

OVI Matching Grant Recipient Report

2024 Grant Recipient: Young Patronesses of the Opera, Inc. – Miami, Florida

Project: All Access Opera Project for Autistic and Neuro-diverse children

Report Date: September 1, 2024

1. Background

During the 2023/2024 program year, YPO President Lisa Hogan prioritized inclusion and accessibility in the arts. To address this, YPO launched the All Access Opera Project (AAP) with a focus on creating sensory-friendly programming for children and families with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and other neuro-diversities. YPO members were enthusiastic about the opportunity to introduce more children and community members to the joy of opera.

President Hogan appointed Dr. Judi Woolger to chair the AAP, which was integrated into the Opera Funtimes Workbook Committee. Through their research into national programs addressing autism and opera, they discovered the exceptional work of Vanderbilt University and the Nashville Opera.

The Nashville Opera All-Access Opera program was developed over five years in collaboration with Vanderbilt University's TRIAD (Treatment and Research Institute of Autism Spectrum Disorders). This partnership resulted in resources that enhanced Nashville Opera's annual educational tour to schools. Evidence showed that the toolkit benefitted not only children on the spectrum but also those with various learning differences.

The All-Access Opera toolkit includes:

- **Storyboards:** To help children understand the opera's plot and process the emotions opera can evoke.
- **Social stories:** To outline the experience of attending an opera.
- **Tip sheets:** Guidance on setting up sensory-friendly performances, including creating quiet spaces for students needing a break during the show.

The toolkit is user-friendly, comes with online training, and can be integrated into existing educational programs.

2. All Access Opera Program

In June 2023, YPO Miami member Linda Fernandez reached out to the Nashville Opera, leading to a partnership with Hannah Marcoe, Education and Engagement Division Manager at Nashville Opera. YPO took on the task of creating a storyboard as part of the

toolkit for the Hansel & Gretel children's opera, which YPO performed at over 22 public and private elementary schools in Miami-Dade County from January through March 2024. The opera was performed twice at each school, reaching over 10,000 children.

The storyboard and toolkit materials were sent digitally to music teachers a week before the performances. Teachers then presented these materials to prepare the students, ensuring all children were ready for the experience.

Dr. Judi Woolger, the All Access Chairperson, requested photos from previous performances and the 2023 rehearsals to create the storyboard. She included text that explained the characters, scenes, and songs, allowing all children to follow the story.

Reports from teachers indicated a significant increase in attendance by special needs students at the In School Opera performances, surpassing previous years. Additionally, mainstream students exhibited fewer disciplinary and attention issues, as they were better prepared for the performances through the storyboards and materials. This preparation made them calmer and more receptive to the music, storyline, and operatic singing.

Outcomes:

- Promoted understanding
- Helped teachers prepare students
- Created expectations
- Built engagement
- Supported story retention
- Bolstered literacy
- Helped students stay engaged
- Catered to students' learning styles

YPO will continue the All Access Project during the upcoming 2024/2025 program year and prepare materials for "Little Red Riding Hood" In school Opera performances.

3. In School Opera Performance at a South Florida Special Needs School

The third component of the YPO All Access Project involved performing an In School Opera at a special needs school for the first time in YPO's 68-year history. Several YPO members, parents of autistic and intellectually disabled children, recommended suitable schools.

On March 7, 2024, YPO brought magic to the Miami Learning Experience School (MLE), a national model for students with intellectual disabilities. Over 140 students experienced the enchanting tale of "Hansel and Gretel" through a special In-School Opera performance as part of YPO's All Access Opera Project. The joy and wonder on the attendees' faces highlighted the universal power of music to uplift and unite.

YPO provided the All Access Project materials, including storyboard PowerPoint decks and hard copies of the Hansel and Gretel Opera Funtime Children's workbooks, to the teachers a week before the performance. This preparation helped students follow the storyline and fully engage with the performance.

YPO members Kathy Feldman and Lucie Spieler introduced the performance. Kathy's son, Allen, and Lucie's son, David, have attended MLE since they were infants and are now adults living independently. The first show was for MLE High School students and adults from the MLE Shannon Campus adult program, while the second was for Elementary and Middle School students. The students were captivated by the performance, reacting positively to the characters and storyline, and showing engagement through laughter, empathy, and applause.

At the conclusion of the second performance, the MLE students surprised the cast, crew, and YPO members with "thank you" gifts, making it a milestone moment in YPO's history. The school shared photos from the event on social media, receiving hundreds of likes and positive comments.

Due to the success of the MLE performance, YPO will schedule 1 to 2 ISO performances at other special needs schools during the upcoming 2024/2025 program year.

4. 2023/2024 In School Opera Program/All Access Project Costs

- In School Opera performers \$20,095
- Sets and Props \$300
- Storage \$4037
- Technical Assistance \$12,560
- Transportation \$4,456
- ISO performance at Miami Learning Experience School \$2000
- Printing of Opera Funtimes for Miami Learning Experience School \$345

5. Exhibits and Materials attached to this report:

- Hansel and Gretel All Access Toolkit (also available on YPO's website)
- Hansel and Gretel All Access Storyboard (also available on YPO's website)
- Photos from 2023/2024 In School Opera Performances
- Photos from March 7, 2024 Miami Learning Experience Performance

A Detailed Social Story
Hansel and Gretel
with Young Patronesses of the Opera

The opera is a place where people wear costumes and sing songs to tell a story. When I go to see Hansel & Gretel, I might go with my family or I might see the show at my school.

