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DAY-SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 14-15, 2026

A HAPPY *MEDIUM*

Livengood relishes role in Menotti's tragic opera

BY JIMMY TOMLIN
ENTERPRISE STAFF WRITER

For Victoria Livengood, necessity is the mother of reinvention.

The Thomasville native went from a country girl growing up on a farm to an internationally acclaimed opera star, and she has orchestrated the same kind of abrupt transformation in her professional career.

Previously acclaimed for her seductive portrayal of Carmen, the young, voluptuous vixen in the well-known opera "Carmen," Livengood now has a new signature role — Madame Flora in Gian Carlo Menotti's tragic opera, "The Medium." In her role as Madame Flora, also known as Baba, Livengood plays an older woman — a sometimes-abusive alcoholic who makes her living as a fraudulent medium, hosting fake séances to prey on grieving families.

"It's called the reinvention of an aging opera singer," Livengood says of her drastic onstage personality change. "As I have aged, I've had to reinvent myself."

Livengood has performed the role of Carmen some 250 times on stages around the world, including at the prestigious Metropolitan Opera in New York City, and she was hailed by one critic as "the most seductive Carmen ever." But at 67, she has long since aged out of that role. Enter Madame Flora, a character more suited to the singer's age — and to her vocal range, which has dropped lower as she has aged, matching the range required to play the medium. She guesses she has about 50 performances as Madame Flora under her belt.

Livengood, who lives in Concord now, will add to that number tonight when she stars in Carolina Opera's one-night-only presentation of "The Medium" at the Dale F. Halton Theater on the campus of Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte. Though she still performs frequently, this will be the first time Livengood has performed in an opera in North Carolina since 2012, so she's excited to be in front of the home crowd again.

"I have such anticipation about this night," she says. "I have so many friends and family members coming — the house is going to be filled, and predominantly with my people. I'm really excited to bring this to them."

There's another reason Livengood relishes playing Madame Flora — her close relationship with the composer, the late Gian Carlo Menotti. She began working with Menotti in 1998 in Spoleto, Italy, and worked with him every summer after that until his death in 2007.

"I got to work alongside him on this role and get all his insights into this character," Livengood says. "So everybody (in tonight's production) has been receptive to hearing my stories and sharing what he wanted to do in certain places, so I think it would have his stamp of approval."

SEE **OPERA/PAGE C2**



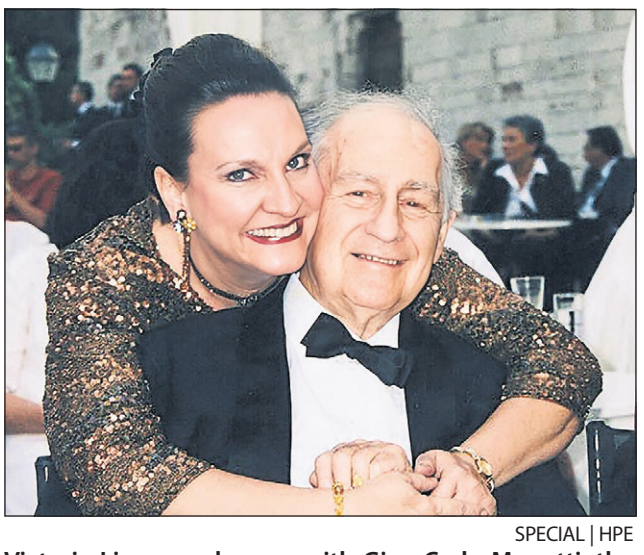
SPECIAL | HPE

Thomasville native Victoria Livengood will perform her signature title role in Opera Carolina's production of "The Medium," a one-night-only performance at the Halton Theater in Charlotte.



SPECIAL | HPE

In this scene from "The Medium," Madame Flora (played by Victoria Livengood) fires a revolver after encountering what she believes to be a ghost during what was supposed to be a fake séance.



SPECIAL | HPE

Victoria Livengood poses with Gian Carlo Menotti, the composer of "The Medium." Livengood worked closely with Menotti every summer from 1998 until his death in 2007.

WANT TO GO?

