



Can flowers evoke an emotional response similar to the way beautiful music moves a listener?

Opera singer and floral designer **Betany Coffland** says yes. And after initially trying to keep her two “lives” separate, this talented performer now blends her passion for classical music with her business **Chloris Floral**, resulting in a highly personal platform for her marketing and branding efforts.

Betany’s vocal training at Julliard School of Music and the New England Conservatory was followed by a successful career performing with several opera companies, including Opera San Jose. But travel and a rigorous performance schedule took a toll on her personal life and by 2013, Betany was ready for a breather. “I decided to put a hold on singing for a little while, and I started volunteering on an organic flower farm in Sonoma County, called **Chica Bloom Farm**. Very quickly, I fell completely in love with flowers, particularly local flowers.”

Experiencing design from a growers’ perspective was exhilarating, and Betany transitioned from volunteer to partner in the business for two seasons. In early 2015, she opened her Petaluma, Calif.-based design studio, naming it Chloris Floral after the Greek goddess of flowers and the heroine of her favorite French art song, *A Chloris*, by Reynaldo Hahn.

By then, Betany had concluded that juggling flower farming with floral design was more than she wanted to

undertake. “But I was definitely pulled to being outdoors, experiencing where the flowers are grown and learning the different stages of harvest for each flower. It’s really my spiritual place communing with the flowers.”

Thanks to North San Francisco Bay’s burgeoning artisanal flower farming community, Betany approached a few farmer friends and proposed an arrangement that allowed her to harvest their flowers for her bouquet subscription business and her wedding commissions.

“I regularly have 10 farms at my fingertips just one hour from me, which I realize is so amazing and fortuitous -- not everybody has that luxury. Working with the farmers relies on a big trust system. We keep track of how many bunches I cut and it allows me to go out and be in the field every week.”

Betany has designed more than 15 weddings in the past two seasons, supplied an average of 10 weekly subscribers to her bouquet CSA, taught workshops and collaborated on floral installations for organizations like **Fibershed**.

Music flows so deeply through her veins, though, that one of the first styled shoots Betany created was musically inspired. “We did one based on Debussy’s *La Mer*. I created a bouquet based on calla lilies that looked like the ocean. I thought, “wow, I could really do something with this’ -- and that’s where the idea of the floral notes series began.”

Betany has gradually returned to opera, although she



"Spring" from Vivaldi's concerto the "Four Seasons"







Herbie Hancock's interpretation of Ravel's "Piano Concerto in G Major."



Bettany Coffland melds a love of opera and flowers in her studio named Chloris Floral.



"A Chloris" by Reynaldo Hahn

is more selective about signing onto performances and venues, staying (mostly) closer to home. Admittedly, it took her a long time to tell her opera community that she was also performing in another artistic genre.

"I was really afraid of letting my opera singing and classical worlds know about my floristry work," she admits. "I felt like I lived two identities for a while."

Once Betany began working with area photographer **Paige Green**, she began to feel a freedom in expressing her dual passions.

Their first collaboration, portraits for the Chloris website, captured Betany in a gown wearing Wellington boots and standing in a field. "That portrait session was like \$10,000 worth of therapy," she confides. "A shift happened and I realized I could be this opera-singing florist. Within a month, the idea of a series of musically inspired bouquets came to me. It wasn't until I really accepted that I have two artistic identities that they began to meld together."

Betany has since created pieces to reflect opera, classical music, movie soundtracks and jazz. She's worked with other photographers (often negotiating a bouquets-for-photography trade) and invited designer friends to be guests on her blog, encouraging them to select their own musical inspiration, such as friend **Seth Chapin** of **Evermore Flowers**, a Napa County floral designer who named his business (and bouquet) after a Led Zeppelin title.

It's no surprise that music is always playing in the Chloris Floral studio. "I listen to it over and over again while I'm making an arrangement for a specific piece. I know it sounds crazy but the flowers so often know what they want to do. For me, the music takes over and it just flows. Design just happens then."

Clients are often music aficionados who find her through social media and local press coverage. "My ideal client is somebody who's aware of the local food movement and who is becoming aware about local flowers, too," Betany says. "I'm starting to get inquiries from brides who say, 'I've been following your work for the last year. I want to work with you,' which, of course, feels amazing."



Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring"

Details:

Chloris Floral: [chlorisfloral.com](http://chlorisfloral.com) @chlorisfloral

Photography: Paige Green, [paigegreenphotography.com](http://paigegreenphotography.com)

@paigegreenphoto ■

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