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creating worlds through theatre



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scene.

THIS ISSUE:
*“Where there’s music
and there’s people
Who are young
and alive”*



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EDITORIAL



By Daniel Sarstedt

Dear reader,

If you have ever stood in a room with 150 young people, most of whom were strangers three days ago, hearing them belt out a song in four part harmony that was written by you and them in a frenzy

of collaboration over a few days of intense creativity, you know how powerful music can be.

This special issue of *Scene* approaches this amazing quality of music, to unite and inspire young people and artists from different cultures, and break barriers of preconception and shy reluctance to fuel the collaborative freedom of an ensemble; regardless of whether that ensemble consists of 2 or 150 people. With ISTA this is magnified a thousand times by the marriage of music with theatre. Music builds a creative understanding and theatre adds a physical and vocal narrative, the two being in constant flux as creative ideas feed off each other.

So with its focus on collaboration ISTA is a great example of how these two sibling art forms can combine to create brilliant work, the key word of course being collaboration. This is described beautifully in these pages, from Krista Deter's description of her work with the American Embassy School, New Delhi in which she states "It was a true collaboration, dependent on input of every person involved", to how Madeline Tetzner's "mind was racing a million miles a minute" as she found inspiration in the conversations she was having with fellow ensemble members at the Eden Project. Also underlined by Zara Nunn's words on the sense of collaboration in her very inspiring account of the development of a devised piece: "One of the most engaging, challenging, unpredictable and exciting ways to work."

Of course, music is more than working with other artists, be it other musicians or actors or dancers or dare I say trapeze artists (an idea for a future Festival?). So much of what drives musicians comes from a basic need that simply makes it impossible not to create, perform, enjoy and love music. As Chloe Grace tells us: "My mother likes to tell me that I was singing before I could speak"; and this sense, acknowledging that music is such a basic human form of expression is clear from all the contributions here. As Stefan Pasternak puts it: "it is through music that we learn from the past, that we use in the present and that we transmit to the future." It is a really interesting aspect of music and theatre's happy marriage that great collaborative work only happens when the artists have a strong sense of their *individual* relationship with the art form.

That music has a professional, educational and vocational aspect is also clear from the varied contributions you are about to read. Jennifer Tickle's wonderful ready-to-go MYP unit of study is a great exemplar of how we as educators can integrate music into the delivery of our syllabus, in a way that allows the students to engage both artistically and academically. Becky Applin's piece on "de-Disneyfying" musical theatre fairytales gives us a toolkit for exploring the full integration of music and theatre in the classroom.

Music and theatre are natural partners, then. We should relish the points where they meet, despite any 'communication issues'. ISTA has a truly remarkable knack for putting people together in places and roles that they would never have been in otherwise. I recall a writing session with a fellow ensemble leader that took place late one night during a Festival. A small keyboard was attached to my laptop, and I was trying to translate what was being said into music. It got to the point where my friend groaned and said: "I want you to play the music I am hearing in my head!" My reply: "Erm, try humming it again..." Of course we got there in the end. I guess my point is that music and theatre speak different languages; but also that the more they talk the better they get at understanding each other. So, the more theatre teachers 'dabble' in music (and music teachers in theatre), the more the art forms will flourish. As Neil Ginsberg writes in his piece on the ultimate merger of theatre and music, namely opera: the combination of music and theatre "has the power to transport audiences instantly and stretches the willing suspension of disbelief".

I hope you enjoy these varied contributions, each of which illuminates a unique aspect of music and theatre, and all of which hopefully will inspire you to explore the two art forms in unison.

Happy collaboratin'!

CONTRIBUTORS



Rebecca Applin

Becky studied music at Cambridge University followed by composition for screen at the Royal College of Music. She has been composing for theatre, dance, radio and screen ever since. She has written new musicals and composed numerous scores. She creates music with young people throughout the UK and runs workshops across a wide spectrum of age groups.

"Telling stories through music is my passion"



Krista Deter

Krista studied music composition and performance at California State University and the University of Louisiana. She has since taught, composed and directed musical theatre. She currently lives with her husband and three children in the backwoods of the American Midwest.

