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Five Cool Case Studies

A Guide to  
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**SPECIAL REPORTS**

### CONTENTS

- 2** Introduction
- 3** Central Ohio Symphony's Drumming Circle
- 7** Musical Instrument Museum: Education is the Main Mission
- 12** Baltimore Symphony Orchestra: OrchKids
- 15** The Pueblo Opera Program
- 18** San Francisco Opera's ARIA Network
- 23** More On The Web

Each article in this issue is also found on our website, MusicalAmerica.com, in the [Special Reports](#) section.

COVER: Baltimore Symphony's OrchKids member Shawna Thompson. Photo: Bill Dennison

## Introduction



Many arts organizations have realized if they want younger and/or more clientele, they'll have to go out into their communities and get them. In *Cool Case Studies*, we focus on five organizations doing just that, in ways we think are particularly inventive.

Our five cases represent one end of the education spectrum, and our conservatory listings the other. If the latter group creates arts professionals, the former creates their future audiences and improves lives in the process.

[The Baltimore Symphony's OrchKids program](#), for example, is not only creating budding virtuosos, it's improving their academics and social and emotional lives. [The Santa Fe Opera](#), mindful of the gap between its well-heeled summer patrons and its Native American neighbors, brings hundreds of children and their chaperones from 19 local pueblos and three reservations to watch dress rehearsals and ask questions of the performers.

In the [San Francisco Opera's ARIA Network](#), now in 66 classrooms and five school districts, teaching artists help students learn the basics of the art form, and at the same time work with teachers to connect opera's elements to the core curriculum. Students then create their own operas, using staff members from the company to help them realize their scenarios.

You don't have to be big to be cool, either. [The Central Ohio Symphony](#), annual budget of \$275,000, has been working with the local courts by leading drumming circles, which help troubled teens and adults address their emotional issues. Call it percussion therapy.

Apart from being deemed by TripAdvisor as Arizona's No. 1 attraction, the massive [Musical Instrument Museum](#) has been focused on education from the day its doors opened in 2010. By its own accounting, slightly under half of its visitors are students, coming with school groups or parents to view its 6,000 instruments (from a collection of 15,000) from 200 international countries and territories. The instruments are grouped by region, rather than by type and/or vintage, so students get a tour of the world, through music. What a great way to go.

Regards,  
Susan Elliott  
Editor, Special Reports

# CENTRAL OHIO SYMPHONY'S DRUMMING CIRCLE

*Orchestra teams with the local courts to help troubled teens*

By Wynne Delacoma

Creating community outside the concert hall has become a priority for American orchestras of all sizes, even those with tiny budgets and minimal staff. Take the Central Ohio Symphony: With a budget of \$275,000, there's little left once its 65 professional musicians are paid for the five-concert season.



Warren Hyer, executive director of Central Ohio Symphony.

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## WYNNE DELACOMA

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*University's Medill School of Journalism.*

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Based in Delaware, OH, a city of about 35,000 north of Columbus, COS was founded in 1978 as a volunteer community group and successor to the Ohio Wesleyan University Symphony. With its 670 annual subscribers, and with Delaware a fairly well-heeled area, COS's primary community service in the past has been its free July 4th concerts, which this year drew an estimated 8,000. But executive director and timpanist Warren W. Hyer, a lifelong percussionist who joined the orchestra before it turned professional in 1990, was looking for something deeper.

### **Social justice meets the percussive arts**

In the late 2000s, he and his wife, April Nelson, now a retired attorney, began working with local judges to help set up courts attuned to individuals with addiction and mental-health problems. Crime isn't a massive issue in Delaware, but a steady stream of young people with those issues goes through the local courts each year—about 60 are currently on court probation.

Attending the annual Percussive Arts Society convention in 2010, in Indianapolis, the couple decided to sign up for workshops on therapeutic drum circles—a kind of therapy designed to help troubled people recognize and express emotions that may be

*continued on p. 5*



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Joseph W. Polisi, President

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15 to 20 adults and a varying number of teens and their families. Young participants can range from as few as two to as many as 10 per session, as they cycle in and out of the program. Teens come to two per month, one for teens alone, the other for teens and their families.

