



Richard Leech (Photo: Provided)

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On Sunday, when Richard Leech takes the stage in a Master Class at the Tri-Cities Opera Center on Clinton Street in Binghamton, he'll likely mention something about opera's simplicity, the fact that, at its core, singing emerges from basic communication.

It is after all, the doctrine that's driven the world-renowned tenor's entire career, one he learned from his first teachers: Tri-Cities Opera founders Carmen Savoca and Peyton Hibbitt.

"I hear (Savoca and Hibbitt) in my own coaching and advice all the time," said Leech, who is the director of Resident Artist Programs at Michigan Opera Theater. "It's very satisfying to take that to another generation."

These days, the 60-year-old Vestal native splits time between Binghamton and Detroit. He is also on the voice faculty of Rutgers University's Mason Gross School of the Arts.

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Throughout his 30-year career, he's performed in worldwide destinations far from his roots at [Tri-Cities Opera](#), including Paris Opera, Covent Garden, La Scala, Vienna Staatsoper, Amsterdam, Berlin, Barcelona, Florence, and Rome.

But, he says, he's always had this place to come back to.



Meroë Khalia Adeeb and Jordan Schreiner played star-crossed lovers Mimi and Rodolfo in the Tri-Cities Opera production of "La Bohème." (Photo: Photo by Randy Cummings)

"I feel like I had that great foundation here that let me go out and do my thing — sing," he said. "In many ways, I never left."

Leech, as he puts it, "fell into Carmen and Peyton's hands" when he was 15. The son of an IBM electrical engineer and a pianist, he had no formal singing background — though his mother's family was deeply entrenched in the arts in Hollywood — but a teacher told him to take voice lessons so off he went to study at what he said was, at the time, simply referred to as "the workshop."

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During the mid-70s when Leech says opera companies in the United States were only just beginning to develop young artist programs, Tri-Cities Opera was thriving.

"It was an amazing and unique place. There were 25 to 30 singers there to work with Carmen and Peyton," he said. "It was a company very much flourishing in this community."



Mary Beth Nelson, left, and Stacey Geyer star in the Tri-Cities Opera double bill. (Photo: Photo by Randy Cummings)

From his teenage years, Leech was already participating in multiple operas staged at the Masonic Temple, learning among a number of trained artists at varied levels of expertise and absorbing the knowledge of founders Savoca and Hibbitt.

It provided a solid foundation for what would be Leech's 30-year career, a "nurturing oasis environment" he credits for his success.

"It was a perfect storm for me," he said. "Organic nurturing and training from day one. No matter what opportunities present themselves and luck along the way...it all comes down to the product."

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Now after decades on stage, in the part of his life he calls Act Two, Leech's job is to pass along what he's learned.

"It's a new generation and a new step forward," he said.

Leech's Master Class on Sunday follows the Tri-Cities Opera Preview Gala on Saturday at Traditions at the Glen in Johnson City, a fundraising event co-hosted by Leech and Susan Ashbaker, Tri-Cities Opera's general and artistic director. Themed tapas served will coincide with the lineup of productions in the 2018-2019 season, along with selections performed by the company's current resident artists and a silent auction.

Leech has received numerous accolades — including the Richard Tucker Award and Voice Education Research and Awareness Award — taken the stage in theaters around the world and performed coveted roles throughout his career. But bringing his expertise to the next generation of the company where he made his start is especially sweet.

"So much of Tri-Cities Opera is a part of me," he said. "To see it succeed is a part of who I am."

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If you go

What: Master Class with Richard Leech

When: 2 p.m. Sunday

Where: Tri-Cities Opera Center, 315 Clinton St., Binghamton

Cost: Free

More information: 607-772-0400 or tricityopera.com