Opera Carolina's production of "The Medium," starring Thomasville native Victoria Livengood, will be presented Nov. 14 at 8 p.m. at the Dale F. Halton Theater on the campus of Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte. Limited tickets remain. To check availability and purchase tickets, visit https://tix.cpcc.edu/upcoming-events and click on "The Medium."



GWYN RIDDICK

The red of a dogwood understory tree contrasts with the yellow of a tall hickory tree in this autumn landscape.

Trees now show their true colors



GWYN **RIDDICK**
ECOLOGY

In the last two weeks, our local Triad area forests and landscapes have been unmasked. Leaf color changes in autumn are the unmasking of the underlying natural leaf color. Chlorophyll gives leaves a green color, covering up the beautiful natural pigments in the leaf of red, orange, brown, yellow and other brilliant shades. Some of my favorite trees and their colors in autumn are sugar maples (yellow-orange), red maple (red), poplar (yellow), black gum (glossy burgundy red), hickory (yellow), dogwood (crimson) and sweet gum (orange to red). Even the oaks with their shades of brown add to the color palette of the fall forest.

As chlorophyll breaks down, the green disappears, and the other colors become visible and give the leaves their fall splendor. At the same time other chemical changes may occur that form additional colors through the development of red anthocyanin pigments.

Some mixtures give rise to the reddish and purplish fall colors of trees such as dogwoods and sumacs, while others give the sugar maple its brilliant orange.

Four shade trees renowned for their brilliant and colorful autumn leaves that are found in the Triad are:

- **Sugar maple (Acer saccharum):** a vibrant mix of bright yellow, rich orange, and fiery red.
- **Red maple (Acer rubrum):** famous for turning a deep, fiery red, alongside occasional yellow and orange tones.
- **Ginkgo (Ginkgo biloba):** distinctive fan-shaped leaves and a striking, uniform golden-yellow.
- **Black tupelo / black gum (Nyssa sylvatica):** shifts through a dazzling palette of yellow, orange, bright red and deep purple.

Most landscapes that are really beautiful include some understory trees. These smaller trees thrive beneath larger canopy shade trees or in partial sun, offering beautiful flowers or foliage during the growing season and spectacular color in autumn.

- **Flowering dogwood (Cornus florida).** This tree has showy white or pink spring bracts, followed by glossy green leaves and bright red summer berries that attract birds. In autumn it turns a rich, deep burgundy to fiery red.
- **Sourwood (Oxydendrum arboreum).** It has unusual, drooping panicles of fragrant white flowers in mid-summer that look like lilies-of-the-valley and bees use to produce famous honey. It is one of the earliest and most spectacular to change, turning a blazing crimson, purple, and orange.
- **Eastern redbud (Cercis canadensis).** This tree features clusters of electric magenta-pink blossoms blanketing bare branches in early spring, followed by large, attractive, heart-shaped leaves that turn cheerful canary-yellow in the fall.
- **Downy serviceberry (Amelanchier arborea).** Enjoy the delicate clouds of white flowers in early spring, followed by delicious, blueberry-like purple fruit in June that wildlife love. In autumn it shines a brilliant mix of apricot, orange, and dusty red.
- **American fringetree (Chionanthus virginicus).** This tree sports spectacular, slightly fragrant, fringe-like white flowers in late spring that look like clouds of fleecy white ribbons, followed by dark blue, olive-like fruits on female trees. In the fall, it transforms into a clean, radiant golden-yellow.

So, it is all a process of complex botanical physiology and transformation of sugars and pigments within the tree leaves. But other factors play a role as well. Low temperatures above freezing can increase the redness of the maples, while an early frost can dull the red colors. However, rainfall and cloudy days will intensify the autumn colors.

Regardless of how and why it happens, Mother Nature knows best, and the spectacular display She gives us in the forest each fall is brief and can be enjoyed by all of us during its multi-week performance.

OPERA

FROM **PAGE C1**

The hourlong opera features Madame Flora, her daughter, Monica, and Toby, a mute servant boy whom Madame Flora rescued off the streets. Monica and Toby help the bogus medium pull off her fake séances.

"She's playing on their grief to make a living, being a charlatan," Livengood says. "She's helping people contact the dead. Then something supernatural happens to her, and it sends her down a fast spiral emotionally into insanity. It's tragic."

Livengood says "The Medium" is an accessible opera for individuals who may be intimidated by opera.

