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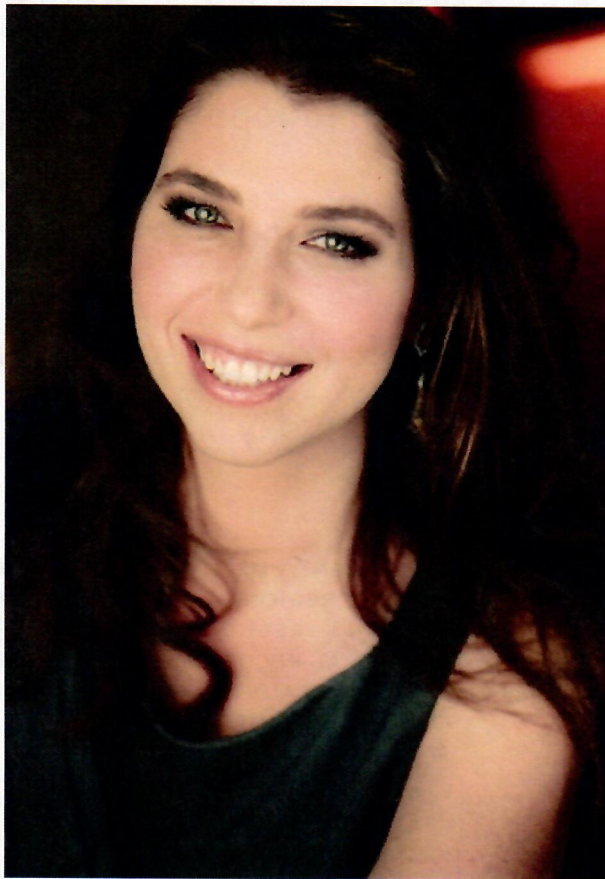
Brett Kroeger's Over There

JULY 08, 2016 IN REGIONAL FOURTEEN FIFTEEN

OperaMetro had the privilege of speaking with local soprano Brett Kroeger, who

will perform a solo concert of songs from the Great War era at the Greenwich Arts Council on December 13.

Regional audiences will remember her sparkling rendition of Gretchen in the Troupers Light Opera's production of Victor Herbert's *The Red Mill* in 2013. Quoth a review in *The Stamford Advocate*: "Of the several couples in the show, the Burgomaster's pretty daughter Gretchen and the handsome young sea captain Davis fill the 'romantic category.' Soprano Brett Kroeger's lovely voice shines in its upper range, especially in her musings on moonbeams from upper floor of the Red Mill." Kroeger also sang Edith in the Troupers' *The Pirates of Penzance* in 2014 and this November sang in the Troupers' *An Evening with Gilbert and Sullivan and Friends* at the Pequot Library in Southport. Kroeger's song that evening was "Vilja" from Lehár's *The Merry Widow*. Listen to her sing "[Vilja](#)."



Brett Kroeger to sing songs from the Great War

Operametro caught up with Ms. Kroeger by telephone.

OM: You're giving a solo recital of songs from the time period World War I. Why?

BK: It just sort of fell into place: my husband and I were driving, listening to the radio in June on what, we learned, was the day 100 years ago that Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria was assassinated in Sarajevo, the event that set off the First World War. And we thought, you know, the songs of that era fit really well with my voice. It would make for an interesting concert. I mean I so much loved singing Victor Herbert's music in *The Red Mill* (1906); it's as if the role of Gretchen were written for me. I knew I was in familiar territory musically. Right up my alley, so to speak.

OM: There are lots of songs from back then, I'm sure. How did you narrow down your selections?

BK: I researched music of the period. Since there was no commercial radio network at the time, a "best seller" was measured in terms of sheet music sales. There were records of course, those scratchy old 78s, but a piano was cheaper than a Victrola. Unlike today, folks more likely gathered around and sang together for an evening of entertainment.

From there, I chose songs that were the greatest hits, the chart toppers, or nearly so, of the war years, 1914 to 1918. I put them into categories: Sending the troops off, Keeping the home fires burning, Keeping the spirits up, and then Welcome home.

OM: Chronological, but also very different emotional experiences for all involved, troops and families alike.

BK: Exactly. Song writers of the era, even President Wilson, knew the power of music to support the war effort and boost the morale of the populace. I'm singing songs by George M. Cohan ("Over There"), Irving Berlin ("Oh! How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning"), Jerome Kern ("Till the Clouds Roll By"), Gus Kahn ("Memories"), and several others. Some, like "Danny Boy," were written much earlier, but became associated with the war because they hit a nerve.

OM: It probably made for a more emotional impact of these songs by singing them together or at least listening to them together. Not like listening to music all alone on your iPod.

BK: Certainly. Singing in a group or with a chorus can be a very moving, very uplifting experience, just like putting on a show. Often the troops sang together in

shows put on away from the trenches. Did you know that Irving Berlin was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1917 to serve his country by writing songs?

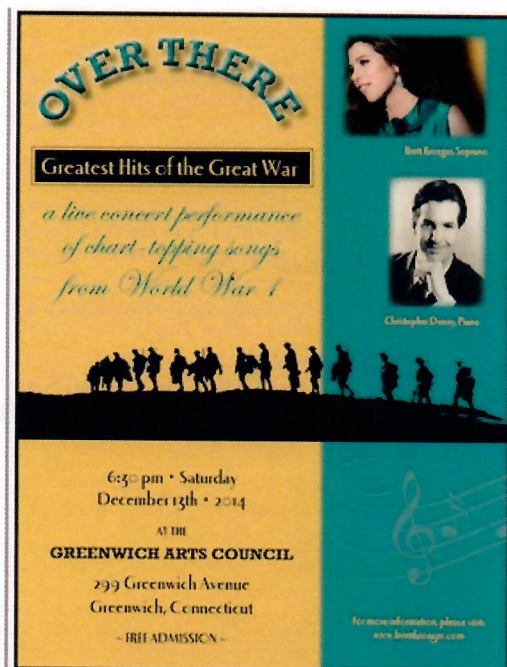
OM: Did not. Interesting. But related to uplifting experiences: It's conspicuous, both in *The Red Mill* and *Pirates*, how much fun you seem to have on stage.

BK: I have a lot of fun. I LOVE to sing! I've been singing since I can remember. I discovered Gilbert and Sullivan in fifth grade, I loved their music. I studied voice and performance both in college and in graduate school; I'm a student with Bill Schuman. Nothing gives me greater pleasure than to sing for people. I enjoy every part of it: preparing the music, learning the part, rehearsing, dressing up, performing...as long as I'm singing I'm happy.

Unfortunately, these days there are not as many opportunities for a classically trained voice to get experience on stage. This is why organizations like Troupers Light Opera Company are so important for young artists. I'm a full lyric soprano whose dream is to do the big roles in big houses. I've sung some big roles in smaller houses with smaller companies: Marguerite in Gounod's *Faust* and Tatiana in Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* being two of my absolute favorites.

But I feel the like, okay, today you have to get a little creative in programming, you have to create opportunities, hence my concert in December. For this I am quite excited. The songs and the experiences they are associated with are part of our collective American history. And I'm really blessed with a super accompanist in Christopher Denny. He is truly amazing, a consummate musician, and way way cooler than I am. I couldn't ask for a better musical partner.

OM: See you in Greenwich on the 13th!



Concert Poster

See Brett Kroeger and Christopher Denny

Dec. 13 Greenwich Arts Council 6:30pm in

a live concert performance of the songs of World War I. For more information, go to

[OVER THERE: Greatest Hits of the Great War](#)

Free Admission

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<http://brettkroeger.com/>

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