

GOLDEN TICKET

Opera company rings in 50 years with 'Carmen'

By Rose Adams

This show has the tragic touch! Brooklyn's oldest opera company will kick off its 50th season with perennial favorite "Carmen." The 19th century tragedy by Georges Bizet, opening on Nov. 23, is a story of forbidden love that viewers adore because of its timeless themes of jealousy and revenge, said the show's director.

"At the core, there's a lot of truth about the relationships between people," said Linda Lehr.

Regina Opera Company will go all out for this production, hiring dozens of singers decked out as 19th century Spanish peasants, featuring a full, 35-piece orchestra, and projecting an English translation of the French songs above the stage, Lehr said.

The company stages "Carmen" about every five years, said Lehr. The popular show keeps opera-lovers coming back to see new interpretations of the fan favorite.

"It's always new even if you do it several times," Lehr said. Many aficionados return for each production to see how a different actress will put her spin on the infamous title character, she noted.

The upcoming season marks a milestone for the opera company, which was founded by Dyker Heights residents Marie Cantoni and Nick Tierno in 1970, after Cantoni heard Tierno's brother singing gorgeous arias on Tabor Court every morning. The small project has since evolved



She's back: Lara Michole Tillotson, who starred in Regina Opera Company's 2015 production of "Carmen," will return to the role starting on Nov. 23. Regina Opera Company

into a training ground for opera's up-and-coming stars, becoming one of the few places where young soloists can get their singing sea legs, according to Lehr.

"It's where people learn their craft," she said. "It's how we grow the next generation."

In 1980, now-worldfamous mezzo soprano Dolora Zajick got her start singing "Cavalleria Rusticana" — now one of her signature pieces — at the company. In this year's production of "Carmen," about half the cast is new to Regina Opera, said Lehr.

Other opera institutions have struggled with waning audiences, but Regina Opera continues to thrive because of its outreach efforts, according to its chairwoman.

"We reach out to young people," said Francine Garber, noting that teenagers pay \$5 for tickets, and children 12 and younger enter free. "A lot of young people studying music come to New York City."

Garber added that producing well-known operas, like Carmen, helps attract new viewers to the company.

"People who haven't seen opera — we try to entice them by doing 'Carmen,'" said Garber. "It's a good starting point."

"Carmen" at Regina Opera Company [5902 Sixth Ave. between 59th and 60th streets in Sunset Park, (718) 259-2772, www.reginaopera.org]. Nov. 23-24, Nov. 30 and Dec. 1 at 3 pm. \$25 (\$20 students and seniors, \$5 teens, kids free).



Stretching out: Beth upgrades from a tiny apartment to a palatial estate after her elevation, in "All Hail Beth," coming to Bric TV on Nov. 11. Bric TV

DIVINE COMEDY

Brooklyn gets a goddess in series 'All Hail Beth'

By Ben Verde

Hail to the queen! A new five-episode web series follows a depressed Brooklyn woman who wakes up one day as a beloved Babylonian goddess.

"All Hail Beth," produced by Downtown arts organization Bric and debuting on its Youtube channel on Nov. 11, follows its title character's mysterious transformation from hapless millennial to Ishtar, the venerated goddess of love, war, and civilization. The show can be seen all over the world, but is aimed at an audience in Kings County, said its creator.

"It's a very New York show," said Misha Calvert. "There's a lot of in-jokes for New Yorkers and specifically for Brooklyn residents."

Before her deification, Beth works at a hip public relations firm in Dumbo, where her co-workers treat her like a second-class citizen, and her friends and family members are too busy with their own problems to care about hers. But as Ishtar, strangers in the street offer her flowers, and her co-workers bow down in worship when she walks past. In the first few episodes, Beth struggles with her newfound holiness until she meets another Babylonian goddess, Aya, who helps her navigate the world of ancient deities.

Much of the show was filmed in Bay Ridge and Dumbo, with the latter neighborhood's constant hordes of tourists and office workers creating a challenge while filming, according to Calvert.

"I will never forget wrangling 50 background actors literally running through the street while we stopped traffic on both sides, possibly without a permit," she said. "I feel like I could probably tackle most problems as a filmmaker after that."

Calvert said she wanted to highlight the religion of ancient Babylon, the pre-Biblical kingdom located across present-day Iraq and Iran, because of the negative stigma assigned to the region today.

"I think I centered on that part of the world to try to dispel some of the myths and fallacies that vilify Middle Eastern Americans right now," Calvert said. "It's also just a really fun time period, it's beautiful and decadent."

"All Hail Beth" premieres Nov. 11 at noon on Bric TV (www.bricartsmedia.org/tv-shows-videos/all-hail-beth).

Regina Opera turns 50!

By Rose Adams

It's not over until the fat lady sings! The beloved Brooklyn opera group Regina Opera Company launches its 50th season of arias this month. In the half century since its founding, the company has grown from a shoestring project into a full-fledged opera house that draws hundreds of spectators for each performance. Here are some notable moments from the company's rich history.



Memory lane: Wesley Garrison and Kimberly Hughes in the Regina Opera's 1995 production of "Tosca," performed at the Regina Pacis School.

1970: The start

Dyker Heights neighbors Marie Cantoni and Nick Tierno founded the Regina Opera company so that Tierno's brother, a tenor opera singer, could have a place to perform. The group got its start in — and its name from — the Regina Pacis Youth Center, where up-and-coming singers sang excerpts from famous operas.

1975: First full opera

Five years after its founding, neighborhood support allowed the opera to begin putting on full opera productions with costumes, sound, and scenery, kicking off with Giuseppe Verdi's three-act "Rigoletto" with piano accompaniment.

1976: Moving on up

Regina Opera ditched the youth center for the auditorium of the nearby Regina Pacis School, where

the audience sat on folding chairs, and often spilled onto lunch tables and the floor nearby to view the popular performances.

1982: Full ensemble

Regina upgraded its music from a simple piano accompaniment to a full, 35-piece orchestra.

2012: Theater upgrade

Regina moved to Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Academy, trading in the low-key auditorium for a 500-seat theater with an orchestra pit.

2018: Ambitious "Aida"

Regina upped its game in 2018 with "Aida," a lavishly produced Italian opera set in Egypt, featuring a 35-person chorus, scenery that evoked ancient Egypt, and soloists with dramatic, versatile voices that could ace the opera's tricky arias.