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Student-Friendly Operas Offer High Art at Low Prices

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Beyond the gilded halls of Lincoln Center, a thriving alternative opera scene grows in this city.

With tickets to the Metropolitan Opera going for up to \$375—though standing room and student rush run more in the range of \$20—it is easy to think of opera as an exclusive realm of entertainment, appealing more to the fur-hat-wearing crowd than to Columbia students.

Not so! The Chelsea Opera and the Opera Company of Brooklyn are two organizations that produce smaller-scale productions that may be more accessible, financially and culturally, to the average college student.

“Opera” and “Chelsea” are not two words that often appear in the same sentence: the neighborhood would seem to be more in the realm of avant-garde art galleries than Victorian era melodrama. Considering this, the Chelsea Opera Company has been surprisingly successful since its founding in 2004. They have mounted eight full operas since then, most of which are performed in St. Peter’s Church on West 20th Street. It is their mission, according to their Web site, to make “opera attractive, affordable and accessible to a broad spectrum of the community.”

The Chelsea Opera might appeal to students because of its offbeat productions—its program strays from the well-worn path of traditional opera. This season featured, in the fall, a double bill of an operatic adaptation of Anton Chekov’s play *The Bear*, and *The Scarf*, based on one of his short stories. Their spring offering is



Diana Wong / Staff Photographer

OPERA HOP | Not just for the diamond-clad anymore, opera moves beyond the Met and into smaller venues with more accessible productions that don’t force you to pay out of the ears, or listen after you can’t pay attention any longer.

Puccini’s *Suor Angelica*, a one-act that premiered in 1918. Student tickets to the Chelsea Opera are just \$12.

The Opera Company of Brooklyn, founded in 2000, is only slightly older than the Chelsea Opera. Though based in Brooklyn, OCB presents its operas around the city in what they term, on their Web site, “unconventional venues.” The venues aren’t the only unconventional thing—many of OCB’s shows are BYOB, a fact they boast of in advertising. It might be the only place in the city where you can watch Violetta and Alfredo (of *La Traviata*, OCB’s next

opera) fall in love while swilling your own wine—legally, at least. Tickets to OCB, at \$35, run a bit more expensive than the Chelsea Opera.

Because of limitations on space and funding, the productions at the Chelsea Opera and the Opera Company of Brooklyn are not long running—each is performed around four times.

It’s now also possible to get some really good deals to more conventional opera companies. The Metropolitan Opera now sets aside 200 orchestra seats—usually selling for \$100 or more—as \$20 rush tickets, making the experience affordable

for even the slimmest budget. Student rush tickets at the New York City Opera are \$16.

But the Chelsea Opera and the Opera Company of Brooklyn offer a different experience from Lincoln Center. Both produce unconventional works you might not see elsewhere, and both are in smaller venues perhaps more accessible to an opera novice than the grand five-tiered halls of the Met and the NYC Opera.

With companies like these catering to a younger audience, maybe you should put a trip to the opera between barhopping and parties in your weekend itinerary.