"It's almost like going to a Broadway play," she says. "It's only an hour long, and it's more about the story and the drama than it is the music. It's more like a drama with singing."

Though Livengood relishes her Southern upbringing — she calls herself "the Dixie Diva" — her lengthy career has won her acclaim all over the world for her powerful mezzo-soprano voice and her expressive acting on the stage. An Italian reviewer wrote, "The power of her voice could straighten the leaning Tower of Pisa."

She has sung more than 110 roles with opera companies across the globe, and she has shared the stage with such luminaries as Placido Domingo and Renee Fleming. She has also performed numerous solo recitals and has built a successful teaching studio.

Still, she remains an active performer with no desire to slow down.

"I made my professional debut in 1984, and I'm still singing and going strong," she says. "That's what, 42 years? That's rare, but I've done it by reinventing myself."

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Petros Karadjias, Associated Press

Cyprus Cyclamens appear in the Famagusta district 50 miles from capital Nicosia, Cyprus.

5 flowering plants and how to keep them blooming

BY JESSICA DAMIANO
ASSOCIATED PRESS



Jessica Damiano, Associated Press

A peace lily appears in bloom on Long Island, N.Y.

Houseplants are a wonderful way to add a little green to your home, especially in the colder months. And if you choose ones that bloom, they can add a rainbow of color to remind you of your summer garden.

Flowering houseplants are just as easy to grow as their leafy counterparts, but some require special care in order to rebloom. Provide what they need, and it'll be like having a living bouquet in your home for weeks or months on end.

Here are five favorites:

CYCLAMEN

Cyclamen bloom in white, pink, red or purple. Their petals curl backward, giving them an odd, butterfly look.

To encourage and prolong blooming, place the plants in indirect light near an east- or north-facing window in a cool room that stays between 60 and 70 degrees Fahrenheit. The plants also like humidity, so put them on a tray to which you've added pebbles and water, or run a humidifier nearby.

Since the plants are susceptible to root rot, avoid wetting their crowns, the junctures where the roots meet the lower stems. To avoid this, water from below by placing the pot on a saucer of water and allowing the soil to drink through the pot's drainage hole. Then discard any excess water. Fertilize monthly when the plant is in its active growth, budding and flowering stages. Stop watering and feeding in late spring when leaves turn yellow, and move the plant to a cool, dim or dark spot to rest until fall.

AFRICAN VIOLETS

African violets can be a bit capricious, but they aren't difficult to grow. They require slightly acidic soil with a pH between 6.0 and 6.8. They aren't heavy feeders, but should be fertilized with a 20-20-20 houseplant fertilizer (or one specially formulated for African violets) every two or three months.

Place them in direct light from October through the end of February (except in the Deep South, where the winter sun is stronger). But during spring and summer, move them off to the side of, not in front of, a north- or east-facing window.

Their leaves will become spotted and blotchy if they get wet, so avoid splashes by bottom-watering with room-temperature water, but don't let the pot sit in water for too long.

The plants also require warmth (but not heat) and high humidity. If the room is dry, run a humidifier or use a pebble tray.

BROMELIADS

Bromeliads bloom only once, their green leaves giving way to tall, bright bracts of red, yellow, orange, purple or peach that last for months. Afterward, the plants produce "babies," their mother slowly fades and the next generation takes over.

The plants are easy to grow and fun to water, as they take in water through their leaves, not their roots. Place them in bright, indirect light and pour water into the plant's central "cup," the point in the middle where the leaves meet. Rinse out that reservoir weekly before filling it with fresh, room-temperature water.

PEACE LILIES

Peace lilies are tropical plants that like bright, indirect light and temperatures between 64 and 72 degrees Fahrenheit.

Water them regularly to keep the soil slightly moist (but never soggy) and mist their foliage occasionally with room-temperature water.

Removing faded flowers will encourage more blooms.

KALANCHOE

Kalanchoe grows best in full, but not harsh, sunlight, and is happiest with daytime temperatures between 50 and 70 degrees Fahrenheit. Cooler nighttime temperatures of 45-65 degrees Fahrenheit will prolong flower life.

Plant them in well-draining potting mix and allow the soil to dry slightly between waterings. Fertilize plants in their active growing stage once a month with ordinary houseplant fertilizer.