

December 14, 1994

Vineyard Theater plans a day at the opera

By Arline Klante

When many people think of opera, they think of extravagant costumes for both players and audience. They think of stretch limos and society columns and foreign languages. To those people, opera is perhaps the most inaccessible of all art forms.

But Barbara Zinn Krieger, the founding director of the Vineyard Theater, says that sort of thinking has things twisted. Opera was never meant to be an elitist happening, she says. It was supposed to be a high art form, where music and dance and a story came together, each one heightening the other. It is supposed to be enjoyed by all.

Krieger is the creator of a new one-act family opera, "Appetlemando's Dream." It is based on the fantasy story by Patricia Polacco, about a little boy who loves to dream. Krieger has combined her project with an ongoing literacy program at Grand Street Settlement. The two groups thought lives could be transformed through art. And, it appears to be working.

About 80 percent of the children who grow up on the Lower East Side of Manhattan won't finish school. One quarter of them live in families with a combined annual income of less than \$10,000 a year, and few of them get to the opera often. But 400 youngsters from Grand Street Settlement will go to this opera. And take part in it as well.

The arts and literacy program is designed to build an entire family's literacy through exposure to the arts. Krieger has been meeting with children and their parents from the Settlement and reading from the story on



Barbara Zinn Krieger and young opera fans at Grand St. Settlement

Villager photo by Brad Rickerby

which the opera is based. On a recent evening, about 20 parents sat on tiny wood chairs in a Settlement classroom on Delancey St. They listened and watched as their children, a class of 5-year olds who had heard the story before, called out, jumped up and came alive while Krieger read.

On the walls were the children's drawings of their dreams inspired by the story they had now learned almost by heart. The children were dismissed to watch a video tape and the parents stayed on to listen to Krieger explain

cage that held a fat gray rabbit and ate potato chips. Parents helped them with their mittens and coats and they went out into the cold night. On Dec. 29, they will all reconvene at the Vineyard Theater to watch the opera they know well.

"Appetlemando's Dreams," by Patricia Polacco; music by James Kurtz; libretto by Barbara Zinn Krieger; sets by Wendy Ponce; costumes by David Brooks; lighting by A.C. Hickox; production stage management by Pat Gihlin and directed and choreographed by Lisa Braloff. Starring Jackie Angelescu, April Armstrong, Suzanne Grodner, Joey Hannon, Siri Howard, Mark Peters and Cliff Thorrn; Dec. 26-31 at 1 P.M. and 3 P.M. at The Vineyard Theater, 309 E. 26th St. Recommended for children ages 5-12. 353-3874.

the opera.

"When they come to the theater, they'll sing the song," Krieger said to the parents. "If they want they can bring their books up afterward and get our autographs and meet the performers." The parents nodded in approval.

"The way you can really help is you can read the story to them," Krieger said. "Stimulate them to read and read more to them. They're very excited about it already."

Children came out of the video room and ran up to parents. They poked fingers in the