

Sharing a love of Opera

"Excellence in student opera," may not be the first thought that comes to mind when people hear "UC Santa Cruz." But that's changing almost as rapidly as Don Giovanni's amorous conquests.

UCSC's fully staged, professional-level Spring Opera productions have wowed regional audiences since 2000 and are now winning nationwide kudos as well. That recognition included a top award from the National Opera Association in 2006.

The Spring Opera is a year-round collaboration of the entire Music Department, with opera program director Brian Staufenbiel at the helm (he is also a singer and a member of UCSC's voice faculty). UCSC music professor and noted conductor Nicole Paiement serves as music director, preparing and conducting both the singers and orchestra.

Paiement and Staufenbiel are partners personally as well as professionally, and their shared enthusiasm for the opera program is infectious.

"Not only is music our deep passion," said Paiement, "but we both have a 'sky's the limit' approach and total commitment to the projects we take on."

Opera is complex and expensive to produce, which makes the program's success all the more impressive. Staufenbiel's and Paiement's zeal is put to the test annually with a grueling production schedule that begins a year in advance. They are now working on Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* for spring 2009. Offerings alternate between classical operas (typically



Nicole Paiement and Brian Staufenbiel

work behind the scenes," she said. "There's a wonderful sense of excitement and community."

Every two years, the Music Department also presents a children's opera. This year, more than 700 kids and their parents enjoyed free performances of Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*, and Staufenbiel wants to do more such performances.

"They introduce children not only to opera," he said, "but also to the UCSC campus."

"We've been very fortunate to enjoy strong community support for all UCSC's music events," said Paiement. "Santa Cruz audiences are sophisticated and curious artistically, which encourages us to be more adventurous as well."

—VICTORIA BOLAM

"We heard singing from 20 year olds that measured up to the seasoned stars we hear on the major opera stages."

—Rich and DeAnne Hart

Mozart) and contemporary works such as Menotti's *The Consul* (2008) and Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2006). Throughout the year, elements of the opera are integrated into seminars, master classes, and public performances.

Staufenbiel has high praise for the student performers, who include members of the full orchestra as well as vocal roles.

"We are one of the few undergraduate programs in the country doing opera at this level," he said. "We ask a lot of students, and they really deliver."

Paiement adds that the entire Music Department gets involved.

"We even have the jazz students coming on in speaking roles, and students from across the campus



UCSC student opera productions have included *Don Giovanni* (full-page photo), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (above), *The Consul* (below), *The Magic Flute*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, and *Street Scene*.



Circle of support

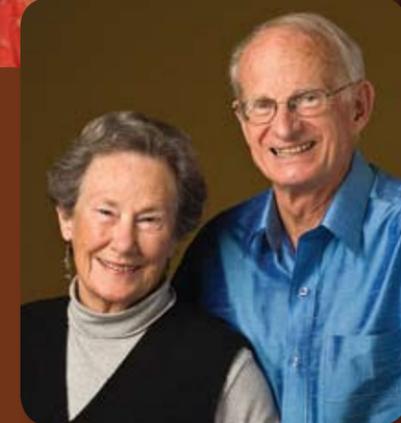
Rich and DeAnne Hart know their opera. They've subscribed to the San Francisco Opera for more than 35 years and have attended performances all over the world.

"As involved as we are," said Rich, "we didn't discover the UCSC student opera program until about five years ago."

When they did, they were impressed with the quality of the performances.

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The Harts have been spreading the word ever since, and in 2005 they founded the Opera Circle, a community support or "Friends" group dedicated to raising community awareness of UCSC's opera program and also raising funds to support it.



Said DeAnne, "We want to make sure everyone in the immediate community and beyond knows how exciting these performances are."

For information on the Opera Circle or to contribute to UCSC's Opera Program, contact Matt Henry at (831) 459-2439 or mfhenry@ucsc.edu.