

# Singer Lisa Mitchell taps '70s tunes for Sundays at Four

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COUNCIL ON CULTURE & ARTS



Mitchell

Leading up to a show, singer and professor Lisa Mitchell brews a cup of hot tea. She believes in exercising and preserving one's voice and finds ways to loosen and warm up her throat, steering clear of dairy, sugar, or coffee products.

As part of her pre-performance rituals she'll go through her songs three or four times a day, and though she says she's good at making up forgotten lyrics on the spot, memorization is imperative for her comfortability.

All of Mitchell's preparation will pay off for Thomas University's Sundays at Four on Sept. 17, where she's envisioning how to embody the "Celebrate the '70s!" theme. With the resurgence of 70s music in popular culture, she anticipates the "YMCA" by the Village People will make an appearance as a way to get the audience moving. Though it will be her first time performing at the Thomasville Music and Drama Troupe, she's hopeful that the venue's lighting will allow her to see the audience—an inclination that those riddled with stage fright might reject.

"I like to see people's mouths moving and singing along with me," admits Mitchell. "It's fun, and the most rewarding part is to see the audience smiling and nodding. Even when you can't see, you can still feel in the air when everyone is really focused or listening."

This kind of communication is key for Mitchell, who has served on the faculty at Thomas University's Speech and Theater Department for nearly 14 years. In the classroom, Mitchell uses her performance-based background and involvement in both choir and theater communities, challenging her students to articulate themselves with clarity and self-assurance.

"I'm inspired by my students who can use the tools they've had all their lives to grow and become better communicators and speakers," says Mitchell. "When you're confident in front of other people, they feel better and you feel better. Push yourself and exude that confidence and it'll help you to be better, too."

Growing up in Georgia, Mitchell was always involved with music at her school and church. She looked up to one of her first choral instructors, Janet Johnson, who equipped her with the tools to become a better singer. She can pinpoint when she first fell in love with the stage, however, during her fifth-grade production of "The Wizard of Oz."

"Swing the feather dusters, swing that broom, the wizard has ordered us to clean the room," sing-songs Mitchell,



THOMAS UNIVERSITY

The Thomasville Singers are preparing for a concert on Sept. 17.

## If you go

**What:** Sundays at Four - Celebrate the '70s!

**When:** 4-6 p.m., Sunday, Sept. 17

**Where:** Thomasville Music and Drama Troupe, 427 Covington Avenue, Thomasville, Georgia

**Cost:** Free

**Contact:** For more information please call 229-227-6964 or visit <http://tinyurl.com/zchzyre>.

who can still repeat her part verbatim. "I was singing almost by myself in front of a hundred people, and I thought, 'This is awesome, I love this.' It was definitely a pivotal point."

Mitchell earned her undergraduate degree in theater and her master's in English education from Florida State University. Post-graduation, she immersed herself in New York City's Broadway theater scene, taking part in numerous productions.

Throughout her time in the city, Mitchell picked up skills and tricks from her fellow performers. During one run of an off-Broadway production of the musical "Little Shop of Horrors," Mitchell recalls one actress' indirect lessons on how to succeed as a team player. Instead of standing out from or above the cast, she strived for everyone to feel up to par in an effort to be cohesive in performance.



"Some people want to be the star, but I don't want to be the best person in the show," says Mitchell. "I like being surrounded by people who are more talented and smarter than I am because it helps me to raise my game and get motivated. If everyone is at the same level it can be hard to get beyond that plateau."

Some of her favorite local shows and roles in the Thomasville, Tallahassee, and Quincy area have been the Baker's Wife in "Into the Woods," and Betty in "The Great American Trailer Park Musical." Mitchell was also given the chance to direct "The Fantasticks" at Theater Tallahassee a few years back.

Mitchell always prizes her chances to participate in Sundays at Four as well. The show is the brainchild of Dr. Karl Barton and is part of Thomas University's Arts for the Community at Thomas University program, which aims to involve the community through the arts. Mitchell says Sundays at Four have provided her and others with the perfect way to gear up for the week

ahead while unwinding in the last few hours of the weekend.

When mapping the songs she'll perform, top hits like "You're So Vain" by Carly Simon and "I Will Survive" by Gloria Gaynor, she finesses different vocal phrasings and artistic emphasis to make the song engaging for the audience. Mitchell will sing alongside the Thomas University Jazz Ensemble, which will inspire a different approach in her singing. Whereas in a chorus, Mitchell aims to blend with other voices, she'll lend her voice more assertively to the instrumentalists' overall sound so that she can be heard.

Ultimately, she hopes to radiate the same qualities as the performers she admires — Patti LuPone and Audra McDonald — both whom Mitchell feels can tell a story regardless of if it's in a musical or as a standalone number.

"They're not just fabulous singers, but wonderful storytellers and that's what I try to do," explains Mitchell. "It's not just about singing the right notes, using good tone quality, or having the rhythms right, though those are very important. You want to communicate with your voice, face, and body the story of the song so that you're really taking on a character and you use your voice beyond just speaking."