



FORT GREENE ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

HISTORIC FORT GREENE BROOKLYN

SUMMER 2009

The Fort Greene Association is devoted to historic preservation, neighborhood and park enhancement, as well as cultural, economic, and housing advancement. To find out more, become a member, or to volunteer, visit our website www.HistoricFortGreene.org

Are You Covered?

That's the big question when it comes to health care.

by Dorothy Peters

Most everyone agrees that there is a health care crisis in the United States with tens of millions of people having inadequate or no health insurance at all. With the recession causing more layoffs more and more people are joining the ranks of the uninsured. In the United States, medical costs are the single biggest contributing cause of personal bankruptcy even when people have insurance at the time of illness.

What is to be done?

President Obama has made health care reform a priority for his administration. Proposals have been put forth generating strong feelings on all sides.

The United States is the only developed nation that does not have a national health care system providing universal access to care. It is also unique that we have a large for-profit insurance industry in the equation. According to Physicians for a National Health Program, the U.S. is number one in terms of the amount we spend on health care: \$8135 per person, more than twice what other industrialized countries spend. Yet our system performs poorly in comparison and still leaves 47 million without health coverage and millions more inadequately covered. We rank 37th in terms of the quality of our health care outcomes (according to the World Health Organization). This is partially because private insurance bureaucracy and paperwork consume from 20-30% of every health care dollar. Streamlining payment through a single nonprofit payer would save more than \$350 billion per year, enough to provide comprehensive, high-quality coverage for all Americans.

A national coalition of doctors, nurses and lay people has formed to achieve adoption of a government-financed program, an extension of Medicare, to cover everyone. Under that system via the Medicare payroll tax system, the government would be the single payer leaving the choice of the doctor in the hands of the consumer.

By eliminating the administrative costs of private insurance, Medicare for all could guarantee health care for all at no additional cost.

To shed light on this complex issue the FGA has invited Dr. Oliver Fein, President of the national organization Physicians for a National Health Care Program (PNHP), and a Park Slope resident, to be a featured speaker at the June 10 special general meeting. At the March 5, 2009 White House Health Care Summit, Dr. Fein and Representative John Conyers Jr. (D-Mich.), author of HR 676 - Medicare for All were the only supporters of single-payer program to be admitted to the summit.

The United States National Health Care Act (HR 676) is a bill that will expand and improve Medicare to cover 100% of all necessary medical care, including dental and psychiatric care and long-term care, for everyone in the United States, with no deductibles, no co-pays, and no exceptions. The Senate has recently introduced similar single-payer legislation, S703. By eliminating the for-profit private health insurance industry, a national single-payer system will save enough money to cover everyone. It will be funded by a payroll tax of 4.5% from employers and 3.3% from employees, plus one third of one percent of all stock transactions. The top 5% of income earners will also have a small increase in income tax. So 95% of families will end up paying less for health care than they pay now.

HR 676 / S 703 may also provide a major stimulus to the economy. According to a recent study, expanding and upgrading Medicare to cover everyone in the U.S. (the single-payer model) would create 2.6 million new jobs, infuse \$317 billion in new business and public revenues, and inject another \$100 billion in wages into the U.S. economy.



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NEXT FGA MEETING:

Wednesday, June 10, 2009
7:30 pm.
Light refreshments
at 7.00 pm

TOPIC: The Future of Health Care

Dr. Fein, an advocate for single-payer healthcare, will trace the history of health care in our nation. He will compare health outcomes of other industrial nations, all of whom have guaranteed health care, with the United States' system. Be there, your health depends upon it.

LOCATION:

ART-NY
138 South Oxford Street,
Fort Greene, Brooklyn, NY

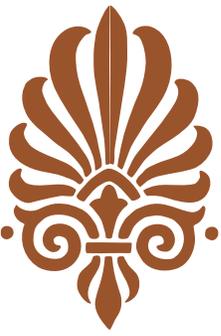
All are welcome to attend, homeowners & renters alike.

