Title: Roundabout Opera for Kids: Developing a Pedagogy of Music Outreach

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Funding level requested: Phase I

Duration of funding period: August 2013-April 2014
Project Description

Purpose:

The performing arts community is becoming increasingly aware of the importance of outreach programming. Arts outreach may be defined, loosely, as bringing artistic efforts to underserved communities, often in non-traditional venues. The motivation for outreach may vary from group to group. For some organizations, the long-term importance of developing new audiences is the primary draw, while for others it may be the strong desire to keep the arts diverse and socially vital. No matter the motivation, it is clear that participation in some type of outreach program will be a core part of many performers’ careers. Are we providing our students with the necessary skills and experiences to be effective in this role?

In traditional opera performance, the boundaries between performers and audience are well established. Performers speak of the “fourth wall”: the conceptual barrier that exists at the edge of the stage, separating the performers from the audience. Our students’ professional training assumes the existence of the fourth wall, and young performers hone their skills at communicating with the audience across the divide. But in outreach performance, the boundaries between artists and their audience are not so clearly defined. The fourth wall becomes permeable, perhaps disappearing altogether. Once we consider this in a meaningful way, several questions arise.

- Do artists need to develop different proficiencies, beyond those addressed in traditional instruction, to become effective outreach performers who can go beyond the fourth wall?
- Does the different relationship between performers and audience require new strategies?
- Can we identify such a skill set?
- And if so, how can we teach these skills most effectively?

This project wishes to explore these questions, laying a necessary foundation to the development of a pedagogy of music outreach. We will be seeking answers to these questions in two ways: internally, from the self-evaluation and reflection by performers enrolled in a new Indiana University service-learning course, *Arts Education and Outreach (U315/515)*; and, externally, by soliciting input and analyzing responses from opera outreach programs nationwide.

The music education field is trending toward experiential learning, and *Arts Education and Outreach* will provide students with a supportive, interactive environment in which they will have hands-on experience in performing and teaching, while at the same time contributing to the community that supports the university. Students will perform as members of
Roundabout Opera for Kids (ROK), an established outreach program that brings opera performances to K-12 venues, including regional public schools, libraries, and museums. Students will be asked to engage reflectively in their own training by evaluating their performance skills through observing their recorded performances and analyzing feedback from K-12 educators and community partners. We will collectively explore the competencies required to be effective as a performer for non-traditional audiences in diverse settings.

Our project will also investigate what other North American opera outreach programs do, or do not do, to train their own performers. The focus of our questioning will be on identifying best practices in opera outreach performance.

This is just the first stage of a long-term project. We hope that the work begun here will lead to the development of a broader curriculum for the training of outreach performers. The purpose of this first stage of investigation is to lay the groundwork by identifying a set of skills and core competencies that could be taught and assessed in an effective outreach training program.

Previous Research Results:
As this is a new research project, previous research results do not apply. For the last four years, ROK has collected feedback from our community partners, but we have focused our evaluation on the impact of our program on the audience we serve. This research wishes to flip the question by investigating the impact of our program on the performers themselves.

Furthermore, there is no published research pertaining to outreach pedagogy.

Significance and Impact:
While the specific focus of our research is on opera outreach, we expect that our results will be broadly applicable to all forms of music outreach, and the performing arts in general. Traditional performance instruction typically minimizes the role of the audience while emphasizing the performer/composer relationship. Outreach performance brings the relationship between performer and audience to the foreground. Our research is an attempt to uncover teachable skills of audience engagement and communication.

We also expect that the students who participate in outreach training will bring their experience back to their voice studios and that their performance in traditional venues will be enriched by the skills they have learned through outreach. The arts today are fighting to remain relevant to a younger, more diverse population; the outreach skills we identify will allow our students to engage creatively with others across perceived boundaries. We want to allow them to move beyond the limitations of the “fourth wall.”
Outcomes and Contributions:

The anticipated outcome of our research will be the definition of a set of core competencies for outreach performers. We will be defining a skill set which represents a type of audience engagement that is not addressed in traditional performance instruction. Before we can assess student achievement in outreach, we need to know what we need to be looking for. This research will lay the groundwork for the assessment of students’ performance in an area that is not considered in traditional courses.

Institutionally, it is significant that Arts Education and Outreach is the first course offered at the Jacobs School of Music explicitly addressing outreach education. Outreach has been identified as a high priority for the music school, and there is a strong interest in the possibility that this course will lead to the development of further outreach courses. Additionally, this course may eventually apply to the Kelley School of Business Arts Entrepreneurship Certificate.

Research Methodology:

Due to the nature of the project, we will be gathering and analyzing qualitative data. Our methods will include questionnaires, direct observation, video recording of performances, reflective group discussion, and self-evaluation by the students. We are arranging for the reflective group discussion to be led by an Advocate for Community Engagement from the Office of Service-Learning (CITL).

