



Soprano Camille Zamora returns to Houston Sept. 17 for 'Sing for Hope: An Evening of Art Songs & Arias' benefiting Bering Omega Community Services.

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Camille Zamora returns for "Art Songs and Arias"

A stint of volunteering at Omega House has brought Camille Zamora back to Houston on a mission of hope

EASTMAN AND JUILLIARD EDUCATED soprano Camille Zamora has been hailed by Opera Magazine as "a singer blessed with Intense communicative ability who blazes with passion." Her credits include appearances with the London Symphony Orchestra and at the Spoleto Festival and Glimmerglass Opera. She has performed at Carnegie Hall, on National Public Radio, the BBC and Deutsche Radio.

So, what would make an opera star with those credits spearhead a fundraiser for a Houston agency that serves people with HIV/AIDS?

As it turns out, Camille Zamora's interests are not solely musical. She cares deeply for Houstonians living with HIV/AIDS.

"Years ago, a friend of mine mentioned that there was this great volunteer opportunity literally across the street from where I went to high school (at the Houston School for the Performing and Visual Arts)," Zamora said. "At that time Omega House was a tiny three-bed facility. I started volunteering and eventually spent every Sunday afternoon there making some amazing friends in the process."

On Sept. 17, at the Hobby Center's Zilkha Hall, Zamora and a talented troupe of up-and-coming operatic talent will present "Sing for Hope: An Evening of Art Songs and Arias."

This is the 11th year she has come back home to Houston to stage the fundraiser that benefits Bering Omega Community Services. Funds raised from the event will go toward the operation of Omega House, Bering's residential hospice, as well as the organization's Adult Day Care Center, dental clinic and support network.

In the early days of the AIDS epidemic, much of the funding for HIV related services came from intimate events created by small, innovative groups of people.

"Back in 1994 I was volunteering with two terrific guys, Aldo Gomez and Jim Murdaugh," Zamora recalled. "The three of us started brainstorming about the feasibility of some kind of fundraiser. I felt certain I could rope some of my musician friends into performing a benefit - when you believe in a cause you are shameless about asking people to help. That first year we were at "Ovations" in the Village and raised \$2,000."

She continued, "The following year I moved to New York to continue my career and entered the Masters Program at Juilliard. As I continued to develop as a singer, the event grew with me. In the next few years It began to take on some real legitimacy."

ZAMORA'S INVOLVEMENT WITH HIV/AIDS took an unexpected and much more personal turn when her best friend from HSPVA, tenor Frank Logan, contacted her while in the final stages of AIDS.

"Frank spent the last six weeks of his life at Omega House," she said. "The care he received there was incredible, and it transformed my Involvement with Bering Omega. What I understood at that time was that there was nowhere else for him to go."

When she talked face-to-face with her friend about his stay at Omega House, Zamora said, "I could see the look of complete relief in his eyes. I realized how valuable this service was. At that point my gratitude and commitment to the community were absolute. 'Art Songs and Arias' really blossomed as a result of my involvement with Frank and is now a tribute to his memory and our friendship', Zamora said.

SPRING FORWARD SEVERAL YEARS and "Art Songs and Arias" now is one the fall season's most anticipated events. This year's cadre of singers comprises some significant talent according to Zamora. "Three of the artists have made their Metropolitan Opera debuts within the last year - these are some of the most exciting singers in the operatic 'thirty-something' set."

She pointed out that "Art Songs and Arias" requires a commitment from the artists who agree to perform. "Many singers will do a single charity event, but this endeavor requires six days of intensive rehearsal time from the artists and production personnel, all of which is donated," she said. "The concert is specifically crafted for this community every year. Our partners, Continental (Airlines) and Marriott (Hotels) underwrite a significant amount of expenses. Without them, this wouldn't be possible."

While some may think that "Art Songs and Arias" sounds a bit stuffy, in actuality the evening possesses a lilt - something these young artists aim for. In addition to arias, it includes show tunes.

"The event is fun and has a truly uplifting vibe," Zamora said. "We are constantly trying to attract new audiences. A concert that combines Broadway and classical works is a great way to do that. The program includes everything from Mozart to Sondheim."

Zamora's life continues to intensify personally and artistically. In spite of the arrival of a new baby boy this past October and ever increasing recognition of her vocal abilities, her commitment to "Art Songs and Arias" is steadfast. "I don't know if I will ever create the most high-powered career for myself," she said. "As you begin a family, there are choices you have to make to balance your career and the rest of your life. The great thing about this process is: singing is my joy in life, but this concert is my mission."