

RIVERA, GRACIELA (1921–)

“The audience of opera buffs swelled with those unexpected fans who had come to hear the first Puerto Rican ever to sing at the Met. Cries of, ‘Que viva Puerto Rico libre,’ punctuated the applause of seven curtain calls elicited by Rivera’s unprecedented performance.”

This spirited description appears in a published profile of Graciela Rivera’s debut as Lucia in *Lucia di Lammermoor* at the Metropolitan Opera House in 1952. Rivera was born and educated in Puerto Rico never imagining she would enter the world of opera until she attended a high school production of *Pirates of Penzance*. She graduated from New York’s Julliard School of Music and launched her career as Adele in *Rosalinda*. Her operatic debut took place in the late 1940s at the New Orleans Opera. Rivera’s distinguished career as a coloratura soprano soared with critically acclaimed performances throughout the United States and abroad. She has performed at the New York City Opera, the San Carlo Opera, with the Havana Philharmonic, and at the New York Metropolitan Opera. Rivera solidified a stellar reputation by giving concerts at Avery Fisher Hall, Alice Tully Hall, Madison Square Garden, and Radio City Music Hall. The weekly WHOM radio program Graciela Rivera Sings, a semi classical and popular music offering, was on the air for five consecutive years. By 1972 Rivera’s personal and family life limited extensive traveling, and she accepted an assistant professorship in music at the City University of New York. Under her direction Hostos College premiered *Nela* the first Puerto Rican opera ever presented in the United States.