

## New program for Riverdale seniors turns music memories from childhood into one-of-a-kind concerts

### Opera Soprano Anna Tonna sings seniors favorites

by [Tanyanika Samuels](#) / Tuesday, March 20, 2012

Every Friday, an eager group of Riverdale seniors meet up for a musical trip down memory lane.

“Songs My Mother Taught Me” is a popular new program at the Riverdale Senior Services on Netherland Ave.

Each week, opera singer [Anna Tonna](#) leads the group in a lively discussion of their favorite songs.

“We talk about memories from childhood, radio programs they used to listen to, first experiences with music,” Tonna said. “I am getting enriched by them and their experiences.”

Ann Tonna, a Bronx Council on the Arts BRIO winner and teaching artist, created the program which takes its name from a Dvorák song - as part of the city’s Seniors Partnering with Artists Citywide (SPARC) program.

Tonna offers various themes to spark song ideas, and uses their suggestions to compile a list of tunes that she performs at monthly concerts at the senior center. Her next performance is on Friday (March 23).

Last week, about 20 seniors showed up. Tonna asked for ideas for the spring concert. “How about ‘It Might As Well Be Spring?’” offered one man. “There’s ‘Easter Parade’ by [Irving Berlin](#),” offered another.

Talking of favorite songs led to sharing childhood memories. “When I was a kid, we went Easter egg hunting. I had four sisters and we would all run around in our nice little dresses and look for Easter eggs,” said [Maria Scull](#), 82, smiling. “And when we found them, we would dance and shout and be so happy. It was fun.” Then she looked down and fingered her long necklace. “I haven’t thought about that in 60 years,” she said.

“Are you into popular music?” 91-year old [Murray Metelitz](#) asked suddenly, then burst into a rendition of “She’s a Latin From Manhattan” and did a jig in his wheelchair. “I got a million of them,” he bragged with a cheeky grin.

As the hour-long session drew to a close, the group asked Tonna to sing. So she cued up the music and belted out “Habanera” from the opera, Carmen. As she sang, the mezzo soprano shimmied up next to Metelitz whose face broke into a wide grin.

“Brava! Brava!” the seniors shouted as Tonna sounded the last note, and applause filled the room.

“We have a lot of people who go to concerts, but there are also members who no longer can,” said the center’s [Executive Director Julia Schwartz-Leeper](#). “So this is an opportunity for them to talk about it, to share their memories and experiences.”

“Songs My Mother Taught Me” is open to all seniors. To learn more, call Riverdale Senior Services at 718-884-5900. ■



Gerta Freeman, Nathan Kravitz, and Murray Metelitz enjoy opera soprano Anna Tonna’s singing during her program for seniors at Riverdale Senior Services.

Photo: Enid Alvarez/New York Daily News