenix-Talent school districts. Lesa Terry, a professor at Santa Monica College and music performer, will facilitate the Zoom sessions. Terry is also on Anima Mundi’s board of directors.

Students met Kizart-Thomas Feb. 23 and will meet with McCain March 2. On March 9 there will be a conversation with Southern Oregon women of color leaders. Participants will include Teresa Cisneros of Southern Oregon ESD, Lisa Ebony of Ashland Black Indigenous People of Color

Sanctuary, and Tiffany Beach of Black Alliance & Social Equity.

“As a teacher, I’m always looking into opportunities to expose my students to different things ... especially different voices from different cultures,” said Mindi Terilli, an English teacher at Armadillo. She will have two classes totaling 35 students from grades 9 to 12 participating in the Zoom sessions and performance.

Students in her classes are exploring different people’s life experiences and stories, which is something they can get through song and music, said Terilli. They will do an assignment after the three Zoom sessions that will ask how what they learned applies to someone’s life and life story and how they may connect it to their own stories.

“The students are very excited They are ready to see it, to learn and experience, and more excited to go to a live event,” said Terilli. “I think a lot of them have never seen a performance like that in a music hall.”

Students will participate in the Zoom session via a large screen with the images coming from a projector, said Terilli. It’s become a regular way of learning during the COVID outbreak, she said.

Individuals associated with Black Alliance & Social Equity of Southern Oregon, Rogue World Music, Southern Oregon Educational Services District, Unite Oregon, Project Youth+ and Ashland Black Indigenous People of Color Sanctuary are assisting with the offering.

Before the Ashland show, “Maternita” will be presented March 13 at Portland State University. In-person visits by Kizart-Thomas will be made at schools in Portland including H.B. Lee Middle School, Reynolds High School and Portland State University.

The mission of Anima Mundi Productions is to create, present and produce new musical works that harness the power of the arts to stir the soul, foster community and address urgent social and environmental problems.

For more information

Details and ticket for the March 20 concert are available at: animamundiproductions.com/tickets/#maternita. SOU requires wearing of masks and proof of COVID vaccination or a negative test within 48 hours for admission.

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