

## BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 8

### MINUTES OF THE LIBRARIES & CULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON FEBRUARY 12, 2015 AT THE BOARD OFFICE

#### Present

Marvin Goodman  
Sylvia Alexander  
Tim Tureski  
Ben Spierman

#### Affiliation

CB8, Committee Chair  
CB8  
District Branch Manager - Spuyten Duyvil Library  
Associate Artistic Director, Bronx Opera  
Company & Orchestra of the Bronx

The meeting began at 6:45PM. Because of a lack of a quorum, the minutes of the previous meetings could not be voted on for approval.

The Chair noted that all Community Board 8 District Branch Libraries had been invited to submit proposals to Council Member Cohen for capital improvement projects to be funded from the discretionary funds available to Council Member Cohen as part of a community budget participatory process. Five library projects have been sent on for further consideration.

The Chair introduced Ben Spierman, Associate Artistic Director of Bronx Opera Company and Orchestra of the Bronx.

The Bronx Opera Company was started in 1967 by Michael Spierman, father of Ben; Michael remains the artistic director and conductor. It has not-for-profit status. Of the five original founders, some are still active. The mission is to make opera affordable and accessible to the community. All productions are in English to enhance audience and performer understandings. The two fully staged productions, with orchestra and chorus, are in January and in May. The January performance is usually a rarely produced one. This year was an East Coast premiere of Richard Sheridan's "The Rivals". This May's production will be "The Marriage of Figaro" by Giuseppe Verdi. Most activities of the opera company are in the West Bronx. Home base is the Lovinger Theater at Lehman College, for most rehearsals and performances. The company also does community concerts and performances at Bronx public schools. Four are involved this year, but none in our community. Through a grant given by Council Member Andrew Cohen to work with cultural immigrant populations, the opera company is working with an Albanian speaking group. At each of the four schools singers and pianists teach about opera, with an abridged version of the story and the music. Students can attend rehearsals and abridged performances at Lehman College for free, with a \$5.00 fee for parents. The idea is to show by attractive, multi-media presentations, that opera art forms are good educational tools to understand history as well as to appreciate art and music.

The Orchestra of the Bronx is an outgrowth of the opera company, but is a separate 501c3 company, founded in 1972, also by Michael Spierman, who still remains as director. Of the professional concerts each year, two are at Lehman College, usually in October and June. The annual performance of "The Messiah" is at the Hall of Fame of Bronx Community College. All performances are free.

Each opera company includes about 120 people, which includes a small administrative staff, a stage manager and a production manager. (All are part-time workers), as well as

costumers and the crew and production group. Performers earn about \$100 per production, which includes rehearsal time at night from 7 to 10PM. Most performers work during the day or attend classes. There are also volunteers, some of whom have served as long as 20 years. Those interested in being in the orchestra or in the chorus apply from such well-known schools as Julliard or Mannes School of Music. For major singers there is an open audition process. Each production has a double cast for each major role to ensure availability. Some chorus singers have been performing over 20 years. These performers also perform at the schools for the students.

Training of the casts: Rehearsals for opera productions involve music rehearsals for 3 weeks, then staging rehearsals for about 4 weeks, then the combined orchestra and singers' rehearsals for at least one week, followed by dress rehearsals. Full rehearsals for a production are about 2 ½ months.

Funding has been given by Council Members Andrew Cohen, Fernando Cabrera and Andy King. The small admission charge for opera for adults also helps. There is a \$10.00 discount for each member of a group when tickets are ordered en masse.

This is a good local resource. You don't have to go to the Lincoln Center.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 PM.

The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 11<sup>th</sup> , 6:30PM at The Jerome Park Library, 118 Eames Place.

Respectfully submitted,

Marvin Goodman  
Chair, Libraries and Cultural Affairs Committee