Chair's Notes by Paul Palazzo, FGA Chair

Fort Greene is full of them. Every day you see them on the way to work, or to the gym, or on the Subway platform; the same familiar nameless faces day in and day out. You grin; maybe even force a knowing smile, the routine rarely changes. For a brief instant you and your familiar stranger share a connection of sorts, and then in a moment walls go up. What if, and I am just saying what if, those walls went down. Maybe there's something in common; maybe there's something different that adds to your life, or maybe there is just a name. Get that prize, that name, and the next day call out to that face with a big "Hello Joe" and not just the usual nervous smile. Maybe you'll even hear "Hello Joe" right back and your connection will be just a bit stronger. So this June do yourself a favor and say "Hello."

And maybe you don't know our names as well. So when we see you at the Farmers Market we'll be there with a big "Hello" ready to hear your name.

As always, we'll be seeing you soon and don't forget to keep in touch.



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Book Review by Howard Pitsch

CITY KID

A Writer's Memoir of Ghetto Life and Post-Soul Success

By Nelson George, 248 pp. Viking, 2009 New York, \$25.95

Beneath the high-domed Olympic Theatre in Pitkin Avenue, Brooklyn, the film *Zulu* unreeled in 1964 about gallant British soldiers battling an attack by African tribesmen. As Nelson George recalls in *City Kid*, the *Zulus* were mad cannon fodder; the Brits had faces. Although he wanted to root for folks who looked like him, the seven-year-old Nelson reasoned: "After all, the *Zulus* may have been brown skinned, but they were Africans, and I was a Negro."

Despite his early concept of color, this saga of a youngster-yearner's desire to be a writer allows but scant mucking about in the racial disparity of African-Americans. We can compare this touchstone with two other authors: in *Brothers* by Sylvester Monroe and Peter Goldman (William Morrow, NY 1988), in which Monroe grows up desolately in the Taylor Houses, the black projects of South Side Chicago, or conversely of the privileged Colson Whitehead in *Sag Harbor*, (Doubleday, NY 2009), who grew up never wanting to go to a picnic carrying a watermelon in the Hamptons.

Though Nelson's divorced mother, Arizona, nurtured him and his sister, Andrea, single-handedly in the Samuel J. Tilden projects of Brownsville, she was astute, racheting up to a teacher's degree and quickstepping her children out of Tilden. Actually, in Nelson's early years, Tilden still had a stockpot of Italians, Jews and Blacks, so that when he moved to a better area and school with many white kids, race didn't loom large. He would later explain: "While I never lost sight of racism, it became a part of my development to take whites as they come." Instead, he becomes musically mesmerized by his mother's Motorola grooving out the Marvelettes' "Please Mr. Postman." Nelson also read and read like an itch, identifying with Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby*, and succumbing to Hemingway, all the while scrupulously codifying his notebook factoids. This penchant for a litany of family begats and schoolboy comic books is rather leaden in his biographic opening, only lifting up in his coming-of-age mandate for masturbation, reminiscent of Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*.

Black English

Having written bits and pieces about music for *Billboard* and the *Amsterdam News* before graduating from St. John's College during 1979's crime-deckled era when Mayor John Lindsay tried to rename New York as "Fun City" Nelson later got tossed from *Billboard* for using "black English." Soon he would meet Branford Marsalis playing a gig at the Bottom Line, and promoter Russell Simmons at a time when Hip Hop was scating out from Soul and Rhythm 'n Blues. Nelson's warp and woof weave speedily thereafter, with a job as music editor at *Record World*, a profile of Simmons in the *Village Voice*, and the issue of his first novel, *One Woman Short*. While the Motown sound oddometered out of Detroit, with some down and dirty tactics, our Tilden homeboy

went to L.A. where he met Quincy Jones who was recording Michael Jackson. From Jones, Nelson learned "Ass Power," a term that Quincy used admirably of Jackson's tenacity to lay down a seamless track, no matter how many takes. Other singers too often laid back too soon, never sticking to it with Ass Power.

In Motown, Nelson is picked up by a bandleader Earl Van Dyke who drives him through Detroit with a revolver on the driver's seat. As Nelson recounts, "Some of the best observations in my book, *Where Did Our Love Go?*, was about Marvin Gaye's inner demons, Diana Ross's temperament, and Stevie Wonder's artistic development." Much else is also in Nelson's popular book, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues*.

