

Former Shockers return to sing for gala concert

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There's no place like home, especially for three Shocker alumni returning to Wichita to perform for the 10th Anniversary Gala Concert of the Wichita Grand Opera.

Samuel Ramey, Alan Held and Joyce DiDonato will join internationally-renowned conductor Steven Mercurio for a homecoming performance Saturday, March 26 at Century II.

"To have those four names in the same place at the same time and in the same program is an extreme tribute to our company," said Parvan Bakardiev, director, president and CEO of the Wichita Grand Opera.

The milestone event will draw George Gibson, a musical mentor for all three singers during their time as students at Wichita State.

Gibson, a vocal coach at WSU between the years of 1967-1997, will travel from Arizona to hear his students sing.

"I wanted to be there because all three of them were very close to me at WSU and I've kept up with them over the years. All three are terrific singers, very different in their own rites," Gibson said. "It was a pleasure to help in their upbringing in terms of training. I knew

that when they left WSU they would have careers and that has all come true."

To say that the three singers have enjoyed successful careers would be an understatement.

Alan Held, who received his Master of Music in Opera from WSU in 1983, has appeared in nearly 200 performances at the Metropolitan Opera, among other starring roles on stages around the world.

The title of the gala, "There's No Place Like Home," rings true for Held. While not a native Kansan, Held is returning to a place that is home to the roots of his career.

"It's like a home for me," Held said. "I purchased my first home in Wichita. Wichita has changed a lot, but it's also still the same to me."

Held is excited to sing with Ramey, a native of Colby, Kan.

He was named "Kansan of the Year" in 1995, and his biography, "Samuel Ramey, American Bass" has recently been published. Ramey's biographer will be in Wichita for the first time for the gala performance and Ramey will be signing the book during a special session Sunday afternoon.

"Sam and I have sung in some operas together at the same time at the



Alan Held

Met and in Wichita," Held said. "I am the middle child. Sam is the big brother, and Joyce will be the baby of the three."

While DiDonato may be the baby of the trio in terms of age, her voice is definitely not small in size. She is currently the lead mezzo-soprano on the stages of The Met, Covent Garden, the Vienna State Opera and the Paris Opera.

Bakardiev said the gala will incorporate grand opera, operetta, music theatre and sacred theatre.

"There's something for everybody," Bakardiev said. "It's a homecoming. The performance will conclude with an encore of selections from The Wizard of Oz. Yes, it's great to be in Paris or at the Met, but there really is no place like home."

If interested in attending the anniversary gala, contact the Wichita Grand Opera at 316-262-8054.