### **Test the waters, exploit the anger**

After only one year of operation, it's difficult to meaningfully assess the program. Lynne Schoenling, a Juvenile Treatment Court magistrate in Delaware, thinks the ratio so far is 50-50, with as many participants being helped as those who fall back into destructive patterns. "It's a coin flip," she says. "But a coin flip is better than 10 percent."

blocking their recovery. Research has found that, through some mysterious physical and psychological alchemy, wailing away on a drum or shaking a rattle helps many people find the words and inner resources they need to deal with their problems.

Nelson and Hyer quickly realized that drum circles would be a good fit for Delaware's specialized courts; local officials agreed to give them a try, not only for therapeutic reasons, but also as a way to keep offenders in regular contact with the court system.

Just one problem. "We didn't have any equipment and we had no money," says Hyer.

### **Finding the funds, launching the program**

Over the next two years, the COS concentrated on fund raising; a \$16,000 grant for each of three consecutive years from Ann and Gordon Getty Foundation Community Investment helped provide seed money for supplies and training. The second grant essentially launched the program in Spring 2013 and COS is anticipating a third to finance next year. With the Getty grants, Hyer has bought instruments, now totaling 30 big drums along with tambourines, shakers, and small hand drums.

The grants also paid for training for Hyer and two associates: COS percussionist Caitie Thompson and Rhonda Milner, a supervising therapist at a mental health and addiction facility in Columbus.

Launching the program in spring of 2013, Hyer, Thompson, and Milner now run a year-round series of drum circles for between

## **A SUCCESSFUL THERAPEUTIC EXCHANGE**

A COS percussionist since 2008, 26-year-old Caitie Thompson knows one life that's been completely changed by the drum circle: her own.

After the training sessions with Hyer and Milner, Thompson knew this would be her life's work. She had been working three jobs—at a recording studio, teaching, and performing—but decided to focus on drum circles and the COS.

"It's a way for me to use music to reach other people and to better their quality of life" she says. "It's more than just playing concerts and entertaining people. Drum circle facilitation really changes people."

"Our goal is to not be in the foreground," said Thompson. "Drum circle facilitation is not leading. It's sitting in the background and letting people lead each other. That's when magic happens."

*continued on p. 6*

Milner, Hyer, and Thompson can cite specific incidents where youngsters and adults are communicating verbally in ways that were impossible before the drum sessions.

Thompson remembers one such episode with a teen who was struggling with anger and resentment toward his father.

"We said, 'Play what your anger feels like.' He said, 'I can't do that, I'll break the drum.' Warren and I looked at each other, and we said, 'Break it.' He took the mallets and went to town on that drum. The look on his face after he finished was complete relief. It was like he had just let out all of these emotions he had been holding back because he didn't have any place to let go of them."

The drum, she added, didn't break. 



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# MUSICAL INSTRUMENT MUSEUM

## EDUCATION

is the **Main Mission**

From ancient German krumphorns to African thumbpianos to

Eric Clapton's Stratocaster, MIM lets students tour the world through music

By Stuart Isacoff

The Musical Instrument Museum is Arizona's Number 1 attraction, according to TripAdvisor, which is remarkable considering it only opened in 2010. Since then, more than 350,000 people have come through its doors, more than 40% of whom have been students.



"From the beginning," founding President and Director Bill DeWalt told me, "I thought that we would develop educational programs here for the local school systems, and that we would eventually use that as a platform to expand to the world. We have the opportunity to develop curriculum to reach young people virtually everywhere."

Since DeWalt retired in 2013, April Salomon has been acting director. But under the guidance of Education Director

### STUART ISACOFF



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	Total School Tour	Title 1	% of Title 1	Students able to visit due to	% of Students Support by
August - June	Participants	Students	Students	Grants	Grants
2012-13 School Year	28,135	14,921	53%	13,944	50%
2013-14 School Year	38,302	23,487	61%	22,579	59%

continued on p. 8

Carly Ofsthun, education remains a top priority, especially for the large number of schools in the area that are supported under the Title 1 Federal Aid program for at-risk districts. (Most of MIM's education initiatives are funded privately, however.)

