

Rachel Mink
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Outcome Report: A Study of American Opera and Pedagogy

A year ago, I was gifted with an Arts Scholars Grant to study opera both as a performer and an administrator. As a performer, I studied with UVa voice faculty member, Pam Beasley, and worked for Ash Lawn Opera in downtown Charlottesville. In this year, my original proposal has been enriched by immense and unexpected opportunities.

In my original proposal, I had planned to audition for graduate schools during the fall of 2015. However, after careful consideration with Mrs. Beasley, we decided that it would simply be healthier for me to postpone graduation school applications until fall of 2016. As a result, I had a more fulfilling academic and vocal year. I was able to focus more diligently on my music for my recital; in fact, I had time to prepare not only for my DMP Recital (on April 23, 2016), but two other half recitals. I was also able to continue working for Ash Lawn through the fall of 2015, for about 10 hours a week.

In the summer of 2015, I spent my time either working for Ash Lawn Opera or in voice lessons. Because of the grant money, I was able to take 2-hour lessons every week with Mrs. Beasley, which greatly improved my vocal technique and set me on more solid ground in undertaking the great responsibility of preparing a full recital. After spending a great deal of time choosing and singing through repertoire, by the end of summer of 2015, Mrs. Beasley and I had decided on my final program for my recital:

1. Händel, "Let the Righteous be Glad"
2. Mendelssohn, "Auf Flügeln des Gesanges," "Frage," and "Suleika"
3. Puccini, "Quando m'en vo" from *La Bohème*
4. Rossini, "La Pastorella delle Alpi" and "La Regata Veneziana"
5. Fauré, "Rencontre," "Toujours," and "Adieu"
6. Gonoud, "The Jewel Song" from *Faust*
7. Gordon, "The Red Dress" and "Will There Really be a Morning"
8. Whitacre, "Good Night Moon"

We chose these pieces because they fit my voice quite well and presented a challenge technically and intellectually; they are all quite dramatically challenging and vocally complicated. We knew

we had a lot of work ahead of us, but with the extra lessons this summer, we had a great head start.

As I mentioned earlier, if I was not working on voice lessons and their preparations, I was working at Ash Lawn Opera. This proved to be a most rewarding experience; the hours were longer than expected (averaging about 30-35 hours a week for a part-time position). However, that being said, I learned a great deal about how the American opera tradition works. I helped plan and organize many big donor events, created and led the education and outreach program, and aided my boss in artist management. I was also involved in the first production of the summer, *Madama Butterfly*, and cued the surtitles. As a result, I attended every tech and dress rehearsal of the production and got to know the music very, very well. I was also able to travel to Blacksburg, VA with the company in the Young Artist's production for Virginia Tech, which taught me how opera can become mobile. In three months, I learned a great deal about how a successful opera company can work in America: the necessity for extraordinary fundraising, from board members and other patrons alike, the necessity for continual engagement of audiences with interesting programming, and the necessity for recruiting great talent and strong supporting actors and actresses. What became abundantly clear to me is that an opera company must really know its audience; it can't simply program lots and lots of events. These events have to be targeted at a certain section of the population to be successful. I also learned that there is perhaps an even stronger need now than ever before for audience education. In order to ensure continued support of Ash Lawn Opera, the company needs to persuade the Charlottesville population that it's worthy of support—and this relies most on education.

At the end of the summer, I decided upon two things: I would continue working for Ash Lawn through the semester and I would perform in a recital in the fall of 2015 with fellow Arts Scholar, Wesley Diener. It, in many ways, became a test run for my final recital, and gave me the chance to perform a lot of new pieces to my repertoire, as well as sing two duets with Wesley. The added push to prepare 10 pieces of music by November 21st was incredibly stressful, but also so helpful in preparing for the solo recital that was to come. In the fall, I also grew in autonomy at Ash Lawn; I was in charge of several big research projects, managed some website amendments, and worked on increasing revenue from advertisement sales in the playbill. In the beginning of December, as planned, I performed in Ash Lawn's production of *Amahl and the*

Night Visitors, which was an excellent capstone to the work I did planning for the production. It was certainly a very busy semester, but it was full of many great achievements.

Spring semester 2016 has been a whirlwind of work in finishing up preparations for my recital. Because of the increased time commitment I would face in the final months leading up to my recital, I had to suspend my work with Ash Lawn for the semester; thankfully, I will be returning to the stage this May for their production of *La Traviata*. In the beginning of February, Wesley and I repeated our recital for the Wednesday Morning Music Club at First Presbyterian Church; later that month, I competed in the National Association of Teachers of Singing competition at George Mason University, where I earned Honors in Classical singing and 2nd place in Musical Theatre. March was an intense month of score studying and memorization and I spent countless hours working on the dramatic aspects of my music, to try and make the performance as authentic as possible. I also spent many hours working on my program notes, a requirement of the DMP in music, which helped me better understand the nuances of the pieces I'll perform. Now, I am a week away from the performance and I am eternally grateful for the assistance of Arts Scholars in making this musical endeavor possible. Thank you to the all of the supporters of the Miller Arts Scholars program, with a special thanks to Sandy and Vinie Miller and Evie and Stephen Colbert.