

Opera confronts trafficking

By David Steinberg / For the Journal

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Susan Narucki appears in the opera “Cuarto Corridos” at the John Donald Robb Composers’ Symposium.

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — A chamber opera that confronts the issue of human trafficking will be presented as part of the annual John Donald Robb Composers’ Symposium sponsored by the University of New Mexico.

The hourlong, multimedia opera is titled “Cuatro Corridos.”

“It’s about four different women and their stories are interwoven,” said soprano Susan Narucki, who is the opera’s sole vocalist and its artistic director.

In two of the opera’s four scenes are the characters of young Mexican women who are trafficked across the border to work as prostitutes for agricultural workers, Narucki said in a phone interview.

“In another scene is a policewoman and in (a fourth scene) is a woman who had trafficked, marries a trafficker and is instrumental in bringing women across the border. She understands the nature of the abuse yet participates in it,” she said.

The characters’ stories are drawn from true events, said Narucki, a professor of music at the University of California at San Diego.

Four composers contributed music to the opera. Hebert Vázquez of Mexico wrote the music for the first scene, Arlene Sierra of the United States for the second scene, Lei Liang of the United States for the third scene, and Hilda Paredes, also of Mexico, for the fourth scene.

“Each composer chose a character to portray,” Narucki said. “The music is different in terms of style and character but each fits into a dramatic arc for the story.”

Narucki alternates singing in English and in Spanish.

Narucki, Jorge Volpi and guitarist Pablo Gómez conceived the project. Volpi also wrote the opera’s libretto.

Preceding the opera will be a short panel discussion on human trafficking.

Narucki also will give a symposium masterclass and participate in an April 8 symposium panel discussion. Other panelists are Albuquerque installation artist Naomi Natale, artist-scholar Dylan Miner and Adriana Ramirez de Arellano, who teaches in Women's Studies at UNM.

If you go

WHAT: "Cuatro Corridos"

WHEN: 7 p.m. April 7

WHERE: South Broadway Cultural Center, 1025 Broadway SE

HOW MUCH: Free, but reservations recommended. Call 848-1320 to reserve a seat

"(The discussion is) about socially minded artists, why artists want to make pieces about socially relevant issues, what change they're hoping to effect and do they feel they're accomplishing those goals," said Peter Gilbert, co-artistic director of the symposium and a UNM music professor.

Threaded throughout the symposium, which runs from Saturday, April 5 through April 10, is the role of the arts in multicultural identity in the Southwest.

The symposium opens at 2 p.m. Saturday, April 5 with the screening of the short film "Agueda Martinez: Nuestra Tierra, Nuestra Gente" at 2 p.m. Saturday, April 5 at UNM's Interdisciplinary Film and Digital Media Facility at Mesa del Sol.

There will be a panel discussion on multicultural identity in conjunction with the screening.

Vázquez, Paredes and Liang – three of the opera's composers – will give master classes with UNM composition students as well as discuss their music.

The symposium also will offer a series of concerts containing music that they and other invited composers have written.

Among the local composers whose music the symposium will present are Julietta Rabens-Moore, Richard Cameron-Wolfe, José-Luis Hurtado, Patrice Repar, Steven Paxton, Monica Demarco, Gary Lee Nelson and Elaine Bearer.

"The symposium serves lots of different constituencies. Most important are the students, in particular the music students and the composition students, and for them to hear what international composers think and say about their work," Gilbert said.

An important symposium event is the John Donald Robb Concert, which will be held at 5 p.m. April 6 in Keller Hall. It features works by Robb and several local composers, including Micah Hood, 2014 winner of the Scott Wilkinson Composition Competition.

The symposium is titled "Beyond Borders." Most of the events are being held at the Center for the Arts on UNM's main campus.

All events in the symposium's first five days, including the opera, are free.

There is an admission fee for the April 10 event – Abel Mireles' Place/Space Project – at the Outpost Performance Space.

For a schedule of symposium events, visit robbtrust.org.

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