### Tours

Far from the usual wander through long corridors to look (but don't touch!) at precious artifacts, MIM school tours are designed to be experiential. Apart from admiring and even trying out a few of the 6,000 instruments on display, students can see them in action—both in video stations within each exhibit and live.



## SO, WHAT IS MIM?



The Musical Instrument Museum, opened in April of 2010, is a two-story, 190,000-square-foot structure of sandstone and glass situated on 20 acres of dry, arid land in Northern Phoenix, AZ. Its modest, boxy appearance belies its exotic contents: 6,000 different instruments on display—from a collection of over 15,000—representing more than 200 countries and territories around the globe. At present the museum lacks instruments only from a handful of countries, such as Maldives and North Korea.

In addition to the instruments themselves, video stations demonstrate how they are played. Visitors wear wireless earphones, enabling them to hear and see the instruments in their native contexts. MIM's artifacts are organized by geographic region, with additional special exhibits like a hands-on "Experience Gallery" (inviting patrons to touch, play, and hear), and a "Mechanical Music Gallery," with player pianos and other self-performing instruments.

MIM has by any measure been a huge success for the Southwest region. In 2014, *USA Today* listed it among the "20 Best Museums for Families Across the USA," and Trip Advisor named it the number one attraction in Arizona. Its visitor total in 2013 was 247,000. That is certainly due in part to its unique holdings, but it can be argued that the museum's success would not be possible without its palpable sense of mission, "to reach young people everywhere," says founding (and former) President and Director Bill DeWalt. Only four years young, MIM is well positioned to achieve that goal.

*continued on p. 9*

For some, a visit to MIM may be their first time witnessing a live performance (often on an instrument they've never heard of), either in the 300-seat theater or within the galleries themselves.

MIM offers seven tours for school groups, from "Musical instruments and animal art of Asia" (Grades K-2), which looks for similarities between animal shapes and instruments, to "Experience Africa" (Grades 3-6), where students explore the African elements in music of the Americas. They participate in a West African percussion ensemble, and get to dance with special "gumboot" shoes. The dancing also ties in with school physical-education requirements.

**School-group tours.** Since October of 2010, there have been 112,696 participants, of 1,711 school groups.

**Youth-group tours.** Since January of 2013, there have been 1,818 participants.

### Artist Residencies

Artists "in residence" at MIM have included the Chestnut Brass Company, a contemporary chamber music ensemble; Ghanaian musician Bernard Woma; ballad singer Tim Eriksen; and classical pianist Alpin Hong. Some also participate in the concert series [see [So, What is MIM?](#)].

Usually, an artist will offer a 50-minute performance followed by an annotated tour of his or her particular gallery or specialty area. By way of example, Hong uses the piano repertoire and popular music transcriptions to engage the students in a narrative about piano mechanics, what practicing involves, and how different intervals, tempos, and elements like stage presence affect the feelings evoked by music. Students are invited to ask questions. For many this may be their first time engaging in a dialogue with a professional musician.

In addition to individual artist talks and demonstrations there are also a number of themed, in-gallery presentations such as: "School of Swing," for grades three to five, which focuses on the history of jazz; "Heidi Swedberg



The 300-seat MIM Musical Theater.

& the Sukey Jump Band," designed to show off the ukulele's many uses; and "Yellowhouse Dancers," in the Navajo Nations area, which shares American Indian culture through song and dance.

### MIMKids

MIMKids comprises two kinds of classes: "Mini Music Makers," (for ages 0 to 5) and "Musical Adventures" (for ages 6-10). Both use the instruments in hands-on movement and music activities that are designed to teach social skills as well the history and uses of the instruments. In the 2013-14 school year, MIMKids reached 1,187 individuals.




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continued on p. 10



Students from Herrera Elementary School at a reception for their artwork exhibit.

