

Sci-fi 'Flute'

The Opera Company of Brooklyn is employing an unusual cost-saving measure in its latest production, "The Magic Flute."

The company's mandate — to present affordable opera for the entire borough — includes keeping their own costs down.

"Everyone donates their time and fees," explains Opera Company of Brooklyn's artistic director, Jay Meetze. "This season we were unable to find musicians who would not accept fees for performing, but next season we hope to have live musicians."

In lieu of flesh-and-blood players, the virtual orchestra for Mozart's "The Magic Flute," will make its debut on Aug. 9 at 8 pm, at the Voorhees Theatre, 186 Jay St. at Tillary Street in Downtown Brooklyn.

The virtual what?

"It uses pre-recorded sample sets of musicians that are stored into a computer," Meetze says. "Every note of the opera's score has been entered into the computer over the course of two years. Then I come in to communicate [to the technicians] what the specific articulations, colors and dynamics are in the music."

"At the performance, someone sits at the keyboard and taps along to my beat as I conduct the singers," he says. "Because the audio speakers are placed in the same acoustical set-up as a live orchestra, it also helps the singers [who are accustomed to certain sounds emanating from specific places in the hall]."

The company's controversial decision to use the virtual orchestra has prompted two famed opera singers, Marilyn Horn and Deborah Voigt, to resign as artistic trustees.

But it is that reliance on 21st-century technical wizardry that distinguishes this "Magic Flute," and doubtless many ticket-holders will be attending just to see how this newfangled orchestra works.

"This is an experiment, the first time that the virtual orchestra will control the lighting and video for the entire show," Meetze says. "We're going to utilize our technology to its fullest capabilities."

Stage director Enrique Abdala decided to set Mozart's fairytale opera — abounding in abstruse Freemason symbolism — in a time far, far away ... the year 2163 to be exact.

"I'm doing it as a kind of 'Men in Black' take-off," Abdala says. "I want to explain the story better, since traditional stagings usually fail to tell it well. It just makes sense to present it in a futuristic way, since we're using all this technology."

Tickets are \$25, \$15 for Brooklyn residents with ID, \$5 for students with ID, and free for Brooklyn students with ID. For more information, call (212) 567-3283 or visit the Web site at www.members.aol.com/operabrooklyn/.



Steven Jarvi works the virtual orchestra.