When I get to the performance, there will be a lot of places to sit. My family or teacher will help decide where we should sit. Before the show begins, people might be talking a lot and it might be noisy. That is okay. There will be a quiet space where I can go to get away from the noise. If I need a break from the noise, I can ask my family or teacher to take me to the quiet space.

An adult might come to the front and start talking loudly. This means that the play is about to start and everyone in the theater should finish their conversations and be quiet. I will try to finish my conversation and be quiet when an adult starts talking loudly on stage.

When the show starts, people will come onto the stage. The singers might ask the audience to join them in a dance. I might like to try to dance too. There may be someone dressed up like a witch. If I get scared, I can hold my teacher or family member's hand or ask to go to the quiet space. There might be music playing and sometimes the people might sing. The people in the audience will try to stay quiet to listen to the show. I will try to be respectful to the performers and others watching the performance by staying in my seat, sitting quietly, and watching the performance. If the music or the singing gets too loud, I can ask to go to the quiet space.

The people in the opera are called characters. Sometimes the characters might pretend to be happy and sometimes they might pretend to be angry or sad. When the characters are angry, they might yell or growl or stomp around. I might get scared. If I am scared, I can ask my teacher or family member to hold my hand, take a break, or go to the quiet space.

I might need to go to the bathroom during the show. If I need to go to the bathroom, I can ask my family or teacher to take me to the bathroom.

At the end of the show, people might clap if they liked the show. I might want to clap too. The characters will bow and they might ask the audience if there are any questions. If I want to ask a question, I can raise my hand and wait for them to point to me to ask my question. If they point to me, I will try to talk loudly so everyone can hear my question.

When it is time to leave, everyone will stand up and walk to the exits. It might be crowded with everyone trying to leave at the same time. I will try to wait my turn to walk out of the theater and out of the door. If I am respectful during the show, by staying in my seat, sitting quietly, and watching the performance, my family and teachers will be so proud of me. I might like going to the opera!





Tip Sheet
Hansel and Gretel
with Young Patronesses of the Opera

Young Patronesses of the Opera has joined with Nashville Opera to implement a revolutionary program, All-Access Opera Education, to make opera inclusive for ALL students—providing special evidence-based toolkits designed in collaboration with the Treatment and Research Institute of Autism Spectrum Disorders at Vanderbilt University. The program bolsters accessibility for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and other disabilities and creates exciting new learning opportunities and audience experiences for students through opera. It is the first program of its kind to be documented for replication in communities across the United States. Partners include Arizona Opera, Pensacola Opera, Michigan Opera Theater and now Young Patronesses of the Opera in Miami. We hope it is helpful to your students or your family!

Supports:

1. **Social Story**

We have developed and provided multiple versions of a **Social Story** for children to use prior to the opera. Social Stories™ describe a situation or experience in order to provide children with an idea of what to expect. Creating predictability can be reassuring for children entering a new situation and can allow children to respond to challenges in an adaptive way. We recommend reviewing this social story with your student or child prior to attending the opera. Social Stories™ are an evidence-based practice as identified in the autism intervention literature review, *Evidence-Based Practice for Children, Youth, and Young Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder* (2014) by the National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders.

2. **Story Board**

We have developed and provided a **Story Board** online that can be projected or printed out for use during the performance. A story board is a visual schedule that outlines the sequence of events. Visual Schedules can be used to outline what might happen at a doctor's visit, the sequence of events occurring over a whole day, or, as in this case, the sequence of events occurring within the plot of the opera. Reviewing the story board prior to the performance will also familiarize your child or student with the story and prepare them for what to expect, both of which may enhance their experience at the opera. Visual schedules are an evidence-based practice as identified in the autism intervention literature review, *Evidence-Based Practice for Children, Youth, and Young Adults with Autism Spectrum*

Disorder (2014) by the National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders.

3. **Quiet Space**

If you or your child or student need to take a break from the noise and/or commotion, it is highly effective to have a designated room or area as a "Quiet Space" to visit. It can be a hallway outside of the performance space, a classroom, or any other place conveniently located near the performance.



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Resources:

- **VKC-TRIAD Community Engagement Initiative:**
<http://vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/vkc/triad/community/>
The Community Engagement Initiative includes the Families First and Organizational Engagement Programs. Families First is a free workshop series for caregivers of young children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The Organizational Engagement Program focuses on supporting organizations in building capacity for inclusion by providing training, developing supports, and collaborating on modified events.
- **Vanderbilt Autism Resource Line:** Local 322-7565 or Toll Free (877) ASD-VUMC (273- 8862) A toll-free helpline for families and professionals to access information about autism- related clinical, research, and outreach services at Vanderbilt University.
- **Tennessee Disability Pathfinder:** 1-800-640-4636 or tnpathfinder@vanderbilt.edu
The Tennessee Disability Pathfinder is a free, statewide, information and referral service for persons with disabilities, family members, service providers, and advocates.
- **National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders:**
<http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu>
The National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders is a multi-university center to promote the use of evidence-based practice for children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorders.
- **Mayer-Johnson:** www.mayer-johnson.com
DynaVox Mayer-Johnson is the leading provider of speech generating devices and symbol-adapted special education software used to assist individuals in overcoming their speech, language and learning challenges.