## MIM CONCERTS

The Musical Instrument Museum hosts a regular concert series in its 300-seat theater. The variety of music offered reflects the variety of genres represented through its vast collection. A recent schedule:

July 5	Judy Collins
July 6	Judy Collins
July 9	Albert Lee & Cindy Cashdollar
July 10	Kevin Miso & Kara Hesse
July 11	Poncho Sanchez
July 13	RUNA
July 19	The Brubeck Brothers Quartet: Tribute to Dave Brubeck
July 25	Omar Sosa Quarteto Afro cubano
July 26	Dorado Schmitt and the Django All-Stars
July 31	Benise with Karen Briggs
August 1	Jacob Moon
August 3	Conjunto Chappottin y Sus Estrellas

## Junior museum guides

This is a relatively new effort, a partnership in which Girl Scouts can earn a special merit badge for successfully completing training as official guides in MIM.

## Student exhibitions




These are designed to help give students a sense of “ownership” in MIM. In one partnership between MIM and a local school district, artwork by third- and fourth-graders was placed on display in a special exhibit area; the young artists and their families were then invited to an opening reception and concert.

Education Director Ofsthen notes how these kinds of special evenings can reinforce the sense of the museum as a welcoming place. “Parents and kids began to talk about how MIM was ‘their’ museum,” she says. Which is precisely the goal.

MIM makes its [curriculum and lesson plans](#) available to any interested teacher.

## Measurable Impact

- During the 2013–14 school year, 97% of teachers said that their students learned something new, and 92% would recommend a guided MIM school tour to their colleagues. 95% of middle- and high school students would recommend a field trip to MIM to other students.
- One third-grade teacher was typical in her response: “My students and I had a spectacular educational experience.”

After only four years, education at MIM has established a strong foothold in the community, and the staff’s expansive vision promises even greater engagement in the years ahead. 

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# Baltimore SYMPHONY Orchestra OrchKids

By Heidi Waleson

Turning around schools in Baltimore's neediest communities

The Baltimore Symphony Orchestra's community and education programs are among the most forward-looking of U.S. orchestras. Arguably the most successful is OrchKids. Based on the now-legendary "El Sistema" program of Venezuela, which harnesses music education as a vehicle for social change, OrchKids, which just completed its sixth year, has begun turning around schools in some of the neediest communities in Baltimore. News of its success has reached the highest levels: in November 2013, OrchKids received a National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award, presented at the White House by Michelle Obama.

## In the beginning

The brainchild of Music Director Marin Alsop (and launched with a significant chunk of her MacArthur "genius" grant monies), the BSO piloted OrchKids in 2008 with 30 children in one of the worst-performing schools in the city. When that one closed at the end of the school year, the operation (and the students) moved to another challenged elementary school, Lockerman-Bundy in West Baltimore, where it has thrived—75 percent of the children enrolled in the school now participate in the program. Schools



### HEIDI WALESON

*Heidi Waleson is the opera critic for The Wall Street Journal and writes about the performing arts for a variety of national and international publications.*



Budding maestro Asia Palmer conducts her peers. PHOTO: Kenneth Adam.

continued on p. 13

and grades have been added each year. Today, OrchKids serves 730 students in five schools, grades K-8, with 600 hours of in-school and after-school instruction. A four-week summer program has also been added.

### How it works

Instruction begins in pre-kindergarten, where children learn the fundamentals of music and musicianship during the school day; these classes continue through second grade. The afterschool program starts in first grade, when students explore the different instrument families; in second grade, they choose an instrument, get group instruction, and begin to participate in ensembles. In third grade, older students begin to mentor younger ones. There are performances, ancillary activities with other community music groups, and field trips. As the children get older, their involvement in the afterschool program becomes more intensive, with classes Monday through Friday, and sometimes even on weekends.

### The Bucket Band

OrchKids students participate in all kinds of music in all kinds of configurations: a jazz band, a choir, mixed ensembles, a large orchestra. And they compose. "Our kids do it all," says Nicholas Cohen, director of community engagement at the BSO. "They are not just one-track musicians."