As stated above, we will be tackling this problem from two directions. One line of our research will be surveying a nationally representative group of opera companies and music schools that have established outreach programs. Our goal is to determine whether they provide any specialized training for their outreach performers, and, if so, what it entails. Through this, we wish to learn what other organizations believe to be important areas of expertise for their performers, and to identify best practices in the field. A secondary benefit is that we may wish to broaden the scope of this project at later stages, and this will help us identify potential partners for future research.

The second line of our research will be conducted over the course of the fall semester in the Arts Education and Outreach course. The participating students will be performing two operas throughout the semester with ROK: Ana y la Sombra by Gabriela Ortiz and Mónica Sanchez (world premiere of ROK commission) and María de Buenos Aires by Astor Piazzolla. We anticipate they will perform approximately twenty off-campus outreach performances over the course of the semester. Their outreach work will also entail the preparation of coordinating educational materials, question-and-answer sessions with K-12 students, and the backstage work necessary to stage the production. Our students will complete written self-evaluations after the first performance, and then every four weeks through the semester. In addition, all performances will be filmed; we will be soliciting feedback from the K-12 participants; and we will schedule class time to reflect together on the successes and
challenges of their outreach experiences. At the end of the semester, we will look for common threads among the students’ and professor’s observations, with the goal of uncovering a set of skills and competencies that can serve as a foundation in developing an outreach of music pedagogy.

Means of Measuring Success of the Project:

One measure of the success of our research will be whether we are successful in identifying a core set of measurable proficiencies in outreach pedagogy. A better measure of success will be seen in the application of the results of our research as it is implemented in the development of future courses. If the skills we identify are relevant, teachable, and transferable to other programs we will count it a strong success.

Disseminating Results:

Our research will be shared with the Indiana University community through programs such as Project Jumpstart, the career development and entrepreneurship initiative of the Jacobs School of Music, and the local chapter of Student National Association of Teachers of Singing. We also intend, once the research portion is completed, to submit our results for publication in a national journal specific to the field, such as Opera News, Opera America, or the National Association of the Teachers of Singing Journal. Roundabout Opera for Kids has presented at the Indiana Campus Compact Service Learning summit in 2012 and 2013, and we anticipate presenting the results of this research at the 2014 summit.

Reflective Teaching Practices:

Arts Education and Outreach is an experiential service-learning class. Its very nature is reflective. As the instructor, I am continuously learning myself from the performances we give, and the response of both the performers and the audience. I will be reading and learning from the written self-evaluation of the students throughout the semester, and I will be participating in the group discussions as we reflect cooperatively on our endeavors.
Budget Narrative:

Funds we are requesting for this project include both personnel and supplies. Our personnel needs include a research assistant and a production assistant. The research assistant will be responsible for our project’s survey research: first, the compilation of a database of professional opera companies, universities, and conservatories with existing outreach programs that we can survey; and second, the preparation, distribution, and findings compilation of our survey. The production assistant will be responsible for assisting with the daily details of the outreach program administration. The production assistant’s tasks will include communicating with community partners and cast members; setting the performance schedule; soliciting feedback from community partners; and other tasks, as necessary. The hours I have listed in the budget are my best estimates based on the experience of past seasons of ROK. For supplies, we are requesting funding for the purchase of a video recorder. The capability to record our performances is critical to our research.

The funds we are requesting will cover roughly 30% of our projected costs for the fall semester. We anticipate funding the remainder of our costs through external music education grants, support from the Indiana University office of service-learning, and private donations to community partner Roundabout Opera for Kids.

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Carballo

**Research Timeline**

Aug. 19-23: preparation for *Ana y la Sombra* by Gabriela Ortiz and Mónica Sanchez (world premiere of ROK commission) and *María de Buenos Aires* by Astor Piazzolla: music review and staging sessions for instrumentalists and singers.

Aug. 27: production assistant confirms fall semester performance dates and sends curriculum guides, librettos, and feedback forms to teachers/coordinators.

Aug. 30: first outreach performances --- cast and location tba

Sept. 3: in-class viewing of first performance; students’ first written self-evaluation

weekly: outreach performances, or workshop on outreach skills;

cast meeting and rehearsal, if needed; student self-evaluations due every four weeks, as well as the final week of the semester; videos will be uploaded after each performance for performers to observe

Sept. 15: assign tasks to research and production assistants:

- develop a database of the community of opera outreach providers, including professional opera companies, universities, conservatories
- develop and distribute a survey which will be sent out to the opera outreach providers we have identified
- archive performance videos
- coordinate with an ACE from the Office of Service Learning to lead reflective group discussions
- solicit feedback from K-12 teachers/coordinators

Dec. 14: research assistant compiles data from opera outreach provider survey, teacher feedback forms, and student points of reflection
Spring 2014: I will synthesize the data we have collected fall semester, and begin to prepare results for presentation and publication while we continue to collect more data and continue community performances through the spring semester.