

AMERICAN LYRIC THEATER

BRABSON LIBRARY AND EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION PROPOSAL

DATE: March 27, 2009

INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR ORGANIZATION:

Year Established: 2005

Name: American Lyric Theater Center, Inc. (ALT)

Address: 458 West 52nd Street Suite 1D

City/State/ZIP: New York, New York, 10019

Contact Person: Lawrence Edelson

Title: Producing Artistic Director

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501(C)3 Organization: Yes

Current total budget: \$142,297 (Projected 2009)

SIZE OF REQUESTED GRANT: \$10,000

PERIOD GRANT WILL COVER (Generally, 1 July to 30 Jun. How many years?):

Funds received will be used for ALT's Composer Librettist Development Program which takes place between September 2009 and May 2010. Funds would be used for program expenses incurred in 2009.

WHAT IS THE BASIC PURPOSE OF YOUR ORGANIZATION? (A short summary including history and major accomplishments.)

ALT was founded in 2005 to build a new body of operatic repertoire for new audiences by nurturing composers and librettists, developing sustainable artistic collaborations, and contributing new works to the national canon. While many opera companies actively commission and perform new works, **ALT is the only company in the United States that also offers extensive, full time mentorship for emerging operatic writers.** ALT's model for developing new works has some important differences when compared with prevailing practices in the opera field. While the traditional company model in the United States focuses on producing a season, **ALT's entire operations are structured to mentor artists, to develop new works, and to collaborate with larger producing companies to help usher those works into the repertoire.** This model draws on best practices not only from the opera field, but also from successful practices of other industries.

Our mentorship model is designed to ensure that as artists develop their work with ALT, that work is artistically vetted much more thoroughly than is often possible in other environments. Opera companies that join with ALT to produce a new work we have mentored are able to assess that opera at a stage where they can better judge its potential. *The Golden Ticket*, based on Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, is ALT's first main stage commission under this model. After over 3 years of development at ALT, we are now collaborating with Opera Theatre of St. Louis to bring this opera to the stage and are very excited to announce that *The Golden Ticket* will receive its world premiere in 2010 in St. Louis, followed by performances at least 3 other opera companies. (Full production plans are being announced this summer.)

We are continuing to build strong relationships with opera companies in New York and around the country, and are developing similar production plans for the trilogy of one-act operas inspired by the writing of Edgar Allan Poe currently being written by our CLDP Resident Artists. In addition, *The Hunger Art*, a one-act opera developed by two of our Resident Artists (Royce Vavrek and Jeff Myers) during the first season of the CLDP, recently received its professional stage premiere in Philadelphia; and another one of our resident artists, Aleksandra Vrebalov, was recently commissioned to write her first full-length opera about Einstein's first wife, Mileva. The CLDP is already demonstrating tangible results beyond the mentorship of talented artists. Audiences around the country are beginning to enjoy operas developed through the CLDP at a wide variety of venues.

WHAT IS THE PROJECT TITLE? Composer Librettist Development Program (CLDP)

WHAT IS THE PROJECT TYPE? (You may check more than one category.)

Arts (Creation)

Arts (Education)

WHAT DOES YOUR PROJECT PLAN TO ACCOMPLISH?

What is the problem?

According to the most recent Survey of Public Participation in the Arts by the National Endowment for the Arts, attendance at live opera performances has dropped to an all-time low of 3.2% of the adult population, the lowest of any art form. Only 13.3% of those who attend opera are under 30 years old and 86.4% of opera audiences are White.

Established opera companies around the country are making highly visible efforts to diversify their audiences by lowering prices and by 'repackaging' the core, foreign language repertoire. While we all applaud these efforts, lowering prices alone is not a sustainable strategy, and there is significant research that shows us that the core repertoire simply appeals to a limited audience, no matter how it is presented. These initiatives have had some very positive effects at deepening participation among those already inclined to attend, but they have proven less effective at bringing new audiences to opera.

As Tony Award winning theater and opera director Nicholas Hytner explained in a recent interview, "The problem for opera is that its conventions haven't been refreshed by a constantly evolving repertoire." But how can we infuse the repertoire with new works of high quality if there is not a concerted effort to mentor the artists who will be writing these new works? This is where ALT is truly different than every other opera company.