One Baltimore-specific program is the Bucket Band, taught by a BSO percussionist, in which very young children use Home

Depot buckets and drumsticks to learn rhythm skills; by the time they get their own instruments, Cohen says, they are extremely proficient. The Bucket Band also introduces musical concepts using genres with which the children are already familiar. "Urban rhythms resonate with these kids more than maybe Bach or Beethoven," says Cohen. "We feed them what they are used to, and then we feed them a little Beethoven." OrchKids concerts draw big, enthusiastic crowds of families, friends, and community members who cheer both the Bucket Band and Beethoven.

### What it costs

The OrchKids budget is just over \$1.1 million, funded largely through private donations, including two \$1 million grants. The students get group lessons, instruments, food, and field trips, all at no charge. The budget also supports the program's staff, which includes an artistic director, an operations director, nearly 40 instructors (several in the orchestra), and support staff. Then there are the site coordinators who are stationed permanently in each of the five schools. This is a critical element, Cohen says, not only to handle logistics, but because their presence demonstrates to the teachers and staff that OrchKids is serious about being a key part of their community.

### The results

Like El Sistema, OrchKids aims for results beyond music education and performance. Music is the vehicle that helps develop skills like teamwork and communication, fosters creativity, encourages academic success, and builds parental involvement. The BSO conducted an assessment in partnership with Baltimore City Schools and University of Maryland Baltimore City (UMBC), looking at the academic, social, and musical progress of the kids in the program during the 2012-13 school year. Several results leapt out:

- Children who had been in OrchKids for three years or more had higher math scores on the state tests and lower absenteeism than the Baltimore city average.
- There were no chronic absentees. "It's an honor to be in OrchKids, and if you don't come to school, you're not participating in it," Cohen says. "The parents get that."



OrchKids's famous Bucket Band. PHOTO: Kenneth Adam.

*continued on p. 14*

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- School attendance in general improved, in one case (Lockerman-Bundy School) by 52 percent from the time that the program was introduced, in 2009-10.
- OrchKids participants are less likely to change schools mid-year—a practice that hinders learning.
- Behavior improved. "Through the assessment, and the feedback we get from the teachers, we are seeing that the kids' social and classroom skills are improving," says Cohen.

When the assessment showed reading test scores to be slightly behind the city average, OrchKids enlisted Experience Corps, a group of retired Baltimore school teachers, to provide after-school homework help and tutoring.

### The future

OrchKids is now ensconced in West Baltimore, with Lockerman-Bundy as the hub school that hosts most of the afterschool programs (children from the other, satellite elementary schools are bussed there), along with Highlandtown Elementary/Middle School, in East Baltimore. The plan is to have a hub school with an afterschool program and satellite schools in each quadrant of the city, reaching 1,600 children, within six years.

For the Baltimore Symphony, OrchKids is a powerful example of how a community institution can reach past its traditional borders and have an important impact. "Most people look at West Baltimore and see it as a hopeless place, but with OrchKids, we are showing the community that change can happen through music," Cohen says. "We want to galvanize others, and hope that other like-minded institutions will step in. It just takes a couple of trail-blazers." 



# The PUEBLO OPERA Program

Native Americans and opera:  
Over 40 years of success

By Wynne Delacoma

Native Americans have been passing through Santa Fe's environs in northern New Mexico for up to 30,000 years. They settled permanently more than 1,500 years ago, long before Monteverdi composed *Orfeo* or John Crosby established his opera company on a former guest ranch in the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.



Since its founding in 1956, [Santa Fe Opera](#) has made the most of its distinctive locale. Its open-sided theater has always been more or less exposed to the elements, allowing real lightning, rain, or luminous moonlight to become part of the scenery—for better or worse. Equally long-running is the company's focus on taking its music beyond the opera house. For its [Pueblo Opera Program](#), established in 1973, the goal is forging strong connections with the Native Americans living in the 19 pueblos and three reservations surrounding Santa Fe.

## The mission

"The program's hallmark has always been an exchange of culture," says Andrea Fellows Walters, director SFO's educational and community programs. "Opera is a specific culture and a specific tradition. And the pueblos, of course, and the reservations, have a very rich, deep tradition of story-telling and music." It's a natural fit.