From 1985 to 1992 he hunkered into an apartment at Carlton and Willoughby Avenues in Fort Greene, an area he scarcely knew, but came to relish since it was mere doors from where Richard Wright wrote *Native Son*. To Nelson, this was the "Brooklyn boheme of artsy black folk." Yet when Russell Simmons once visited, Simmons asked him why all the



NELSON GEORGE. Photo by Jelena Vukotic.

Fort Greene sidewalks were cracked, and why didn't he move out of the ghetto. Nelson, however, like so many other black and white transplants, raised up sand in the propagation of Fort Greene pride. And here, among his factoids called *City Kid*, he recites a full Megillah of New York, Motown and Red Eye denizens whom he knows or has written about: Betty Carter, Thulani Davis, Rosie Perez, Anita Baker, Shelton (Spike) Lee, Wesley Snipes, Lester Bowie, the Marsalis brothers, Cecil Taylor, Erykah Badu, his work with Chris Rock on Cell Block Four, Kevin Powell, Lionel Richie, Queen Latifah in the author's HBO hit *Life Support*, Halle Berry, Frank Sinatra, Dinah Washington forgive me if I've omitted a battalion more. It's all a vivid flourish for upstage applause at curtain call. Still, aside from his mother and sister, I felt but one truly etched, split-second synapse of human spark of a person who is never by one word quoted. That was a sharp focus on TV "Today" host Bryant Gumble, whose Arctic calculation before interviewing Nelson rattled our raconteur's psyche into a state of awe.

FGA Grants – lending a helping hand.

by Mary Priebe

It is Prom time and the FGA has given a helping hand to Carol Thomas of Just Because Hair Therapy Salon on Carlton Ave. Working with the FGA and neighborhood businesses Carol has arranged for 6 girls to have a Senior Prom night that would not otherwise have been available to them. Working with the McKinney High School guidance office, six students were chosen. Just Because Hair Therapy Salon will be doing hair and make-up for the girls and with help from the Lower East Side Girls club and local donors. There are also dresses and accessories provided for all of the girls. Polish Bar has donated the manicures and yes there will even be a limousine. This is a great message to young women about neighborhood support. Several of these girls, thanks to full scholarships, will be heading off to Buffalo State and Xavier University of New Orleans in the fall. Congratulations!

Also in the Neighborhood The FGA is proud to have been a supporter of the PS 46 Arts Program Fundraiser, held May 16th. The event was held to raise funds for the Arts programs as well as to show off PS 46 to the neighborhood.

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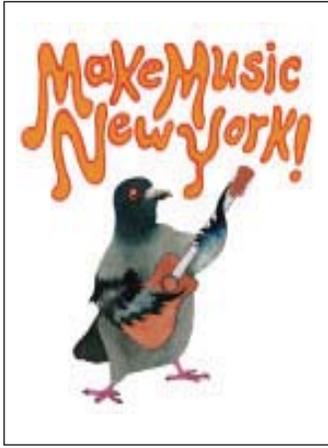
For next sponsorship availability date and for details call 718.875.1855

News from the DeKalb Avenue Merchant's Association

By T. Conoscenti

DeKalb Avenue will be participating in the 2009 *Make Music New York* festival on Sunday June 21st, the first day of summer. Make Music New York is a unique festival of free concerts in public places throughout New York City. The festival is coordinated with other free music festivals in more than 327 cities around the world. Local artists from Fort Greene and the region will be performing in front of the Ronald Edmonds Playground along DeKalb between Carlton and Adelphi and in front of Behren's Pharmacy on the corner of DeKalb and Clermont. Festivities on DeKalb will run from 11am to 7pm.

For a schedule of performances visit the DeKalb Avenue Merchant's Association at dekalbavenue.org.



CLEAN YOUR CLOCKS, CLOSETS AND CUPBOARDS!

An Appeal for vintage photos of Fort Greene, Brooklyn.

ARCADIA PUBLISHING CO. PROPOSES A NEW BOOK ABOUT FORT GREENE.

What a neat idea at last to have a well-illustrated book whose commentary about each historic picture explores the glory of Fort Greene. Arcadia Publishing of Portsmouth, NH has contacted the FGA giving us this opportunity. The pictorial history will portray images from the earliest years onward of people, buildings, streetscapes and happenings that weave into our neighborhood's lively fabric.

