



Harvard Musical Association
George Henschel Community Awards Program
57A Chestnut Street
Boston, MA 02108

November 28, 2018

Dear Committee:

I am writing to you with a final report on the *Opera Bites* collaboration between Boston Opera Collaborative, The Boston New Music Initiative, and the Longy School of Music at Bard College, which was supported by a grant award of \$5,000 by the Harvard Musical Association and George Henschel Community Awards Program. The award was announced in May 2017 and the project, consisting of three performances, took place between November 10-12, 2017 at Pickman Hall at Longy School of Music.

The performances featured seven brief operas, each approximately 10 minutes in length. Three of these works were world premieres, three were by female composers, and three were by Boston-area composers. The full repertoire was as followed:

- Oliver Caplan, *Symposium*, 10'. Libretto by Anne Ray
- Carrie Magin, *Voice on the Wire*, 12'. Libretto by Kendall A. (US Premiere)
- Eva Kendrick, *Wish You Were Here*, 10'. Libretto by Claudia Hass (World Premiere)
- Tony Solitro, *Triangle*, 10'. Libretto by Jane Martin (World Premiere)
- David Wolfson, *Rapture*, 12'. Libretto by David Wolfson
- Tom Cipullo, *Lucy*, 10'. Libretto by Tom Cipullo
- Beth Ratay, *Womb with a View*, 11'. Libretto by Rich Orloff (World Premiere)

Performance Against Project Objectives

The project was overall a great success, highlighting the strengths of each of the collaborators and achieving the primary objectives in the collaboration by each organization:

- BNMI's involvement in this project was part of its "Core+ Initiative," where a significant project is explored each season incorporating BNMI's core musicians, guest musicians, and a vital collaboration with another arts organization in the greater Boston area. By partnering with a professional opera company that has been a champion of new music, and an established conservatory of music in the Boston area, this project successfully met this objective, and reinforced the importance of this initiative for future BNMI seasons. Typically these projects are of a much smaller scale for BNMI, and the HMA grant allowed the organization to take on this much more ambitious project for this season.
- Boston Opera Collaborative had presented their *Opera Bites* production in previous concert seasons. However, they sought two additional goals in collaborating with BNMI on this project in 2017: 1) to expand its instrumentation in these performances beyond

piano accompaniment, and 2) to seek out additional repertoire by living composers. By collaborating with a professional new music ensemble with access to a large international network of composers, BOC was able to successfully meet each of these above goals.

- Longy School of Music served as host to this ambitious project, bringing in hundreds of audience members to witness the performance of the innovative works of seven living composers.

Measuring Success

- Repertoire Selection
 - BNMI received a smaller than its average number of submissions for its call for scores on this project, which was not entirely unexpected given the constraints in instrumentation and genre. There was still a large selection (approximately 40 scores) that were sent to the judging panel (consisting of BNMI and BOC staff members) for review.
 - BNMI and BOC could not align on final selection from the call for scores on many pieces. BOC cited concerns with the dramatic material in the submitted works that were selected by BNMI judges. This forced the team to regroup in order to come up with a full concert program.
 - The music licensing and rental fees for the works by composers selected by BOC wound up coming in over \$1,000 over the projected budget. This helped to contribute to the overall budget loss on the project.
- Concert Attendance
 - While each of the three shows did not sell out as had been anticipated, the combined number of attendees was approximately 500 patrons.
 - Both BOC and BNMI received a number of donations in support of the collaboration project, helping to offset the overall budget loss.

Lessons Learned

A collaboration of this size between three well-established organizations requires a great deal of organization and streamlined communication channels. Several additional meetings between the groups would have been beneficial in order to avoid some of the issues encountered. In particular:

- Budget expectations: BOC incurred a number of expenses that exceeded the original budget scope. With an operating budget several times the size of BNMI's, the impact to BNMI was disproportionate and thus required an adjustment to the final revenue payout ratio to both organizations.
- Longy expressed disappointment that its affiliates were not more involved in the project as performers and composers. While Longy was given the opportunity to invite faculty and student composers to create new works for the performance, no members of Longy faculty were able to participate at the time, and the proposed libretti submitted by potential students did not meet approval by BOC's judging panel. The communication on this matter was not as clear as it should have been, which could have avoided this issue, or allowed for the opportunity to explore alternatives earlier in the planning process.
- BOC did not see a noticeable difference in ticket sales through its collaboration with BNMI as in previous seasons. Meanwhile, the project budget was significantly increased

due the number of additional performers involved, and the revenue total needed to be split between BNMI and BOC. These factors led to a larger loss for BOC than in their previous *Opera Bites* iterations.

Financially, the project did not fully meet expectations, as actual expenses exceeded the planned budget and revenue totals fell short of projections, resulting in an overall project loss of approximately \$3,000. However, this was within the risk margin for both collaborators.* It should be noted that without the grant award by the Harvard Musical Association, the project loss would have been far greater and would have had a negative impact on both organizations' programming in the 2017-2018 and future concert seasons.

At the conclusion of the project, all parties expressed an interest in doing such a collaboration again in the future. The major change discussed was that, given the difficulties encountered in attempting to be full collaborators, one organization (BOC) would take the lead in any future collaborations, and BNMI would contract its services out to BOC as needed. This would allow BOC to maintain full control of all project revenue, while also controlling expenses. Meanwhile, BNMI would have reduced artistic input, but also could mitigate the risk of any unanticipated project expenses that would negatively impact its overall season budget.

* As Longy's budget participation was entirely through in-kind donations of equipment and venue space, it was not impacted by actual project budget performance, for the purposes of this discussion.

Conclusion

The Boston New Music Initiative, Longy School of Music, and Boston Opera Collaborative all sincerely appreciate the opportunity provided by the Harvard Musical Association's George Henschel Community Awards Program. If you require more specific information or have any questions regarding any of our submitted material, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,



Timothy Davis

President, The Boston New Music Initiative, Inc.

Attachments:

1. Final *Opera Bites* house program
2. Review of performance in *The Theatre Times*