

Bob Gilfry performs in the Great Stone Church.



MISSION MAGIC

When the sky darkens at dusk and the theatrical lights go on at the Great Stone Church at Mission San Juan Capistrano, something akin to magic happens. The walls are silhouetted sharply against the sky while the ruins are illuminated from within. Then a singer takes the stage, and one of the most unique musical evenings in California begins.

OC's own Susan Egan will be the

performer this September 20 at dusk, after guests have enjoyed a cocktail reception in the Mission's gardens as part of the Romance of the Mission fundraising gala.

"It's a beautiful, beautiful venue," Egan says, admitting to being a bit Mission-obsessed as a kid. Her parents were married at a Mission and she studied them all, and visited most.

She will sing "Broadway classics and songs by the hottest writers working in NYC," including selections from her six solo albums that represent the new Broadway.

Don't expect a sedate singer running through a repertoire of Broadway hits. Egan is a consummate performer, with the pipes and comedic patter of the best cabaret singers. Her husband is a comedy king in his own right, and it's worn off on her. So expect laughs, as well as a selection of her own Broadway hits.

But she's probably best known in theater for her connection to all things Disney. "All my friends worked there when I was growing up," she says of Disneyland. But when she moved from Orange County to NYC in 1992, "I was told Broadway had 10 more years left." Then she was cast as the original Belle in *Beauty and the Beast*, for which she received a Tony Award and Drama Desk nomination for best actress.

The musical is given credit for helping to usher in a new "golden age" of

critically acclaimed and profitable Broadway productions.

"That show brought two generations to the theater for the first time," Egan says of those who were kids in 1994 and their parents, many of whom weren't finding Broadway relevant before that show.

"The audience saw every dime on the stage. No one felt cheated in the audience," she says, though at the time some criticized the price of a ticket. And Broadway shows are much more expensive today.

The annual Romance of the Mission concert is the only one held in the ruins. It's followed by a four-course candlelit dinner in the Mission's Central Courtyard prepared by long-time community partner The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel.

Mission San Juan Capistrano is owned by the Diocese of Orange, but receives no funding from either the Church or the state of California. We're accused of not knowing our history in Orange County in our rush to build the brand new, but the Mission is one of the sites where this place began. The Mission Preservation Foundation, comprised of business and community leaders, is committed to ensuring its long-term preservation and viability. —KEDRIC FRANCIS

GO :: Individual tickets cost \$350. For more details visit the website or contact Barb Beier. 949.234.1323 :: missionsjc.com

Susan Egan

JAVIER NAVAL