While those of us who already love opera will always be attracted to the traditional repertoire, getting new audiences to explore opera requires building a bridge. New works, created with contemporary sensibilities in mind, can bring new audiences to opera and serve as a catalyst for them to later explore the traditional repertoire. But just producing new works is not enough. Between 1991 and 2005, 261 new operas were produced in the United States, but only 7 of them have had 5 or more stagings since their premieres. Why are so few operas successful at entering the repertoire? Opera companies continually produce new operas because they know these works have the potential to attract new audiences, but new audiences often don't explore these operas because they feel little connection to the subject matter, the genre, and the organizations producing them.

Of equal importance, many new works are written by artists that have not had any professional mentorship in the art of writing for the opera stage. Just because one is a gifted composer or a talented dramatist does not mean that they have the tools to write an opera; yet, most opera companies commissions their new works with limited (if any) mentorship of the artists they are seeking to have write those works. Should we really be surprised at the highly variable results of such initiatives?

As an ALternative to the traditional model, ALT serves as a catalyst for the development of new works that are strategically developed with specific participation building goals in mind. To be a catalyst for

new works, we MUST mentor the artists who have the potential to write those works. In so doing, ALT is filling a crucial void in American opera with the Composer Librettist Development Program.

How will your project address this problem?

Until ALT started the Composer Librettist Development Program, there was not a single full-time training or mentorship program for opera composers and librettists at any opera company in the United States. Almost every opera company in the country has a Young Artist Program to mentor emerging singers, and over the past 25 years, these programs have proven immensely successful at improving both the artistic level and the career success of American singers around the globe. Similarly, there is a proliferation of mentorship opportunities available for emerging playwrights and screenwriters. Imagine what could happen if the same sort of opportunities were available for operatic writers. ALT is doing more than imagining this – we are making it happen.

The Composer Librettist Development Program is a tuition free initiative for emerging operatic writers selected through an open, competitive application process. The program includes a core curriculum of classroom training and hands-on workshops with some of the country's leading working artists, including composer/librettist **Mark Adamo** (*Little Women*, and *Lysistrata* for Houston Grand Opera and New York City Opera); composer **Daniel Catán** (*Florencia en el Amazonas* and *Salsipuedes* for Houston Grand Opera, and currently composing *Il Postino* for Plácido Domingo at Los Angeles Opera); composer **Anthony Davis** (*X*, *The Life and Times of Malcolm X*, and *Amistad* for Chicago Lyric Opera); dramaturg **Cori Ellison** (New York City Opera, Metropolitan Opera); librettist **William Hoffmann** (*The Ghosts of Versailles* for The Metropolitan Opera, *As Is* on Broadway); and stage director **Rhoda Levine** (international operatic and theater credits including numerous world premieres). This coming season, we welcome two Pulitzer Prize winning opera composers to our faculty: **William Bolcom** and **John Corigliano**.

In addition to ongoing classes and workshops, composers and librettists in the program have the option to take part in residency observerships at our theater and opera company partners (**New York City Opera, New York Theatre Workshop, The Vineyard Theatre, Primary Stages, and The Atlantic Theater Company**) during which time they have the chance to explore the rehearsal and development process of operas, musicals and plays. ALT also provides opportunities for Resident Artists to meet opera company leaders from around the country so that they can show their work, and expand their professional network. Additional networking and membership resources are provided through Opera America, the national service organization for Opera in the United States, of which ALT is an active member in good standing.

For the inaugural season of the CLDP (2007-2008) ALT selected nine Resident Artists from a pool of over 70 applicants. Based on the quality of applicants each year, ALT accepts up to 5 composers and 5 librettists to participate in Year 1 of the Program. We are continually seeking emerging artists from diverse ethnic backgrounds to ensure a diverse pool of applicants and to ensure that we are mentoring work in both English and Spanish. Select artists are invited to continue their residency with ALT for a second year, during which time they receive private mentorship as they work towards developing full-length works.

