

**Wesley Diener**

**Miller Art Scholar Minigrant Proposal**

**The Last Five Years: Directing a Musical**

We, Wesley Diener, Jack Gereski, and Maelisa Singer, are applying for Art Scholar Minigrants to fund our participation in the Lab Series production of *The Last Five Years*.

The Department of Drama's Lab Series will present Jason Robert Brown's *The Last Five Years* on November 18 and 19. Wesley will direct the musical, Jack will portray Jamie, and Maelisa will design the costumes. This production provides unparalleled opportunities for undergraduate drama students to take on larger responsibility within a professional theatrical environment. Our active participation in classes and departmental productions has equipped us with the necessary skills to stand on our own as artists.

My participation in the Art Scholars has encouraged and inspired me to explore the arts beyond my specific discipline. Through this, I have found a passion and skill for stage direction. My primary discipline, opera performance, represents the combination of musical and theatrical passions, so it is no surprise that I am once again attracted to an interdisciplinary craft. Last year, as a new director, I surrounded myself with all the educational opportunities offered by the drama department: I took Directing I and assisted Dave Dalton on his production of *Blood Wedding*. This assistantship included independent study and weekly meetings to discuss the intricacies of stage direction. My training prepared me for my first directing project, a play in the New Works Festival. This first attempt was a large, enjoyable success, and I received substantial positive feedback.

With basic understanding and skills acquired, I feel prepared and excited to work on a production that most closely correlates to my expertise: musical theatre. This semester I will direct *The Last Five Years* with the Lab Series. In preparation, I served as an intern on Charlottesville Opera's production of *Oklahoma!* under Mary Birnbaum, an emerging opera director who regularly works with leading international singers and actors at the Metropolitan Opera and Julliard Conservatory. I believe that *The Last Five Years* is the ideal project to advance my directing skills, presenting challenges of musical theatre such as singing, musical interludes, and increased production value. This opportunity will train me to work with skilled performers and designers within a fast-paced process. It will prepare me for more professional environments, as well as acclimate me to the world of musical theatre, progressing towards my ultimate goal of opera direction.

We are requesting funding to cover the rights, royalties, and material rentals for this departmental production of an iconic musical. We feel very fortunate to present such a compelling work of theatre in departmental space, but the popular nature of this musical results in significant financial burdens. With the assistance of these minigrants, we hope to be able to represent this musical, our individual skillsets, and, most importantly, the collaborative, multidisciplinary nature of the Miller Art Scholars in the best possible way.

**Timeline**

Summer 2017: Finalize logistics, secure cast and technical designers  
October 7-November 17: Rehearsals  
November 18 and 19: Performances

**Budget**

Rights and Royalties ----- \$900  
Material Rental ----- \$400  
Technical Elements ----- \$200  
**Total ----- \$1,500**

To cover the budget, we are requesting the full \$1,500 that is allowed across the three minigrants. While we are grateful for support from the Drama Department for access to the Helms Theatre, the costume shop, and the prop shop, its financial support is minimal and we require this funding for rights, royalties, and rental materials.

Thank you so much to the Art Scholars for your consideration and continued support.