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Arts & Entertainment

A weekly guide to music, theater, art, movies and more, edited by Robyn Israel



Norbert von der Groeben

Edith Zitelli, an active member of the Fortnightly Music Club since 1947, has performed annually for the last 56 years and has found tremendous support among the group's members and audiences.

Fortnightly

by Robyn Israel

***Palo Alto
music club
prepares
to celebrate
its 96th
anniversary***

Imagine this scenario: You're a classical music devotee who's always dreamed of performing in front of a live audience. As an amateur, it seems like a pipe dream.

But what if you didn't have to audition? What if you could appear in an intimate venue before a small crowd and belt out a song of your choosing?

It's all possible for anyone who joins the Fortnightly Music Club, a 96-year Palo Alto tradition that welcomes all classical music enthusiasts, be they amateur singers, professional performers or simply happy listeners. Any member who falls into the former category is welcome to perform at the club's informal events, which take place at members' homes on a monthly basis.

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Norbert von der Groeben



Norbert von der Groeben

Edith and Deborah Rogers, club president.

Fortnightly

(continued from previous page)

Edith Zitelli, an active club member since 1947, has performed annually for the last 56 years and found tremendous support among the club's members and audiences.

"I've loved this club," said Zitelli, who performed for many years with local pianist Adolph Baller. "It was through this club and these wonderful people that I have had the opportunity to grow as a performer. It was with their encouragement that I had opportunities to do so. There was an audience that would listen."

Zitelli will help celebrate the

Fortnightly's 96th birthday on Jan. 11 at a concert that will take place at the Palo Alto Art Center. Zitelli has chosen an intense, soulful piece for the program, entitled "Kinder-Totenlieder" ("Songs on the Death of Children"), set to music by Gustav Mahler and lyrics by Friedrich Rueckert.

"The music is so beautiful," Zitelli said. "It's very rarely done — the subject matter is not very uplifting. It's very emotional."

Sharing the bill with Zitelli will be pianist Natalya Duvanenko, a native of Belarus, who will perform works by Beethoven and Chopin. The concert will mark Duvanenko's first formal concert. For club president Deborah Rogers, the

pairing of longtime club participant Zitelli with new member Duvanenko is a symbolic reflection of the club's history and future.

"To me, Natalya represents the new energy coming into the club," Rogers said. "Edith represents the longevity and durability of the club. It was a happy coincidence of programming."

This mix of novices and seasoned members certainly helped Zitelli when, as a recent Julliard graduate and new Palo Alto resident, she discovered the Fortnightly Music Club through the Stanford Opera Workshop.

"I was a young singer — most members were older than me," Zitelli recalled. "They guided me in the most wonderful way. They would encourage me. They would correct me if they felt I was attempting music that was too difficult."

At one concert, Zitelli performed "The Shadow Song," an aria from Donorah, which seasoned member Newell Ford pooh-poohed.

"He said 'You shouldn't attempt that song.' He said 'You're not ready for that.'"

Today, Zitelli serves as a role model for new musicians. In a recent performance, young local pianist Javier Gonzalez stood transfixed as he watched Zitelli perform.

"This was wonderful for Javier, to see how an artist handles herself on stage, with such poise," Rogers said. "That's one of the wonderful things — the club keeps nurturing

musicians.

The Fortnightly Music Club dates back to January 1908, when a number of Stanford faculty wives began meeting as a music study group on alternate Monday afternoons. The women would select a particular composer or subject for study, with one or more members giving an illustrative musical performance.

The club evolved within a few years from a study group into an evening performance club that accepted male members. The membership gradually expanded further to include non-performers and music lovers from surrounding communities.

In 1915, Fortnightly members were instrumental in sponsoring a professional concert series at Stanford, which brought esteemed artists such as cellist Pablo Casals and violinist Fritz Kreisler and vocalist Shuman Heink. The Stanford concert series eventually morphed into Stanford Lively Arts, now in its 34th year.

Today, the purpose of the club remains the same as it did 96 years ago: the sharing of musical talent and the enjoyment of live performances. There are about 150 members; 100 are active members, while the remainder are associate members, comprised of informal performers or non-performing music enthusiasts. Formal concerts are staged monthly, from October through May, at the Palo Alto Art Center. Informal concerts continue

to take place at members' homes.

"I've heard that this is the oldest music club in California," Rogers said. "It must mean something, or else it would have faded long ago, because it's all volunteer. It's people like Edith — their dedication, their devotion, their active participation. That's what's kept it going."

And it's that passionate spirit that will be needed for the club to survive in the 21st century.

"Nowadays, everyone is so busy. It's hard to find people to do that extra bit, and that's what it's going to take to keep it going," Rogers said. ■

WHAT: A celebration of the Fortnightly Music Club's 96th anniversary. Performers will include vocalist Edith Zitelli, pianist Natalya Duvanenko, violinist Patricia Burnham and pianist Anna Semyanovsky

WHERE: Palo Alto Art Center, 1313 Newell Road

WHEN: Jan. 11 at 8 p.m.

COST: Admission is free.

INFO: Please visit www.fortnightlymusicclub.org

About the cover:

Edith Zitelli and Susan Gross Bratman practice for the Jan. 11 recital. Photograph by Norbert von der Groeben



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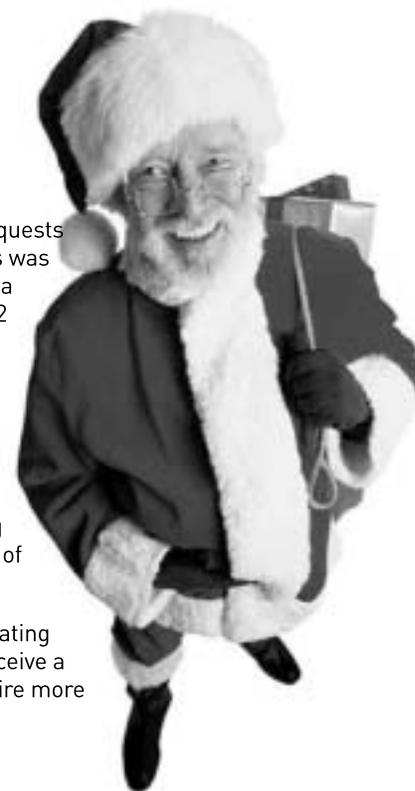
"Ho ho ho! Mrs. Claus and I were just checking the list twice and we couldn't help but notice all the requests for Vivre memberships this year. Thankfully, I paid a visit down to Vivre myself to see what all the fuss was about and ended up pumping iron, running on the treadmills, practicing yoga--and even had time for a great massage. Now my abs are rock solid and I'm able to scamper up and down chimneys like I'm 22 again! I'm so jolly now that I've helped Vivre come up with some great gift ideas just for you!

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Finally, there's the **"Personal Training Package"**, which I'm giving to Rudolph for successfully negotiating through that fog a few years back. Merely purchase one of Vivre's Personal Training Packages and receive a complimentary massage on Vivre! So be the gift giving saint this year and pay a visit to Vivre and inquire more about these and other great gift ideas!"

--Chris Cringle, Vivre Member since December 2003



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