## How it works

Every year between 400 and 500 Native American children, chaperones, and adults attend three open dress rehearsals as guests

## WYNNE DELACOMA



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*continued on p. 16*



POP kids with their chaperones at the rehearsal of *Don Pasquale* at Santa Fe Opera.

of Santa Fe Opera during its three-month (summer) season. The Pueblo Opera Program has an advisory council, and each pueblo has a volunteer coordinator. Some of the pueblos are two to three hours away, and the opera provides free round-trip transportation. (Rehearsals are available to other local youth groups as well.) POP visitors get advance materials designed for opera newcomers and younger visitors, and the company holds an interactive preview before each dress rehearsal titled 3-2-1-Opera.

The visits might include stops at a local museum or other performing arts organizations, and every year the Omaha Steak Company sponsors a dinner for Pueblo Opera Program guests.

POP isn't a one-way street. Over the years, opera staffers have attended ceremonies and performances at various pueblos.

### The cost

Santa Fe Opera's annual budget last season was \$20 million, about \$1 million of which was spent on education and community programs. Since POP is built around existing final dress rehearsals, the costs are minimal: approximately \$70,000 to cover expenses like transportation and supplemental materials.

### A stunning success story

The Pueblo Opera Program thrives, in part, because of the casual, relaxed connections between its volunteer coordinators and their pueblo neighbors. Claudene Martinez, 45, who grew up on a pueblo, has been a volunteer coordinator for the past 27 years.



Three generations of POP. Right to left: Pueblo coordinator Claudene Martinez; her niece, Desiree; and her sister, Renee.

continued on p. 17

## A FEW FAMOUS POP GRADS

Childhood visits to Santa Fe Opera have changed lives. You might recognize Patricia Michaels, a textile and fashion designer from Taos, N.M., as the first runner-up on TV's *Project Runway* in 2013. Or Robert Mirabal, the Grammy Award-winning Native American flutist and flute maker, from his multi-media shows aired during PBS pledge drives.


Santa Fe Opera staffers remember Michaels and Mirabal as two of the thousands of children attending their dress rehearsals over the decades.

She knows firsthand what fun a childhood trip to the opera can be. She was 10 when she made her first.

"We would meet at the big tree," Martinez says, "and the bus would pick us up there. That was a big gathering place. When all the Native kids would meet together there, we'd say, 'Are you going to the opera? Are you going to the opera?' It was something different, a different culture, a different atmosphere. It was free, so why not?"

Martinez is the coordinator for the Nambe pueblo, organizing programs for pre-kindergarten through post-secondary students. She chats up parents and makes sure to mention her son, a formerly squirmy kid who became intrigued with opera.

"In the beginning," says Martinez, "I'll say, 'Hey, have you ever been to the opera? You should go.' They'll say, 'No, I don't want to go.' And I'll say, 'Oh, just give it a chance.'"

"I use my son as an example. So they say, 'Hmm, maybe I will go.' And now there are some that are hooked. This year I got eight new ones to go." 

As Mirabal puts it, Santa Fe Opera "was where I experienced my first taste of dramatic art. The operas were a part of my life and my musical dreams when I was a young boy living in the Taos Pueblo."

Michaels first encountered Santa Fe Opera in the early 1970s when she was five. She had already seen family members perform, in traditional ceremonies. "We were all raised onstage as children," she says. "I was the only one who didn't sing. I took a liking to making the garments."

"I already had an understanding of what it meant to be onstage. But when I first went to the opera, I was like, 'Wow! I haven't seen a stage like this before!' with an orchestra, and the volumes and volumes of material that were available—the silks, the organdies, the satin organzas, the plethora of yardage. All of a sudden, garments could be grand and [designed] on a scale that I never expected."



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# SAN FRANCISCO *Aria* OPERA's Network

WHERE OPERA MEETS MATH, LANGUAGE ARTS, SCIENCE, AND SOCIAL STUDIES

By Heidi Waleson

When Ruth Nott arrived as director of education at the [San Francisco Opera](#) in 2008, her charge was to breathe new life into the company's education programs—to come up with a strategic, quantifiable plan that truly served, and was relevant to, the SFO's community.



Jefferson Elementary School's opera creation was *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*.  
PHOTO: Cory Weaver.