Get your treasures published. The Arcadia's series "*Images of America*" are in black and white, bound between covers of sturdy paper. The thrust is on our neighborhood as it developed historically, rather than artful shots from today. We already have early subway construction pictures, some of BAM's trove of plays and players, a rendering of the cathedral that never got built at Lafayette/Clermont, and a few from the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

But we need many more, for the whole caboodle must be COMPLETED by 1st October 2009. So get out your photos and notify Howard.Pitsch1@verizon.net. Or, 718.237.9031. If you are proficient with a computer scan, please do so, but only as TIFFs, 27cm wide, 300dpi, no compression. Then email those to Mr. Pitsch with any pertinent details of names, place, occasion, etc. Or trust us to scan and faithfully return your photos. What an opportunity! So get out those old photos today.

Good Neighbors Of Fort Greene And Clinton Hill *by Beverly Emmons*

The phone rang Saturday at 3PM. The wheelchair bound neighbor down the street had fallen on the floor and would I come over and lift him back into bed. He was heavy and I feared for my back. He was alone on weekends trying to save money, having full time home health care only during the week. He refused to call 911 as he was in terror of being taken to a nursing home against his will.

Another neighbor was just back from a short hospital stay and would be immobile while her knee recovered. Who would get her groceries and cook some meals for her? Her family is far away.

A friend, vibrant and lively, has fallen and broken his hip. During the stay in a therapeutic home you see him quickly decline, become confused, and fade away.

Good Neighbors is a membership 501-c-3 organization being fostered by the Fort Greene Association whose purpose is to help keep people in their own homes as long as possible.

Modeled on an organization founded 8 years ago in Boston, called **Beacon Hill Village**, Good Neighbors arranges to offer its members, primarily through third party providers, many of the activities and services available to residents of conventional high quality retirement communities. (*Wall Street Journal*, November 15-16, 2008).

The census says that there are 3,000 people over 65 living here in Fort Greene and Clinton Hill and 7,000 more living with family members. NYC is full of independent individuals often without close family ties here (or anywhere). In the past a family member would become unofficial caregiver. This is not true anymore. **NORC**, (Naturally Occurring Retirement Community) is an official designation of the City of New York. It applies to buildings where there are more than 80% elderly people. The law requires a landlord to put handholds in

the tubs and other physical details. This idea however can apply to a neighborhood

Retirement communities are not a good option. They are expensive to buy into and then pay the additional monthly fees. And there are not enough of them to take care of the large numbers of older people that is foreseen. It is much less expensive to stay in one's home and continue to pay for the necessities and comforts of one's life. The difficulties arise in coordinating the many existing services and filling in the gaps where no service exists.

Good Neighbors seeks to identify and provide activities and services most needed. These would supplement not supplant existing health programs and existing church and city services.

Good Neighbors would provide one phone number to call to arrange for rides, trips to the doctor, rides to mall shopping, handymen appointments, grocery shopping, and exercise classes.

Good Neighbors will identify and monitor available services and programs. In some cases it will provide simply information and referral to member-recommended and often discounted, group of providers.

As the organization adds members it can have a stronger voice for arranging discounts, representing the interests of that segment of the population. Some services that would come for free with the annual membership:

- Information and referral to available services, with an added monitoring to see to it that the result is high quality
- Grocery shopping with or without the individual
- Exercise classes geared to older bodies
- Doctor prescribed rides to appointments
- Geriatric care management - for members or loved ones

- Restaurant dining at a discount, arranged on different days of the week to get people a good meal out and about mid day.
- Cultural, social and special interest group events
- Volunteering structured as Time Banking
- Discounted legal and accountant services as needed.
- Twice a week walking groups for fast walkers and slow walkers

Annual membership for those that can't afford it would be under \$1,000 per year with a "need based scholarship" program for those that can't afford that. People who qualify for Medicaid can turn to several organizations that do this all paid for by the Feds to the tune of \$6,400/month. Qualification requires one to be completely destitute. Most people fall just outside this bracket: Good Neighbors would provide important protection and coordination.

Time Banking is a developing notion of volunteering that can support older folks and then accumulate credits to ask for help later. Certainly there could be opportunities to involve students, training social workers etc.

