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Martina Arroyo Foundation Holds 2013 Annual Gala



Martina Arroyo, honoree Tyne Daly and HGTV's Selling New York stars and CORE's Mickey Conlon and Tom Postilio. Photo by Judy Pantano

The Martina Arroyo Foundation's 9th year Annual Gala was truly a unique event. It was held at 583 Park Ave., one of New York's most elegant landmark venues.

The honored guest was Tyne Daly, Tony- and Emmy-winning actress. Playwright Terrence McNally introduced Ms. Daly to the audience and told the several hundred guests from the worlds of Broadway, opera and fashion, how much he cherished Tyne Daly as a friend and an artist, playing Mamma Rose in *Gypsy* and Lacey in the television series *Cagney and Lacy*.

Daly exclaimed her great admiration for opera as an art form. When all the ingredients of singing, action, music and drama are done right, sheer perfection is the result, she said. She

then added, referring to her legendary portrayal as Maria Callas in Terrence McNally's hit show *Master Class*, "I am not an opera singer, I played one on Broadway!"

Stephen De Maio, president of the Gerda Lissner Foundation and artistic director of the Licia Albanese-Puccini Foundation and the Giulio Gari Foundation, all of which provide scholarships to young talented opera singers, accepted his award graciously. He also showed off his other "unofficial" award, an exotic blue tie that was a gift to him from legendary Turkish diva Leyla Gencer. Lissner Foundation board members Karl Michaelis, Gloria Gari, Barbara Ann Testa and Michael Fornabaio watched the glass crystal award glisten like the giant chandelier above.

Frederick Wertheim, music lover, lawyer and board member of the Martina Arroyo Foundation, received the coveted Michel Maurel award, named for Arroyo's late husband. The honorary gala chair was in the elegant hands of award-winning designer Stan Herman. The co-chairs were Alexandra C. Cohn and Edward Sadovnik.

Martina Arroyo, recovering from knee surgery, looked fabulous. She spoke eloquently of her young artists. The foundation's "Prelude to Performance" series has evoked great critical praise for the singing and acting of these future stars of the operatic firmament that have learned to "sing on the word" and act from the heart. This summer, Mme. Arroyo exclaimed, the series will present *La Traviata* and *The Barber of Seville* for a total of six performances.

I asked Arroyo, who insisted on us calling her "Martina," how Brooklyn played a part in her life and career. Her father Demetrio provided for her singing lessons and coaching as well as the entire family with his job as an engineer at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. I then asked Martina if she had anything to say to my readers of the *Brooklyn Eagle*. "Yes, baby," she exclaimed, "Without Brooklyn, none of us would be here." Martina Arroyo may not have been born in Brooklyn, but her musical career was conceived here.

She introduced her young artists in an overview to her "Prelude to Performance" series of operas in the "Chanson de Kleinzach" from Offenbach's masterpiece *Tales of Hoffmann*. It featured tenor Won Whi Choi, who was a passionate Hoffmann, along with Benjamin Bloomfield, Tyrone Chambers, Kirsten Scott and chorus. They made us relive that brilliant performance at the Sylvia Fine & Danny Kaye Playhouse last July, named after the two famed Brooklyn performers.

The host was the enchanting Midge Woolsey of PBS and WQXR Radio fame, who introduced the featured artists. It was nice to meet and greet Midge and her husband, economist Jerry Stoltz, afterward. We chatted with outstanding Met tenor Richard Leech, who has lent his considerable skills in coaching the students. We also met Sean Milnes, son of legendary baritone Sherrill Milnes; Met Broadcast Opera Quiz maven Ken Benson, and Murray Rosenthal from Opera Index.

Soprano Eleni Calenos regaled us with a poignant subtle and triumphant “Un bel di” from Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*. Calenos sang “on the word” and “from the heart” as Licia Albanese would advise.

Bass-baritone Ryan Speedo Green sang a captivating and humorous “La Calunnia” from Rossini’s *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* with rich tone, burnished lows and thrilling highs. Green brings back the era of great basses. Lloyd Arriola was the superb piano accompanist. After dinner and dessert, the final surprise of the evening was famed Cuban-American Grammy Award clarinetist and saxophonist Paquito D’Rivera, with piano accompanist Alex Brown. They played several sets of great jazz including Bach variations.

Martina Arroyo is known for her sense of humor (She was a frequent guest on “The Odd Couple” and “The Johnny Carson Show”). When playing *Madame Butterfly*, she referred to herself as “Madame Butterball.” While singing at the Metropolitan Opera, a security guard said, “Good night, Ms. Price,” mistaking her for Leontyne Price. Ms. Arroyo exclaimed, “No honey, I’m the OTHER one!”

Arroyo, a great international acclaimed Verdi-Puccini soprano, trailblazer and humanitarian, will be honored by President and Mrs. Obama at the Annual Kennedy Center Honors, with fellow honorees keyboardist-composer Herbie Hancock; singer-songwriter Billy Joel; actress Shirley MacLaine and musician-songwriter Carlos Santana on Sunday, Dec. 29 from 9 to 11 p.m. on CBS.