

ARTS AND CULTURAL PROGRAMMING

A Leisure Perspective



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Is there room for innovation within the programming consideration of *where*? Jay D. Meetze, artistic director of the Opera Company of Brooklyn (OCB), offers an innovative approach to this aspect of programming. The company's mission is to make opera affordable and accessible to people who do not usually have the opportunity to attend performances in conventional venues. The company keeps production costs down by eliminating virtually all visual elements of production (costumes, scenery, and spectacle), and it even reduces, if not eliminates, venue costs. Instead, those scarce resources are allocated to the core values of the art form and the artists. Works are often presented in an intimate venue where the audience has a better opportunity to connect with the art, which is also a core value for the OCB.

Meetze admits to cutting the operas down to a 2-hour running time, but he defends the programming as traditional. As the primary programmer for the company, he respects titles that audiences will recognize, and he understands that such titles result in greater interest from the public. Although the titles are traditional, the venues most certainly are not. The organization often produces works at unpublicized anonymous venues, including private residences in and around Brooklyn. The logistics for such an innovative approach are unique: Audience members interested in attending must call the OCB box office for advance reservations. Once audience members pay for a ticket (usually around \$15 U.S.), they are instructed to call back a few days before the event. When they call back, they are given the address of the performance. Title recognition, word of mouth, and world-class performers are among the OCB's most powerful allies as it works to fulfill its public service mission (Meetze and Osa 2006).

When the Program Occurs

Timing is everything. The success or failure of programming is often a function of when the event takes place. The most obvious consideration is venue availability. Arts organizations that do not own their own home are often at the mercy of the venue and its calendar policies. For example, an orchestra that shares a hall with other local arts groups may compete with those organizations on scheduling. Some programs



Kenneth Overton as Papageno in the OCB 2003 production of *The Magic Flute* at New York City College of Technology's Voorhees Theater in downtown Brooklyn.

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