"I gaze at the stars every chance I get."



Neil Ginsberg

Neil teaches music and musical theatre at Essex Street Academy in New York's Lower East Side. He has worked as a film/TV composer, musical director, orchestrator, composer, conductor and pianist. He is an ISTA 'veteran' having worked at over 15 Festivals, including Encore! (the forerunner to The Academy).

"For me, the lines between teaching and being an artist will always be happily blurred."



Chloe Grace

Chloe is 18 years old and attends the American Embassy School, New Delhi. She has been attending ISTA Festivals since 6th grade and by the time she graduates she will have been in every theatre class offered at her school and been a part of every play produced on the main stage. She hopes to study theatre at university next year. Her most recent album is called

Last Together Afternoon.

"I am a sucker for the arts".



Zara Nunn

Zara works as a professional theatre artist and composer. She has extensive experience in large-scale education projects working in the field of composition, devising opera and musical theatre, song writing and harmony and part-singing for actors. She has worked for notable companies/institutions such as Central School of Speech and Drama. She is also Artistic and Musical Director for Idle Chatter Theatre Company.

"The process of composing and making music for theatre is, for me, one of the most engaging, challenging, unpredictable and exciting ways to work."



Stefan Pasternak

Stef studied popular music, sound technology and song writing before receiving a BSc from the Open University and becoming qualified to teach ESL in the mainstream. He became a language teacher in 2011 and continues to teach English and French at Ecolint as well as maintaining a healthy music career.

"It is through music that we learn from the past, use in the present and transmit to the future."



Madeline Tetzner

Madeline is 16 years old and is Australian. She has lived in numerous Asian countries as well as Belgium, where, until recently she attended the International School of Brussels. She hopes to be a singer/songwriter and is also interested in hotels and marketing as a future career path.

"In the words of Eric Butterworth - Don't go through life, grow through life."



Jennifer Tickle

Jen teaches MYP and diploma performing arts at the International School of Dhaka, where she is also MYP and community and service coordinator. Jen has also taught TOK and been a CAS coordinator. She is vice chair of ISTA's board of trustees and Dhaka is her 5th international school.

"I love theatre for its power to transform lives."

Music! Words! Opera!

By Neil Ginsberg

Opera is theatre too! So why aren't there more Viking-horned sopranos singing high Cs in our drama classrooms? Well, there are many reasons, but the most common is that the musical demands of traditional opera are so massive that it takes a well-trained musician to tackle the masterpieces. And that's a lot to ask. But opera doesn't need to be inaccessible to the amateur theatre artist any more. Music! Words! Opera!, a hands-on curriculum developed by Roger Ames and Clifford Brooks under the auspices of Opera America and published by GIA, has built a bridge from the opera house to the schoolhouse. The course teaches teachers how to implement opera study in their classrooms through a curriculum that combines listening, watching, creating, and producing.

Last summer I became a national teacher trainer for Music! Words! Opera!. With a fresh new Sharpie in hand, I led workshops around the country teaching teachers how to create and produce original operas with students in their classrooms. Typically, my residency at a regional opera company lasted five days and involved about 20-25 K-12 (Primary and Secondary) teachers and teaching artists from different subject areas. My teaching partner, Clifford Brooks, led workshop sessions that focused on a specific opera that the company was producing the next season. He also lectured on the history and conventions of European opera and guided the group through lessons on how opera can be used to study language arts, history, and even geography, math, and science. The week culminated in a performance of an original work created by the ensemble of teachers.

Creating and producing an opera in five days with a diverse group of classroom teachers is a challenge. Almost all of the participating teachers are new to the idea of devising material. During a residency in Atlanta last summer, most of the participants had never set a word to music or given much thought to how to stage, let alone construct, a story. So the first order of business was a crash course in drama: my Sharpie took wing. What is dramatic? What makes a story stage-worthy? What stories and characters lend themselves to being adapted to the singing stage? How can music create drama and help us understand the story and the emotional journey of the characters? How is stage music different from concert music?

