

Opera Meets Musical Comedy in New Work, *Don Imbroglia*, a Sold-Out Hit in NYMF

By [Kenneth Jones](#)
25 Sep 2005

An opera makes its world premiere in the 2005 New York Musical Theatre Festival Sept. 25, when *Don Imbroglia* — billed as "an opera you can't refuse" — begins at the Lion Theatre Off-Broadway.

Set in the world of the Italian mob scene, the show is already proving to be an offer theatregoers can't refuse: It's sold out.

In recent days it was announced that the six-performance run was sold out, so a 4:30 PM performance has been added Sept. 29.

The new, original work by Peter Hilliard (composer) and Matt Boresi (librettist) is directed by Jenny Lord and produced by Beth Morrison Projects and True Love Productions. It has been seen in developmental presentations prior to this full-production NYMF run.

Don Imbroglia is billed as " a side-splitting musical theatre experience about opera and the mob, divas and gangsters, love and pastry, and a requiem for a dead cat."

In it, "The FBI and IRS have cracked down on Don Imbroglia's front organization, the non-existent Staten Island Grand Opera — and if he doesn't produce an opera quickly, his entire family will go to jail," according to production notes. "Meanwhile, the Don's collegiate daughter, Angelica, brings her hapless boyfriend home for the first time to attend the wedding of the Don's temperamental son, Dante — who has his own hands full with his hot-blooded bride, Donna, and broken-hearted ex-girlfriend, Chastity. All the while, the lecherous family consiglieri, Lascivo, guns for a piece of the action any way he can get it. After an evening of gun play, word play, poisoned cannoli, whacked cats, and slamming doors, the family gets down to business — and produces an opera in Italian with sur-titles written by a 'friend of the family,' who, ahem, doesn't quite speak Italian."

Composer Peter Hilliard told Playbill.com, "Matt [Boresi] and I met at NYU in 2000 and started working together because we both love opera. We love reviving old forms and we think the answer to music-theatre's woes is to go back to the well and find common principles that don't change over time."

Librettist Matt Boresi told Playbill.com, "We share the nutty belief that some crusty old opera forms have a lot to say to a modern audience; that music should have a melody, that jokes should be funny, and that characters should be, well, full of character."

Is Don Imbroglia an opera or a musical comedy?

Hilliard said, "Opera and musical theatre are both at a crossroads right now: Opera has all but abandoned the common person, even in the most accessible of new work, and musical theatre is now written by corporate committees because the cost has gotten too high for writers to be the driving force anymore. If opera doesn't get closer to the average person's sensibility (and currently Rossini is closer to the average sensibility than most of what is written for the opera stage) it will die. If musical theatre doesn't start developing more personal voices, it will also die. We aim to kill those two birds with one stone."

Boresi added, "We're taking the pacing and energy of modern musical theatre and fusing it with the brains and musical brawn of opera. There's great joy in a well-told tale and good music sung well. We want that joy to be central to all our work. It's easy to stay home and watch TV... it's hard to go see a live show. If you're going to do go to the trouble, the authors of that show owe you some joy."

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Steven McGhee is musical director of the production which features scenic and props design by Lee Savage, costume design by Camille Assaf, and lighting design by Marcus Doshi.

The cast includes Nick Dalton as Dante, Arielle Doneson as Angelica, Robert DuSold as Don Imbroglia, Valerie MacCarthy as Donna, Ray Mcleod as Joey, Vale Rideout as Cesar, Wayne Schroder as Lascivo, and Erica Schroeder as Chastity.

Collaborators Hilliard and Boresi, graduates of the New York University Tisch School Graduate Musical Theatre Writing Program, recently had excerpts of their chamber opera work performed at the

National Opera Association National Convention in New York City, and have appeared as visiting opera lecturers at the Tanglewood Institute.

Together they have written *Wonderful Clockwork* (NYU); *Don Imbroglia* (seen in developmental presentations at NYU, the Lark Theatre); *Eat Your Greens: Verdi by Vegetables* (Dixon Place, Open Circle Arts, Great Small Works); *The Staten Island Grand Opera's Administrative Intern Presents: Tosca* (Open Circle, Bad-Ass Clown Productions); *The Filthy Habit* (Manhattan Opera Theatre, The Tanglewood Institute, 2005 NOA Chamber Opera Competition finalist); and *The Brazilian*, an opera-bouffe based on the play by Meilhac and Halevy, which premiered in October 2004 as a joint production by Manhattan Opera Theatre and the French Institute Alliance Francaise at Florence Gould Hall.

They are currently at work on an operatic adaptation of the Off-Broadway play *An Empty Plate at the Cafe Du Grand-Bouef* by Michael Hollinger.

Director Jenny Lord has directed several operas, including Peter Hilliard and Matt Boresi's *The Filthy Habit* for Manhattan Opera Theatre; *Così fan Tutte*, *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Beatrice & Benedick* for Berkeley Opera; *Eugene Onegin*, *The Daughter of the Regiment* and *The Grand Duchess of Gerolstein* for Pocket Opera; and *Street Scene* for San Francisco State University.

Theatrical directing credits include *Bee-luther-hatchee* for New Century Theatre, *A Christmas Carol* for Dallas Theatre Center, and Rodgers & Hart's *By Jupiter* for 42nd Street Moon. She is a graduate of Yale University.

The Lion Theatre is in the Theatre Row complex, 410 W. 42nd Street, between Ninth and Tenth Avenues. The *Don Imbroglia* performance schedule is Sept. 25 at 8 PM, Sept. 27 at 8 PM, Sept. 28 at 1 PM, Sept. 29 at 4:30 PM, Sept. 30 at 8 PM, Oct. 1 at 4:30 PM and 8 PM.

Tickets are \$15. For more information, call (212) 352-3101 or visit www.nymf.org.

For additional information, visit www.donimbroglio.com.

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This new staging has a Yale University angle: Beth Morrison received her MFA in Theater Management from Yale School of Drama in May; Lee Savage (scenic and props designer) also graduated this year, from the design program; Camille Assaf (costumes) graduated from the design program a year ago; and Marcus Doshi (lighting) a year before that. Director Lord is also a Yale grad.

From Left: Robert DuSold and Raymond Jaramillo Mcleod in *Don Imbroglia*.
photo by Rick Berube