

## **An American Tradition: A Study of American Opera and Pedagogy**

### **Rachel Mink - Rising Fourth Year Award Application**

My proposed project is an immersive study of voice and opera, right here in Charlottesville. This summer, I am remaining local, after having studied abroad twice in my career as student (first to Florence, then to Vienna, both times to study opera). While I have gained an immense knowledge of opera and vocal technique through these experiences, in the summer between my third and fourth year at the University, I would like to take a chance to study the American opera tradition as well as continue my own training. In order to do so, I will be working in two different capacities. First, I will be working with my voice teacher, Professor Pam Beasley and my accompanist, Karen Dalton. Second, I will be interning with Ash Lawn Opera. Both of these ventures are personally and professionally fulfilling, and I would love to receive funding make this summer as effective as possible.

My plan for this summer is to study intensely with Professor Beasley, working 1.5 to 2 hours a week in voice lessons. The effects of this will be twofold: 1) to cement my vocal technique as I audition for graduate school auditions in the fall and 2) to prepare for my Distinguished Major's Recital in the spring of 2016 (the proposal for which was just approved today!). As a student of Professor Beasley's, I have grown immensely from first year to present — we have a wonderful working relationship and her guidance has truly made the past three years great. However, after returning from a semester abroad in Vienna, Austria, the opportunity for vocal training and practice has been much lower than what I became accustomed to abroad, where I took two voice lessons a week, a coaching every week, and a performance workshop every week. This summer, I hope to recreate that conservatory environment I experienced while abroad to be the best singer I can be, in preparation for what awaits in my fourth year. I plan on applying to graduate school for vocal performance next year, which is a vocally rigorous process, while also preparing my Distinguished Major Recital, an hour long recital occurring in the spring of my fourth year that represents the culmination of my musical study here at UVa, so every moment counts this summer.

While studying with Professor Beasley over the next three months, I will also spend between an hour and an hour and a half per week with Karen Dalton, my piano accompanist. The time we spend together is immensely helpful as a musician—we work to make beautiful music collaboratively, learning from one another as we work through different pieces. I have so much to learn from her and her vast knowledge of vocal repertoire, and it's wonderful to have her opinion on various musical attributes (tempi, crescendi, historical context). She will be accompanying me in my DMP Recital, and the additional time spent together working on music would be immensely helpful to ensue the musicality of my work next year. In short, next year will be a chance for great improvement as a vocalist as I undergo many responsibilities and challenges, but I will be tenfold more successful if I am able to continue lessons this summer, with the help of Arts Scholar funding!

In addition to working with Professor Beasley and Karen Dalton, I will also spend this summer interning with Ash Lawn Opera. This ties into my second DMP thesis project for my Arts Administration degree. I will be focusing on arts advocacy and how to better advocate for opera companies in the United States to maintain our cultural heritage. Ash Lawn Opera is a growing force in

the Charlottesville area and the state of Virginia. Ash Lawn Opera is a chance for me to experience opera in a smaller, more intimate setting, in a community that is hugely supportive of its aims; it is the perfect place to do research on how to effectively advocate for an art form that many people consider to be dying. A few weeks ago, I was lucky enough to participate in Renee Fleming's master class at UVa and she argued that because they are not bound by tradition, like the bigger opera houses, regional opera companies have more flexibility for experimenting in productions, leading to more diverse repertoire and more creative pursuits. It would be amazing to experience this first-hand. There are many challenges to establishing a name for an opera company that isn't "The Met" or "The Lyric" and encouraging people to participate in its growth. But this is something I think Ash Lawn has done incredibly well, because of powerful artistic and administrative leadership. I've participated in opera both on stage and in the audience, but now I'll have the chance to experience this behind-the-scenes. This is an important part of my growth as an artist, and will be hugely influential in the next year as I decide what I will be doing post-graduation.

My objectives for the summer, in a more concise form, are as follows:

- Improve my vocal technique, musical skills, stylistic interpretive abilities, and rehearsal techniques through intense practice and rigorous teaching
- Improve my performance practices through various performing opportunities throughout the summer
- Study French, German, and Italian diction to increase the legitimacy of my pronunciation while singing
- Increase my understanding of the current role of opera on a local level
- Learn from artists involved in Ash Lawn about their experience in opera in the United States
- Gain better experience as an administrator of opera to address the challenges a local opera company faces

#### **Anticipated Timeline:**

- Summer 2015
  - Study with Professor Beasley for 1.5-2 hours a week
  - Work with Karen Dalton for 1-1.5 hours a week
  - Intern with Ash Lawn for about 30 hours a week
  - Begin research for my DMP Recital
  - Begin research for my DMP Thesis with Arts Administration
- Fall 2015
  - Continue study with Professor Beasley 1.5-2 hours a week
  - Establish full set list for DMP Recital
  - Continue work with Ash Lawn Opera in their production of "Amahl and the Night Visitors"
  - Finish work on my DMP Thesis with Arts Administration
- Spring 2016
  - Present findings to the Center for Undergraduate Excellence in early April, including a performance element from my work on the recital

- o Present DMP Recital in Old Cabell in mid-Spring
- o Present DMP in Arts Administration at the end of April

**Budget:**

This summer will be quite intense time-wise, and, as the age-old adage says, time is money. So, for this grant, I am asking for the full \$3000 to offset lesson expenses, coaching expenses, and living expenses. To anticipate the way my schedule will work this summer, I have included the range of what I could spend on lessons, depending on the availability of Professor Beasley and Mrs. Dalton each week, ranging from an hour to two hours every week. Here is my proposed budget:

EXPENSES:	TOTAL:
Voice Lessons: \$30 / 30 mins x 1.5 hours x 12 weeks (or) \$30 / 30 mins x 2 hours x 12 weeks	\$1080.00-\$1440.00
Coachings: \$25 / 30 mins x 1 hour x 12 weeks (or) \$25 / 30 mins x 1.5 hours x 12 weeks	\$600.00-\$900.00
Rent: \$550 / month x 12 weeks	\$1650
Meals: \$50 / week x 12 weeks	\$600
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$3930.00-\$4590.00</b>

This number will be offset by a \$500 stipend from Ash Lawn, but I plan on having to work a second job through the summer to compensate for that which is not covered by the Arts Scholars Fund in conjunction with the Ash Lawn stipend. The Arts Scholars award, though, would certainly be essential to making this plan possible, and would allow me to spend most of my summer working privately on singing as well as observing art in the making at Ash Lawn.

**Conclusion:**

This semester has been an eye-opening experience for me as a singer. In February, I was chosen as a singer in Renee Fleming’s master class (one of three!), an experience that will forever be one of my most cherished memories. Just this past week, I sang as a featured soloist for the University Singers in the *American Pioneers* concert, in front of an audience of 500. And, as the Arts Award from last year made possible, I lived in Vienna for four months last semester, where I had the chance to witness amazing art (the ever-impressive Juan Diego Florez and Diana Damrau, as two examples) as well as create amazing art. As I am thinking about long-term goals, all the signs are pointing towards pursuing music as a career post-graduation, and I couldn’t be more excited to begin that process. I would be so thankful to the Arts Scholars for awarding me a grant that would prepare me for the competitive atmosphere of graduate school and allow me to concentrate solely on vocal art for a summer.

Thank you for reading!