

Women unite on Trinity's Brownbag Concert Series

by Mike Telin



When soprano Kristine Caswelch and mezzo-soprano Kira McGirr were given carte blanche to create a concert for Trinity Cathedral's Brownbag series, it took a little time for them to figure out what direction their program would take. Then over the summer the two got together over coffee and came to the realization that, like many women, they're not happy about much of what's going on in the world right now — and a lot of great music has been written about being angry.

On Wednesday, October 23 at 12:00 pm at Trinity Cathedral, Caswelch and McGirr, assisted by pianist Todd Wilson, will perform a concert of works that explore a range of human emotions from anger and fear to humor and sisterhood. The concert is free, but a freewill offering will be received. Audiences are invited to bring lunches or purchase one for \$7.

During a sitdown interview, Caswelch and McGirr said they wanted to include some early music on the program. "The mad songs from Henry Purcell's era are so cool," McGirr said. "They're about women who are upset over some aspect of love. But at the same time a lot of these women are not just angry, they're really mad — as in crazy. The lyrics in John Eccles' "Must then a faithful lover go?" from *The Mad Lover* talk about raving and not following society's rules anymore because of the effects that love has had."

Caswelch noted that the anger in Purcell's "Beneath a poplar's shadow lay me" from *Sophonisba*, and *Lost is my quiet* falls more along the lines of "there's this fiery rage within me. The more it burns the angrier I get — and the stronger the goddess becomes."

The soprano noted that the anger in “The Simple Joys of Maidenhood” from Lerner & Loewe’s *Camelot* is not about being a scorned lover, but rather about wanting what everyone else has. “Guinivere has no control over her life. She asks, ‘Why am I missing out on all of the things a maiden my age should have? I want control over my life but I can’t get it, and now I’m angry.’”

The program also pays tribute to legendary Broadway composer John Kander. McGirr will pair “I Don’t Remember You” from *The Happy Time* with “Sometimes a Day Goes By” from *Woman of the Year*. “I just love these songs,” she said.

Caswelch will also sing “Burn” from *Hamilton* by Lin-Manuel Miranda, while McGirr will be featured in Gene Scheer’s and Andrew Thomas’s *Lean Away*. “The lyrics spoke to me,” the mezzo said. “It’s not an angry song. It’s talking about love, but a love that isn’t always able to be known. There is a frustration with that, but also an acceptance.”

Although the vocalists started off using the theme of anger in making their selections, the program eventually morphed into songs that are on the more wistful side of anger. They both agreed that when women are unhappy, they discover that they are not alone. And sisterhoods are often formed as a result.

“We’re singing “What is this Feeling?” from *Wicked*, which is the ultimate friendship musical,” Caswelch said. “But we also sing about sisterhood in the biological sense.” The program includes the famous sibling duets “Sisters” from *White Christmas*, “Ohio” from *Wonderful Town*, and “I Will Never Leave You” from *Sideshow*. “I think ‘Ohio’ will make people laugh. It’s always good to have some levity while discussing serious topics and intense emotions.”

Two operatic works will complete the program. “If you’re a soprano and a mezzo, there are two duets you just have to include,” McGirr said. “First, the ‘Flower Duet’ from *Lakmé*, and second, Rossini’s cat duet, *Duetto Buffo di Due Gatti*.”

The vocalists agreed that there is something special about performing on the Brownbag Concert series, which is now in its 42nd season. “The series has evolved and so has the audience, which is very exciting,” Caswelch said. “It’s always fun to perform in the middle of the day, and it’s one of the few places that I have this artistic freedom to create programs like this one — combining early mad songs with musical theater.”

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