

ALL THE MAGIC OF BROADWAY IN YOUR OWN BACKYARD

Miguel Rosario

While theater fans by the thousand flock to attend Broadway performances in the heart of Times Square, the rest of us have Making Books Sing, an organization that has been bringing cultural and educational programs full of color and literature to city schools for nearly 10 years. Now the rest of us can enjoy shows at prices that would make the Phantom of the Opera drop his mask in shame.

Founded in 1996 by renowned playwright and artistic director Barbara Zinn Krieger, Making Books Sing adapts one book every year for its traveling musical show that visits The Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens. At the moment, Krieger and her team are preparing to launch their adaptation of Deborah Hopkins' *A Band of Angels*, which tells the story of how freed slaves in the American South struggled to get an education after the end of the Civil War.

"It's an adaptation of a book based on the life of the Jubilee Singers of Fisk University, a group of ex-slaves in the 1800s whose university was going bankrupt," explains the organization's assistant director of education, Doris DiFarnecio. "They traveled around Europe for more than a year singing and raised \$250,000, and saved their university from going bankrupt. One of the granddaughters of the singers is attending [the performance]."

La magia de Broadway en el patio de su casa

Making Books Sing offers theater workshops in more than 20 schools around the city, allowing thousands of students to learn more about their cultures and the history of their country by way of the theater. But, as Krieger explains, the magic isn't left on the stage.

"Ten thousand students attend our productions [every year], and after seeing our show, at least half of them go back to their schools to participate in our literature programs, where they have the opportunity to choose a book and learn to write scripts for their own theatrical works," Krieger explains. Through this program, kids have the opportunity—for many, their first ever—to attend a play, and later work through all the details of a full theatrical production in their own classrooms.

Making Books Sing's plays are also available to the general public, with tickets going for just \$16. The curtain will rise on *A Band of Angels* Feb. 5 at Lehman College's Lovinger Theater in the Bronx. On Feb. 12, the show will move to York College in Queens, and the final performance will take place at Kingsborough Community College on Feb. 19. For more information, call (212) 573-8791 ext. 245, or visit www.makingbookssing.org. **VNY**