

UF benefit 'Splendor' features alumnus Nicholas Pallesen

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Courtesy of the UF College of Fine Arts

University of Florida alumnus Nicholas Pallesen will be the special guest performer at "Splendor: New York Nights" on Saturday at the Nadine McGuire Pavilion of Theatre and Dance.

Nicholas Pallesen is not your ordinary Gator.

Pallesen is a renowned baritone who performed at Carnegie Hall, the New York City Opera, and was the University of Florida 2007 Young Alumni Award recipient.

The UF alumnus recently made his Metropolitan Opera debut as Lysander in "The Enchanted Island." "It was a really positive experience ... any time you make a debut with the Metropolitan Opera, it's a huge step in someone's career," said Pallesen, who graduated with a B.A. in Music in 2005.

"The biggest stars in opera were all in that cast. It was a cool experience to share the stage with them. I can't think of a better way to debut at The Met than something really fun."

Pallesen will be the special guest performer at Saturday's "Splendor: New York Nights," a benefit for UF's School of Music and the School of Theater and Dance.

"Every time I come to Gainesville I feel like I'm coming home," Pallesen said. "UF has been extremely wonderful to me ever since I graduated. I feel I got a great solid foundation to grow as an artist and a human being. It is always nice to come back and give back."

Cherie Fine, president of the Friends of Music, said people should expect an evening of good entertainment and food catered by Dean Cacciatore at Saturday's "Splendor."

"The combined talents of the School of Music and the School of Theater and Dance makes (the event) very unique," Fine said.

The jazz band is fantastic, and they have great songs lined up to play for us," Fine said. "We also have Nicholas Pallesen, who is one of our alumni. He debuted at the Metropolitan Opera last week. He is a fantastic baritone."

"Splendor: New York Nights," which coincides with the 40th Anniversary of the formation of the UF's Friends of Music, will bring the glitz and glamour of New York City to UF's Nadine McGuire Theatre and Dance Pavillion.

Fine said the theme "New York Nights" was inspired by Pallesen's career in New York City.

"New York City offers so many musical and theater entertainment," Fine said. "We just thought it was a natural fit." The theme incorporates black cocktail attire with bright pink accented accessories.

The benefit also will feature a silent auction where patrons can bid on packages like a chance to meet Celine Dion in Las Vegas, a vacation getaway or the opportunity to experience Broadway firsthand in New York City.

Tony Offerle, director of UF's Opera Theatre, said the first segment is called "On Broadway!" and will feature the Gatortones.

"They will be performing music from 'The Most Happy Fella' and 'Smokey Joe's Café,'" said Offerle, who is the coordinator and producer for the musical gala.

Pallesen will perform "The Toreador Song" from "Carmen" with the UF Concert Choir and the string quartet. "We gave him a call and he was excited to come back and support us," Offerle said.

“Splendor: New York Nights” also will offer musical theater, classical instrumental music and dance performances. The audience will be in for a treat with the surprise closing performance, he added.

“We have a wonderful dance segment that incorporates Spanish dance with some amazing tangos that will be accompanied with the string quartet from the School of Music,” Offerle said. “The event is quite grand and elegant.”

UF sophomore Alana Klonoski will play “Danza del Gaucho Matrero” as her solo piece for the benefit. “I’ve been playing classics like Beethoven and Chopin. My professor wanted me to pick a more contemporary song, something different from what I usually play and a more modern piece,” Klonoski said. “It is a Latin piece with a typical Spanish rhythm.”

UF freshman Nicoletta Lanese is one of the dancers in a tango segment choreographed by Isa Garcia Rose and co-produced with Steven Thomas.

“It is a ballet number that is reset to a slow sultry tango music,” said Lanese, who is dual majoring in dance and behavioral and cognitive neurosciences.

Lanese said the variety of performances at “Splendor: New York Nights” will give patrons “a lot of bang for your buck.”

“You are getting a speckling of all the talents you can get going to New York City right here in Gainesville where you don’t have to go so far and pay so much,” Lanese said.

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