



Retired opera diva recognized at LSU

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By Jennifer Flowers

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What a charmed life.

That is what Jasmine Egan was thinking after her alma mater announced its recognition of her 30-year singing career that took her to the corners of the globe and had her befriending the likes of Imelda Marcos.

"You never know when your past life comes back to haunt you," said the veteran lyric soprano, who has long since retired but still betrays the strong voice that made her famous. "What a joy this career was."

The Shreveporter was among six alumni to be recognized recently by the LSU Opera in conjunction with its 75th anniversary this year. Others were James King, Dallas Draper, Marguerite Piazza, James Stuart and Frances Greer, all of whom were inducted into the LSU Opera Hall of Fame along with Egan. LSU plans to invite Egan to return to LSU and offer a master class in the fall of 2006.

"Jasmine Egan is a vibrant, knowledgeable singer," said Robert Grayson, opera and voice program chair at LSU. "Her reputation as a valued interpreter of a variety of roles, but especially Madama Butterfly places her in the highest category of performers. We look forward to her return to LSU."

Egan is recognized internationally for her portrayal of a seemingly endless list of female soprano leads in opera, and was most famous for her role as the delicate Cio-Cio-San in "Madama Butterfly." Egan also has performed the leads in "Aida" as well as Marguerite in "Faust," Mimi and Musetta in "La Boheme," Santuzza in "Cavalleria Rusticana," Violetta in "La Traviata," Fiordiligi in "Cosi Fan Tutte" and Nedda in "Pagliacci" among many others.

Her appearances abroad include various venues in the Philippine Islands and the Orchestre Philharmonique de Paris. Nationally, she has been featured at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Fort Worth Civic Opera and the Shreveport Opera among others. She also sang with orchestra groups including the New Orleans Symphony Orchestra, the Houston Symphony Orchestra, the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, the Shreveport Symphony Orchestra, the New Orleans Pops Orchestra, the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra and the Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra.

Though her two favorite roles are the leads in "Tosca" and "Madama Butterfly," she also adores "The Merry Widow" and "Die Fledermaus." Egan also adores the overly confident and sexy Musetta in Puccini's "La Boheme."

It's about time Egan's distinguished singing career was recognized with the LSU honor, according to local attorney Carl Rice,



Jasmine Egan poses near a portrait of herself performing as Madame Butterfly. Egan was recently inducted into the LSU Opera Hall of Fame. (Greg Pearson)

Multimedia:



[Jasmine Egan sings "Vis d'arte"](#)



[Jasmine Egan performs "Un bel di"](#)

whose mother, the late Martha Rice, was good friends with Egan. "I'm not much of an opera guy, but I tell you, I can sit there and listen to her sing 'Madama Butterfly' and cry like a baby," Rice, 62, said. "When she sings, it captures the crowd. You feel like you know her."

Rice recalls Egan always had a packed house during her Christmastime appearances at First United Methodist Church in Shreveport to sing hymns and carols. "She's one of the few people of that caliber and talent who was able to balance her marriage and her family with her gift of opera singing," he said. "Of course, she always put her family first. She loved Shreveport, she loved her family. She could go around the world and do operas and then she'd come home for a while. It's a good balance."

Half Filipino and half American, Egan left her home in the Philippines just after World War II. Her father wanted to remove her from her war-torn country and sent her to Louisiana, where she lived with her aunt in Crowley.

She met her late husband, Shreveporter and local attorney Reuben Egan, while training in voice at LSU. She graduated in 1951 during what the program refers to as its golden age, beginning in the 1930s when the program was directed by baritone Pasquale Amato and conductor Louis Hasselmans, and in the 1940s when it was directed by Ralph Errolle.

The Egans made their family a priority, even when Jasmine was in and out of the country performing. Her son, David Egan, is a musician based in Lafayette and her daughter, Alexis Houston, lives in Dallas.

Over her long career, Egan rubbed shoulders with music-world superstars and became friends with the likes of Placido Domingo and Van Cliburn. On a recent weekday, the petite Egan gestured animatedly with her bright red nails and warm eyes as she described the trips she used to take decades ago in and around the Philippines with her old friend Marcos, a former first lady and an infamous political figure in the Philippines.

"After surviving how horrible (World War II) was, everything I did was fulfilling: singing, two beautiful children, a husband who was devoted to me," she said. "I couldn't complain. I never did complain. How could I?"

Egan attributes her success to her family as well as to locals including John Shenaut, conductor emeritus of the Shreveport Symphony. Locally, the Shreveport resident has sung many roles including Bloody Mary in a summer production of "South Pacific" directed by the late Joseph Gifford, as well as Cio-Cio-San in a Shreveport Civic Opera production of "Madama Butterfly."

"(Shenaut) is the one who gave me my first big leading roles in an opera, like the lead in 'Faust' and later 'Madama Butterfly,' and on and on," Egan said. "I cut my teeth on all these big operas right here with him conducting. When I went out into the big world, I was so secure for having done it already right here in Shreveport."

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