



# THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

June 24, 2025

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Foundation Joe Morris

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## *Melinda Whittington, Opera Soprano*

by **Elly Clary**

In soaring soprano voice, colorfully dressed Opera Carolina leading lady Melinda Whittington opened and closed her Rotary presentation with song, accompanied by recorded music.

Interspersing her remarks with images of roles she's played and costumes she's worn, she was often humorous.

"I'm a lyric soprano, so most of the time I play women who die," she smiled. "I'm almost always dead by the end."

For her opening aria, she stepped back from the microphone to deliver her powerful performance. "Opera singers aren't amplified 99 percent of the time," she explained.

Intermittently she was serious. As a voice professor at Davidson College and mother of two boys, she commented on "the balance between performing and teaching and mommying."

Sometimes she takes her children on the road and experiences difficulties finding childcare and appropriate housing while juggling rehearsal schedules. "My kids still expect me to be mom," she said. "I still have my students."

Since earning voice-related degrees at UNC Greensboro and UNC Chapel Hill, Whittington has played 927 opera roles. Many came in the last seven years with Opera Carolina, but others were with organizations such as the Minnesota Opera, the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Arizona Opera, and Utah Opera.

Her collage of images started with an early role as Marie Antoinette, included singing when three months pregnant and “sick as a dog,” and ending with last year’s duet with Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli. The latter two were with Opera Carolina.

Whittington’s father was a pastor, her mother a minister of music. “I grew up with a lot of music in my life,” she said. Yet she never took a voice lesson and didn’t decide she wanted to sing professionally until college.

She won a UNC scholarship to travel Europe for three months and see operas. She also visited museums and heard symphonies. Since she loved learning, languages, and history as well as singing, opera was a strong pull.

“I could study opera for the rest of my life and barely scratch the surface,” she said. “One of the cool things about opera is that the stories are timeless. They can be updated to different periods.”

Whittington met her husband, Dr. Philip Bugaiski, when they were singing in the Charlotte Master Chorale. Recently, Whittington appeared at the opening of the restored Carolina Theater.

“When I’m not performing with an opera company or teaching, I’m creating my own performance opportunities,” she said. “I have an album that I recorded during the pandemic.” (CDs were available.) She sometimes sings jazz, generally from the 1920s and ’30s.

In closing, Whittington sang the Emily Dickinson poem, “I Shall Not Live In Vain,” explaining it speaks to Rotary’s mission. “It’s all about service.”

A recording of the meeting can be found here:

With Slides: <https://vimeo.com/1096064700?p=0s>

Without Slides: <https://vimeo.com/1096073608?p=0s>

The program introduction begins at 25 minutes.