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Aida Bullock will turn 80 on Sept. 11 and for her birthday, husband, Matthew W. Bullock Jr., is taking her to the opera.

Not just any opera, mind you. It's Giuseppe Verdi's Aida,

the favorite opera of Aida Bullock's father and the inspiration for the name of his first and only child. And it just so happens that the performance falls on Aida's birthday.

"I consider this concert one of my birthday presents to her," said Matthew W. Bullock Jr., a self-proclaimed "certified enthusiast" who is happily "retired from mundane toil."

The UCSB Music Affiliates' opera program featuring the Los Angeles Opera provided the former Philadelphia lawyer and Pennsylvania judge with the fitting gift idea. The Bullocks are Music Affiliates and by coincidence, the community support group's 2000-2001 opera offerings included a performance of the well-known Aida.

Begun about six years ago, the opera program is a popular fund-raiser for the Music Affiliates. The group takes a motor coach full of opera lovers to the Los Angeles Music Center for several performances during the Los Angeles Opera's season. On the way down, participants are treated to a gourmet box dinner from the Wine Cask

and their choice of wine. Once there, they watch the performance from front balcony seats.

Program organizers say this is the first time they have heard of anyone using the opera trips to mark a special occasion.

With a master's degree in fine arts, Aida Bullock had taught music and art and was a musical performer herself as well. The opera is just one favorite; her preference often depends on which opera she is listening to. She is certainly prejudiced in favor of Aida

because of its connection with her father who loved the spectacular splendor of the opera.

Aida is the story of an Ethiopian princess enslaved in Egypt who is torn between her allegiance to her homeland and family, and her love for a man who commands the Egyptian army.

The two countries are warring and Aida is manipulated by her father to discover Egypt's battle plans from her lover, Rhadames.

Pharoah's daughter finds the three and denounces Rhadames as a traitor. Rhadames surrenders himself as Aida and her father escape. As punishment, the army commander is buried alive and when the crypt is sealed, he finds Aida who had entered the vault in secret to share his fate.

In addition to Aida (which has sold out), UCSB Music Affiliates trips are planned for performances of La Boheme, Dec. 19, Giulio Cesare, March 2, 2001, Don Pasquale, April 24, 2001, and Tosca, June 22, 2001. The group offers 42 tickets for each performance and encourages early reservations, especially for the more popular operas. Out of each ticket price ($100 for Music Affiliates/$150 for non-members), $25 go toward music scholarships.

The Music Affiliates are dedicated to strengthening relationships between UCSB and the greater Santa Barbara community, showcasing music students and faculty, and raising money for scholarships. Since 1984, the group has given nearly $180,000 in scholarships to UCSB students.

For additional information, call the Community Relations Office at 893-4388.

About UC Santa Barbara

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