

Singing praises of Caruso

By ELIZABETH HAYS
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To say that Aldo Mancusi is a fan of opera great Enrico Caruso is an understatement.

For more than a decade, the Brooklyn opera aficionado has run a museum dedicated to the world-famous Italian tenor out of his Homecrest house.

Now, with the 100th anniversary of Caruso's American debut coming up this year, Mancusi is gearing up for a busy run of concerts, exhibits and speaking engagements to honor the noted Neapolitan who made his first New York appearance singing Verdi's "Rigoletto" at the Metropolitan Opera on Nov. 23, 1903.

"They say that Caruso was a miracle," said Mancusi, 73, yesterday, referring to the famed tenor's voice, which was reportedly so powerful that he once gave a concert for 50,000 people in Central Park without a loudspeaker.

"I believe that he is still working his miracle today," added Mancusi, who opened the Enrico Caruso Museum of America on the top floor of his house on E. 19th St. back in 1990. "We're still celebrating him 100 years later."

This month, Mancusi and other devotees, including former Met diva Licia Albanese and Players Club head John Martello, are offering an elaborate dinner concert at the club in Gramercy Park honoring Caruso's New York debut.

The \$125 July 20 event — which is already sold out — will feature performances by up-and-coming tenor James Valenti, famed soprano Lucine Amara and others.

Gift to world of opera

Throughout the summer and fall, Mancusi will lead a lineup of special guests through the museum, as well as give various lectures and stage an exhibit at the Garibaldi-Meucci Museum on Staten Island during the month of October.

Mancusi hopes to hold a second full-scale concert tribute in November closer to the actual date of the centennial.

"This year we're celebrating not only his talent, but what he has done for the opera world," said Mancusi, adding that Caruso's popularity brought added appreciation of Italian opera to the U.S.

"He uplifted the whole Italian community," added Mancusi, whose family was originally from outside Naples.

Mancusi, who worked for more than 40 years in home improvement before retiring to run the museum full time, was first drawn to Caruso while listening to his father's collection of opera records.

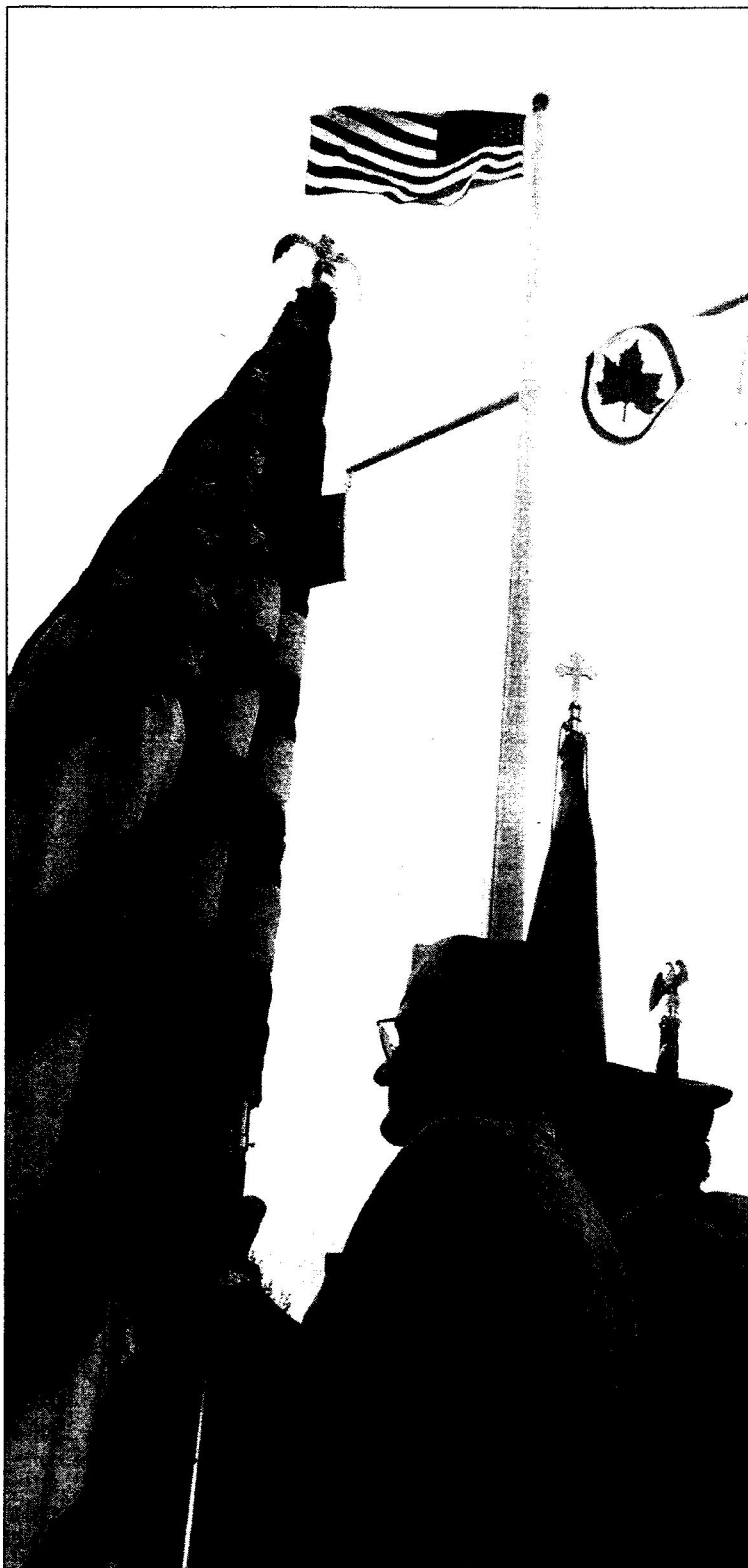
Today, the grandfather of three has a 1,500-object Caruso collection — including costumes, drawings, letters and personal objects — that is visited by opera lovers from all over the world.

The museum also features a 1906 Victor gramophone for listening to original recordings, and a 20-seat screening room for viewing footage of Caruso's performances and other programs.

"Caruso had such a powerful voice," said Mancusi, who was granted the title of *Cavaliere Ufficiale* by the Italian government in 1996 for his work in preserving Caruso's legacy. "His voice thrilled people."

For information about the museum or to schedule a visit, call (718) 368-3993.

Memorial stand



SUSANA BATES

HOMAGE Flagpole honoring heroes and victims of Sept. 11 attacks is dedicated in Juniper Valley Park yesterday. Turnout included vets and elected officials.