

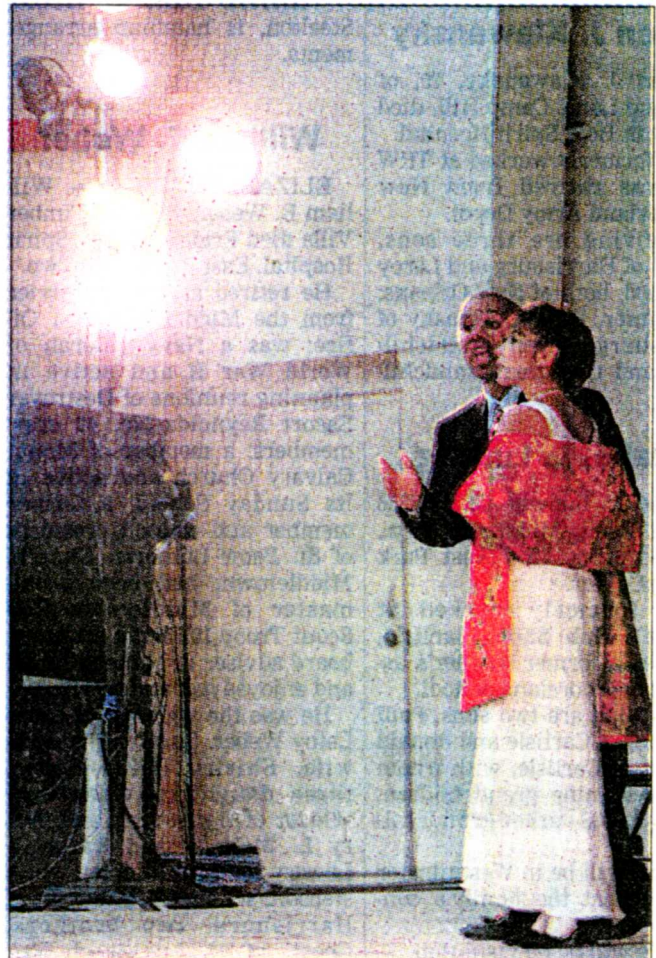
LOCAL & ST

Divas in the park



JEFFREY LOWE / FOR THE PATRIOT-NEWS

Above: Soprano Marta Burton and tenor Christyan Seay perform yesterday evening during the Opera in the Park program at Reservoir Park. **Right:** Soprano and artistic director Tami Swartz sings with Seay.



Powerful voices shatter opera's solemn stereotype

BY MARY KLAUS
OF THE PATRIOT-NEWS

Nikki Tanberg and Phil Jurick always considered opera a formal type of music that was out of their league.

But the teen-agers, attending the "Opera in the Park" program in Reservoir Park last night, found their first brush with opera as soft as the blue fleece blanket they sat on for the musical program.

"Whenever I think of opera, I think of dressing up and acting formal," Phil Jurick, 17, of Mechanicsburg said as he and six friends from the Pennsylvania Bible Fellowship youth program enjoyed their outing. "It's not like that here. This is out of the ordinary and

pretty cool. I'd go to opera on a date."

Although Harrisburg-area residents are more likely to spend Sunday nights watching movies or analyzing football games than listening to opera, a mixed crowd attended the Harrisburg Opera Association's eighth annual Opera in the Park.

The program featured music from five operettas, dubbed "opera light" by some because of its spoken lines and dancing in addition to singing.

Linda Larson, association executive director, said that interest in the 30-year-old association and its productions has been growing ever since it became the resident opera company at Whitaker Center for Science and the Arts.

Jill Uhler, Harrisburg Opera Association production and public relations manager, said Opera in the Park helps the association "get our name out to the average Joe on the street. The Harrisburg Opera Association is celebrating its 30th year, but we're still a well-kept secret. We want to change that."

They did.

Opera-goers on benches and quilts in the grass focused on the simple band shell and listened to Tami Swartz, soprano and artistic director; Marta Burton, soprano; Christyan Seay, tenor; and Ryan Leeds, bass-baritone. Kelly Horsted was musical director. The four sang with power, clarity and emotion.