## HEIDI WALESON

*Heidi Waleson is the opera critic for The Wall Street Journal and writes about the performing arts for a variety of national and international publications.*

Her first order of business was to ask the components of that community what they needed. "Teachers wanted to learn more about opera through professional development," she says, "but they also wanted opportunities for their students to connect with the professionals who make opera happen." Teachers also suggested that students could learn more about the art form by creating their own operas.

These, along with other "wish-list" suggestions from district arts coordinators, became the basic ingredients for the [ARIA](#) (Arts Resources in Action) Network, now in 12 schools, 66 classrooms, and five school districts. The program has a waiting list, and garners high praise for its connections to the curriculum.

## How it works

ARIA Network (K-8) runs for a full semester or a full school year, with a classroom visit every week by a teaching artist. Hired by SFO, teaching artists are generally experts in one or more fields—including poetry, scriptwriting, composing, directing, singing, or acting—who have been trained in classroom techniques. They teach students the elements of opera by studying and viewing an opera, either in a dress rehearsal or on film. (They also teach teachers, in special, required sessions.)

*continued on p. 19*



Danielle de Niese teaches a master class as part of San Francisco Opera's ARIA Network. PHOTO: Cory Weaver.

Then students create their own opera, writing the music and text, crafting the production, and performing it. (The ARIA Residency, a shorter version, focuses on one aspect of opera, with four to 12 classroom visits.)

Teachers can also draw on SFO resources. One might decide to bring in a stage director; another might focus on set models, and



At El Dorado School, a student works on the set for *The Gingerbread Man*. PHOTO: Scott Wall.

work them into the math curriculum. "They can bring in people from the opera's props staff to work with the kids," Nott says. "If the opera is based on a book [they might ask the kids], 'do you want the show to look like the book, or not? What props and sets do you absolutely need to show where story takes place?' Then that props person might come back two weeks later to help build what they talked about."

The company's young artists—Adler Fellows—and the children's chorus are also resources. ARIA Network classes may have as many as 40 visits from opera professionals over the course of the school year, providing not only instruction, but first-hand contact for students with the people who make the art form.

### Teacher/curriculum-driven

Each school project is developed individually by teachers in collaboration with teaching artists. The teachers determine the shape of the project and connect it to their curriculum, whether in language arts, social studies, science, or math [see sidebar, [The Curriculum Connection](#)].



West Portal Elementary School's opera was titled *The Elganator*. PHOTO: Cory Weaver.

Schools are deeply concerned about meeting academic standards as codified in the federal government's Common Core (which mandates a certain achievement level at the end of each grade). So K-12 arts programs that have close ties to the curriculum, and that give teachers the tools to meaningfully integrate that program with academics, have a higher chance of being adopted.

*continued on p. 20*

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"We have more schools applying for the program than we can accommodate, because principals see that it is helping them meet the Common Core standards," Nott says, as well as broadening students' knowledge of the arts.

### Cost

An Aria Network project in one school, in four or five classes, for a full year, costs SFO about \$20,000. The school pays \$1500 at the most; supplemental funding is available by need, and most of the schools receive some scholarship monies.

### Results

SFO's evaluation of the ARIA Network is ongoing. An analysis of the 2011-12 data by Larry Scripp and the Center for Music in Education detailed positive responses from students, teachers, principals, teaching artists, and parents. One survey's conclusion was of particular interest: "one of the biggest benefits of the program is the creation of a large production as a powerful social and communal experience." 

## THE CURRICULUM CONNECTION

Since students must tell a story and build characters, their opera creations are often linked to the language arts curriculum. At one inner-city Oakland elementary school, the K-1 grades saw and studied *The Magic Flute* and connected the plot to how an author can change a reader's perspective on a character (such as the Old Priest telling Tamino that he should not trust the evil Queen of the Night). The first grade classes wrote original stories for their operas, which included *The Freezing Wand*, about bullying, and *The Children's Crusade: Kids Who Changed the World*, based on the Birmingham, AL, students who marched for equal rights. The latter project also fit into the social studies curriculum.

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