Ideally a storefront drop in office manned by volunteers and a few paid staffers could become the center of this organization. Hand me down computers could provide the data bases for the collected information of goods and services available to the community. It would identify Good Neighbors as a community; provide a landing place for those out on a walk, help down load and print family photos and messages for those without computers.

Come to a meeting of the Fort Greene Association June 10th at the South Oxford Street Space to discuss this and other related ideas. Contact Beverly Emmons at bemmonsld@earthlink.net.



FORT GREENE ASSOCIATION

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Next FGA Meeting: Wednesday, June 10th, 7:30 - 9PM

Light Refreshments at 7pm. Meeting at ART-NY, located at 138 South Oxford Street, Fort Greene, Brooklyn, NY

TOPIC: The Future of Health Care

At the June 10th meeting, Dr. Fein, an advocate for single-payer healthcare, will trace the history of health care in our nation; from charity hospitals for the poor, to the linking of health benefits to employment during World War II, to the present-day dominance of the private for-profit health insurance industry. He will analyze the costs of private health care (about 30% of premium dollars go to administration.) He will compare health outcomes of other industrial nations, all of whom have guaranteed health care, with the outcomes in the United States. Be there, your health depends upon it.

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NEWSCENES

BESPOKE BICYCLES 64-B Lafayette Avenue (near S. Elliott). Thurs-Mon 10-6/Tues 2-6 Closed Wed. Proprietor Cassidy Vare. Full service shop repairs, bike sales, parts, accessories. Here for the everyday rider plus bicycles made for specialized purposes. Neatly ordered space stop by to say hi and good luck. Who knows you might ride out. 718 643-6816

HAWA COSMETICS 711 Fulton Street (near Ft. Greene Pl) Mon-Fri 11-8/Sat-Sun 11-7. Owner Hawa Aziz, Brooklyn resident. Ladies come pamper yourselves at this charming airy new shop opposite BAM. Simple look to glitz and glam. Gentlemen enjoy skin care. Do weddings, fashion and photo shoots. But here's the real delightful surprise - bring your canine best friend to this dog friendly environment - while you have a makeover, he/she can nap on a big red pillow! Wish them well. 718 858-5507

Be sure to pick up, at the Visitors Center, Borough Hall, 209 Joralemon Street, a free card listing all nine Brooklyn HOUSE & GARDEN TOURS from now to mid-October. Have a special look at what are otherwise private spaces with individual personalities - pick up design ideas, enjoy.

We suggest that you make it a point once or twice, or more, during the summer to check Myrtle Avenue. New changes and additions are happening there week by week; they may well be to your advantage. And use their guide book to help. Eat, browse, buy.

DOSSIER 244 Dekalb Avenue (near Vanderbilt) Tues-Sun 12-7 Owners: Skye Parrott, Katherine Krause and Molly McIver, Brooklyn residents all. Store was conceived as physical extension of DOSSIER, Journal, biannual arts & cultural magazine the partners publish. The store is an interesting mix of items from clothes by local designers to accessories, books, stationery, gifts and more. During the summer, in the outside areaway, you'll find a rack of \$25 vintage clothes. Drop by, enjoy quiet and sophisticated surroundings. Wish them success. 718 783-0783 www.dossierjournal.com

COMESTIBLES

BIDON VILLE Coffee & Tea. 47 Willoughby Ave (near Adelphi). Mon-Fri 7am-8pm/Sat-Sun 8am-6pm. Owner: Arseman Yohannes. Soup, sandwiches, sweets. A little rough gem, just right for an easy neighborhood gathering spot. Charming, reflecting the personality of the young woman who greets you. She explained to us that the cafe's name means something like "shack," and it is a work in progress which seems to add to the friendliness. Meet your neighbors there and give her an "all the best" for the future. bidonville47w@gmail.com

Keep your eye on 773 Fulton Street (near S. Oxford) for a new restaurant opening in the near future. If you are fond of fish this will be for you - keep watching.

Notice the new expansion at **Pequeña**, 86 S. Portland. An outdoor, glass enclosed patio space. Better to watch the passing parade as you enjoy a Margarita.

