

# Don Juan in Scarsdale: opera at St. James the Less

By DEBRA BANERJEE

The gray stone parish hall of St. James the Less Church was transformed into old Seville for the New York Opera Project's production of Mozart's opera "Don Giovanni" Sunday evening, Nov. 20. At the uniquely interactive event, over 100 patrons gathered at tables to enjoy dinner, wine and desserts timed to coincide with events happening in the opera. The informally staged production made good use of all spaces of the church hall, creating a virtual reverse theater in the round, making the opera more accessible and engaging. A translated libretto helped the audience follow the action.

The New York Opera Project, under the artistic direction of Fredrick Martell, who is also executive director, was formed in 1992 as a company to produce concert performances of operatic and vocal/recital chamber compositions. NYOP provides a training ground and opportunity for artists committed to careers in the performing arts and presents the artists with opportunities to familiarize themselves with a wide repertoire of roles.

Church members Dorothy Heyl and Louise Clark, and Linda Levine, board members of the NYOP, brought the production to St. James the Less.

Clark's son, baritone Peter Clark, who is an Edgemont High School graduate, sang the role of the depraved Don Juan with smooth confidence. Leporello, his slippery



DAVID ARKY PHOTO

Singers Peter Clark and Rachel Arky with Fred Martell, artistic director of the New York Opera Project

companion, was played with practiced comic effect by baritone Vladimir Shvets. Donna Anna, who is almost seduced by Don Giovanni and whose father was murdered by him, was sung with emotion by soprano Julia Rolwing, who had a very dramatic presence, as did soprano Veronica Chapman-Smith, who beautifully sang the role of Donna Elvira, another of Don Giovanni's wronged women. The delightful couple of Masetto and Zerlina was played by the baritone David Kellaheer-Flight and the promising soprano Rachel Arky, a sophomore at Barnard College, who had won the National Association of Teachers of Song competition the night before. Bass Erik Kroncke sang Il Commendatore with authority as did tenor Peter Tantsits who sang the role of Don Ottavio.

The peasant girls, who helped serve the meal, were played by Scarsdale High School students Pamela Jacobs and Ingrid Vidal and by Aderonke Coker and Louise Clark's granddaughter Angela Gaylard who was visiting from Virginia.

Susan Morton, musical director of NYOP, was accompanist.

Proceeds from the event benefit the New York Opera Project. The next performance of the NYOP will be Menotti's "Amahl and the Night Visitors," Wednesday, Dec. 7, at Hunter College's Assembly Hall, East 69th Street in Manhattan. For more information, go to [www.nyop.org](http://www.nyop.org).