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Happy meals redefined at Freedom Plaza

by peggy burges
Special Correspondent
Published: March 26, 2014

Happy meals recently got redefined by one group of Freedom Plaza residents – those planning to attend the Met Live presentation of Mozart’s opera “Cosi fan Tutti” at Hyde Park Cinebistro. What could make a meal happier, they reasoned, than having an attentive waiter serve them gourmet food while they’re ensconced in a comfortable easy chair, watching a big-screen, live performance (via satellite) from the Metropolitan Opera?

When arrangements for this April excursion were announced at a recent Opera Club session, attendees lined up quickly to fill the transportation sign-up sheet. Some had attended CineBistro before, many had not, but all were excited about the prospect.

CineBistro is the descriptive name given a movie theater that also furnishes food and bar service while patrons watch the featured screen presentations, including Met Live performances. While the concept of eating and drinking during an opera performance may seem novel, the practice is certainly not. Turn back the pages of opera history for a moment.

The first public opera house opened in Venice, Italy, in 1637. Called the Teatro San Cassiano, it was the first edifice designed especially for production of this new art form, opera, which had arisen in Italy in about 1600. Other Italian cities quickly followed suit, constructing their own opera houses with the elaborate architecture typical of the era.

Seventeenth century opera houses were the entertainment and social centers of their day, a place where one went to “see and be seen.” Patrons expected a full scope of amusements, including food and drink, and they got it. Waiters served full meals to people seated in the tiered boxes where some chairs were set facing away from the stage. Card games ensued, business deals made and romantic trysts conducted – all during the performances. Some opera houses even contained gambling rooms for those who became bored with the music.

By comparison, enjoying a happy meal at a 21st Century CineBistro seems rather tepid. Nevertheless, Freedom Plaza Opera Club members are looking forward to what they consider a hedonistic experience, especially with Mozart’s delightful comic opera in the offing.

If you’re interested in exploring opera at a CineBistro, go to www.cinebistro.com for information. Better still, attend Freedom Plaza Opera Club meetings in the Freedom Plaza Auditorium every second and fourth Wednesday evening and go exploring with us.

Peggy Burgees is an associate of Freedom Plaza and columnist for The Sun newspaper.

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