CATHERINE'S CAFFE 184 Dekalb Avenue (near Carlton) Mon-Fri 7-7/Sat 8-7/Sun 9-7 Expansive menu with a dessert called "Brooklyn LOVE." But this restaurant's claim to fame in Fort Greene is that it adds yet another ethnic cuisine to the many already in our midst this time Czech included liberally throughout the menu. And adding to the ambience is a large, lovely tree-shaded garden with a burbling fountain. So, make your way to Catherine's and pretend you're vacationing in another land. 718 858-3712.

Probably many of you, during the next few months, will be doing some RENOVATION - small or large. If you are in the Fort Greene historic district, before beginning, be sure you will be working within the requirements of the Landmarks Preservation Commission - save yourself time, trouble, dollars with just a phone call or two. If you need some information, give a call to 718 624-5719 the FGA Landmark Chair (dorris.gaines.golomb) who will be glad to help you start in the right direction. **ASK BEFORE YOU ACT.**

Also during the summer, be sure to take advantage of our parks. They're here for all of us to enjoy whether the big ones or the childrens' play areas, and for families. Respect them, delight in them. Have fun!

Please SHOP FORT GREENE FIRST. Our merchants will be here even if summer is slower.

Reach thousands of Fort Greene households in the mail, via email and on the web by underwriting the FGA Newsletter.

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Taking The Eric Holder Challenge

by Ursula Hegewisch, former FGA Chair

Back in February Attorney General Eric Holder gave a speech to his staff and colleagues at the Department Of Justice concerning Americans and race, on the occasion of Black History month. The speech became infamous in the media as the “nation of cowards” speech. It was rather, a thoughtful and long overdue challenge to Americans to confront the issue of race in our Nation’s past, present and future and to engage in meaningful dialogue with each other about our feelings and experiences with regard to race in America. Two months later, in a Fort Greene living room, twelve people, black, white; male, female; ranging in age from late twenties to mid-seventies, decided to take “The Eric Holder Challenge” and begin a dialogue on race.

As Attorney General Holder pointed out: “This is admittedly an artificial device to generate discussion that should come more naturally, but our history is such that we must find ways to force ourselves to confront that which we have become expert at avoiding.”

Maybe it was a little awkward at first, but soon people opened up and the dialogue flowed. It was neither confrontational nor divisive but respectful and rather collegial; in fact, one of the frustrations that some felt at this first meeting was that, although we didn’t all know each other, we were all “part of the choir”. This was admittedly a challenge in that we were a self-selected group, voluntarily engaging, rather than a random gathering.

So, while we politely discussed a very difficult and fraught subject, deeper understandings of each other’s perspectives and life experience were forming. Hearing my neighbors’ personal stories was edifying and revealing. One woman, a graduate of Harvard Law, recalled that because she was African-American, many people at Harvard assumed she was there not because of her impressive academic abilities but because of affirmative action policies that they assumed admitted less qualified students in the name of diversity. This opinion on many occasions was expressed directly to her without the least hesitation, embarrassment or doubt.

Admittedly, we only scratched the surface but most of us are committed to continuing this dialogue on a regular basis. We would like to invite anyone interested in joining us to send an email to: ursulaheg@yahoo.com

Link to the Eric Holder Speech:
<http://www.usdoj.gov/ag/speeches/2009/ag-speech-090218.html>

**Help support the efforts of the Fort Greene Association today.
Make a donation on our website via PayPal or use this membership form
to mail us a contribution. (Check One)**

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**UPCOMING PERFORMANCES:
The Brooklyn Conservatory Chorale**



The Brooklyn Conservatory Chorale will be performing their Spring Concert at the Lafayette Presbyterian Church, Sunday June 14 at 3p.m. The program, "Songs of Nature," includes pieces by Josquin des Pres, Monteverdi, Jannequin, Debussy, Randall Thompson, and an original piece by Cesar Vuksic, pianist for the Chorale. The Chorale will also perform this same program at the Brooklyn Conservatory of Music, 58 7th Avenue in Park Slope June 12 at 8 p.m.

Directed by Nelly Vuksic, the Brooklyn Conservatory Chorale, now in its third year, continues to achieve new levels of musical refinement, attracting talented singers. Pieces performed are often musically challenging in tonality and rhythm and are in many different languages.

General admission tickets are \$10 and \$5 for students and seniors, and can be purchased on line at www.bqcm.org or by calling 212-209-3370. The Conservatory can be reached at 718-622-3300, if you interested in auditioning.