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The Brooklyn Papers' essential guide to the Borough of Kings

# Hometown hero

## Opera Company of Brooklyn pays tribute to tenor Richard Tucker

By Kevin Filipksi  
for The Brooklyn Papers

The Opera Company of Brooklyn hopes to be to the opera world what the minor league Brooklyn Cyclones are to the Mets. It's a chance for music enthusiasts to watch — and listen to — talented, young opera singers, some of whom might one day make it to prestigious companies.

Then the Opera Company of Brooklyn (OCB) audience will have the pleasure of saying, "I knew them when..." At Bargemusic Tuesday, OCB presents "A Salute to Richard Tucker," a benefit for its just-formed Resident Artist Program. The benefit falls on the 88th anniversary of the great tenor's birth.

The late tenor, who sang at the Metropolitan Opera for three decades, was born in Williamsburg, and his son Barry Tucker is the honorary chairman of this special event.

In keeping with OCB founder and artistic director Jay Meetze's stated aim for the company — to both nurture rising talent and enrich Brooklyn with more affordable opportunities to support the arts — the concert features several talented young singers, who have already gotten their start with other notable opera companies. They will perform selections from many of the operas in which Tucker himself performed during his long and storied career.

A handful of the performers on the benefit program have sung locally: soprano Jacqueline Venable, mezzo Barbara LeMay and tenor Enrique Abdada have all performed on the New York City Opera stage. (Abdada is also the director of OCB's Resident Artist program.) As for the other featured performers, soprano Joanna Mongiardo has sung at the Caramoor Festival in Westchester County, soprano Michelle Mattalina has performed at Santa Fe Opera and baritone Galen Scott Bower has sung with the Lyric Opera of Chicago.

Accompanied by pianists Kathy Olsen and Leo Shih, the singers will perform arias from a veritable "Greatest Operas" list: Mozart's "The Magic Flute" and "Così fan Tutte," Verdi's "La Traviata" and



"Rigoletto," Johann Strauss' "Die Fledermaus," Donizetti's "Lucia di Lamermoor" and Puccini's "Madame Butterfly." Such excerpts give the audience a chance to hear much-beloved and familiar music as well as enable the performers to show off their vocal chops, both solo and in an ensemble.

Coming off an auspicious debut season that opened with a double bill that could be called ambitious by any standard — a youthful Mozart's "The Impresario" and the dramatic Gian Carlo Menotti one-act, "The Medium" — OCB intends to take that momentum (undoubtedly furthered by the Tucker benefit) into its upcoming 2001-2002 season.

If scheduling Puccini's ubiquitous tragedy "Madame Butterfly" to open the season smacks of pandering to its audience, well, why not? However overly familiar it is, "Butterfly" also has the distinction of Puccini's best music: glorious melodies that burn themselves into your brain and stay there, and sympathetic characters who slide reassuringly into their fateful trajectories.

And Puccini's music usually brings out the assertiveness in many singers; in this production (staged by Ira Siff and conducted by Maestro Meetze), soprano Mattalina returns to sing the ill-fated heroine Cio-Cio San, and baritone Bower also comes back as the American officer Sharpless.

("Madame Butterfly" will be performed Dec. 15 at the Klitgard Auditorium, NYC Technical College, 300 Jay St.)

If Menotti's "The Medium" awoke unsuspecting opera-goers to the strength of 20th-century American operas at OCB last season, then his holiday perennial "Amahl and the Night Visitors" will reaffirm their faith in the sheer soothing beauty of music. Originally broadcast on television in the 1950s, Menotti's "Three Kings" retelling provides an evocative musical setting for such an oft-heard story. The OCB production, directed by Ted Altschuler and conducted by Meetze, features OCB Resident Artist Jessica Miller.

("Amahl and the Night Visitors" will be performed Dec. 23 at Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims, 75 Hicks St.)



Opera's next generation: Opera Company of Brooklyn artistic director Jay Meetze (left) gathered with a few members of the company's 16-singer strong Resident Artist Program at the Victorian opera house, Grand Prospect Hall on Prospect Avenue in Park Slope, Sunday. Above, from left to right, Resident Artist members mezzo-soprano Crate Herbert, baritone Sang Jun Yoon, baritone Glenn Friedman and tenors Ivan Rivera and Julian Altshul get a bird's eye view from the hall's second balcony. On Aug. 28, the company will pay tribute to Williamsburg tenor Richard Tucker, pictured (inset) as Pinkerton from "Madame Butterfly."

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Next spring, the Opera Company of Brooklyn's season concludes with two more events: the first annual opera gala featuring all 16 of the company's Resident Artists (May 18 at the Klitgard Auditorium); and a staging of Donizetti's comic gem "The Elixir of Love" (June 8 at the Klitgard Auditorium). Meetze himself has said that the company is located

in Brooklyn so residents can have the opportunity to attend a professional operatic production without having to leave the borough. Hearing young singers on their way up is an exciting proposition for many opera lovers, and discovering a career in its ascension is just one of many reasons to keep an eye — and ear! — on the Opera Company of Brooklyn.

**BROOKLYN MUSIC**

Opera Company of Brooklyn presents "A Salute to Richard Tucker," on Aug. 28 at 7:30 pm on Bargemusic at Fulton Ferry Landing. A post-concert wine and cheese reception is included. Tickets are \$50. For more information about the Opera Company of Brooklyn, call (718) 986-3294 or visit [www.operabrooklyn.com](http://www.operabrooklyn.com).