Once we established the intellectual questions of how to create drama, we also performed hands-on theatre exercises like tableaux, theme statues, and other activities designed to build ensemble and establish a physical vocabulary. The focus then turned to the craft of composition: song forms, major vs. minor, melodic structure, ostinato, and using metaphorical language to create lyrics and librettos.

Being a workshop leader for MWO required me to take on many different roles to create a new musical theatre piece: director, dramaturge, songwriter, librettist, choreographer, orchestrator, arranger, set designer, producer, (and with the larger groups, good old-fashioned wrangler). I needed to frequently switch hats between being an artist and being a teacher of teachers, which made facilitating the workshop a balancing act between leading and letting go. Part of guiding a group through the creative process is knowing when to hold the Sharpie and when to put it down. When to let the group work through an idea, even though I knew it would end up on the chopping block (like creating an opera about teacher contracts) and when to spotlight an idea that I knew could get momentum. Teaching teachers also involved a lot of processing and reflection throughout the day. Although they were students for the week, they were also teachers. Knowing that they would be applying exercises and concepts to their real life classrooms meant that it was important to regularly ask, "Do you think this will work with your students?" "How can you differentiate this activity to better suite their age level?" "Do you have the time/space to complete this activity?"

After we established the basics of creating theatre and music, it was time to select a topic for the opera. During my residency with the Atlanta Opera, the ensemble selected the Trail of Tears. The Trail of Tears is the name given to the government-sanctioned removal of the Cherokee nation in 1838 that forced thousands of Native Americans to walk from their lands east of the Mississippi River to present-day Oklahoma. Over 4,000 of the 15,000 Cherokees died on the trail. The ensemble was drawn to this chapter of local history and thought there was potential for many different characters expressing their points of view in the medium of opera. They quickly began imagining the victims and their stories as well as the lives of the rank-and-file soldiers charged with



carrying out their duties. The group sketched out the possibilities for songs (arias, duets, ensemble songs, incidental music) and even planned a moment of simultaneity, the operatic term for many different characters singing at once in counterpoint.

When the group becomes an ensemble, working on the piece becomes everyone's focus. This is also the point when the diverse skills of the group become invaluable. One participant, a high school librarian, had completed her masters' thesis on Andrew Jackson (the President that issued the order) and led research that resulted in a darkly comic aria for the former president (sung in this workshop by a cross-dressed alto).

The group's music teachers were excellent singers, composers, and performers and created original songs in small groups. Songs included a love interest duet between a soldier and Cherokee girl, a haunting ensemble number sung by the migrating tribe interspersed with an aria by an ambivalent general carrying out his orders to march. Two art teachers created a show poster, built props, and found some simple costume elements. Three elementary school music teachers were Orff specialists and, with the help of their xylophones, recorders and hand drums (Orff teachers always have these things in their cars!) created authentic sounding Native American music and taught the entire cast a Cherokee folk dance that instantly established the setting. Even the opera company's education director got in on the act and played her bassoon at the performance.

Opera hasn't found a place in most drama/theatre curriculum. Sadly, the stereotypes and parodies surrounding opera have overshadowed the genuine article. But women with Viking horns and all those high notes shouldn't dissuade drama teachers from teaching opera to their kids. Telling stories through music and singing is an ancient art form found in every culture. Opera has the power to transport audiences instantly and stretches the willing suspension of disbelief. It's entertaining, challenging, outrageous, and darn pretty! Singing words on stage heightens emotion, sustains dramatic moments, and can reveal subtext, relationships, and elements of time and place. Opera can also teach us about history, culture, and the art of adaptation. Opera is theatre. Whether your student is the next Beverly Sills or just learning to carry a tune, they are capable of creating, producing, and loving opera. The Music! Words! Opera! curriculum offers a way to introduce this great art form to students.

For information about next summer's Teacher Development sessions, email Education@operaamerica.org. For further information on Music! Words! Opera! including publications and materials for purchase, visit: <http://www.operaamerica.org/content/education/mwo/>

For more general music education resources, the following is one of the most complete resources online: <http://www.giamusic.com>