In our current season (2008-2009), ALT invited 3 composers and 3 librettists back to the CLDP to begin work on a trilogy of one-act operas inspired by the fiction of Edgar Allan Poe. ALT will present public workshop performances of these three one-act operas in New York City in the fall of 2009, and discussions are currently underway to premiere the staged production of all three operas at Ithaca College in upstate New York. In addition, 8 new first year artists were invited to start the program (3 composers, 3 librettists, and 2 composer/librettists). While it was our hope to provide full-year mentorship for these eight artists, we were forced to reduce the program duration due to budget limitations within the current season. These eight artists received 4 months of full-time mentorship between October 2008 and January 2009. During the coming spring, they will be working on individual projects under ALT's guidance. All eight artists are being invited back to the CLDP for the 2009-2010 season to continue their mentorship and training.

During the 2009-2010 season, we anticipate mentoring 14 artists. In addition, we will continue to offer free performances of works in progress by our Resident Artists at Symphony Space in New York

City. These public performances not only allow artists to hear their works in progress with professional singers and musicians, but also provide an opportunity for the public to learn about the new works development process.

What will be accomplished?

It is our goal that, upon completion of the program, artists have addressed crucial voids in their training while creating a draft of a new work to be further developed for staged reading or full commission by ALT, with the possibility of subsequent professional production by ALT and/or other companies. In addition, ALT professionally records the work of Resident Artists. As it is both expensive and logistically challenging for artists to produce recordings with professional singers, this is a truly invaluable resource that provides these artists with a way to showcase their work to other opera companies, producing organizations, and funders.

Who will receive the funds from the grant?

Funds received from The Brabson Foundation will be used to offset direct program expenses. If the Foundation wishes, we would be pleased to create two named "Brabson Fellows" to express our appreciation of the Foundation's support of the CLDP.

Who will be affected by the results of your project?

The Composer Librettist Development Program immediately affects the artists participating in the program; however, the long-term effects of the program are much more extensive. By providing mentorship to emerging artists, ALT is able to have a positive impact on the works that these artists write for the public. Not only is the artistic quality of these works being elevated through participation in the program, but we believe that because the artists will be addressing the new works development process in a more comprehensive way than has been available in the past, their works will have a greater opportunity to enter and stay in the repertory of opera companies across the country.

How many will be served/affected?

During the 2009-2010 season, we anticipate mentoring 14 artists through the CLDP. In addition, free performances of works in progress by Resident Artists are made available to the public at Symphony Space in New York City. Over the past two years, all of our public performances and open studios have been full to capacity.

What are the geographic and demographic ranges of your recipients?

The program is open to emerging artists from across the United States, however, each season, at least 50% of Resident Artists will be from the greater metropolitan New York City area. ALT defines an emerging opera Composer or Librettist as someone who has acquired significant skills as a composer and/or playwright/librettist through academic study, practice, and professional experience; who demonstrates a unique and important musical and/or theatrical perspective that could benefit from intense mentorship as part of the CLDP; and who has not yet had a work commissioned or performed by a professional opera company in the United States. Students of degree granting institutions are not eligible for consideration. There are no age minimums or maximums for participation, provided the artists truly are emerging as opera writers. All participants must be citizens or legal residents of the United States. As diversity is at the core of ALT's mission, we are actively seeking emerging artists from diverse ethnic backgrounds, and we are committed to mentoring at least one composer/librettist pair who will be working on opera in Spanish.

WHAT NEEDS OR ISSUES WILL BE ADDRESSED?

How do these needs and issues relate to the Mission Statement, Vision, and Values of the Brabson Foundation?

The Brabson Foundation seeks to support bold, innovative ideas that have the potential to make a significant, long-term impact. The Composer Librettist Development Program is just such a program. So many initiatives that are currently being employed by opera companies to address declining participation focus on the symptoms of the problem, but not the core problem itself. By providing mentorship to the artists who will be writing new works for the opera stage, we have the opportunity to positively impact their work at the very foundation. Almost every opera company in the country has a young-artist program for singers, and the results have been extraordinary. In the past 25 years, American opera singers have become the best trained, most versatile singers in the world. This would never have happened without the abundance of young artist programs available to mentor them. But what about composers and librettists? Just imagine the impact we can have on opera if we provide them with the same sort of structured, high-caliber mentorship that has been available to singers in recent years. We have the opportunity to give these artists an experience that will influence their work for years to come, and we will surely see the results of our efforts in the works that they write as they mature. The long-term possibilities are extraordinary, and ALT is committed to making this happen.

HOW WILL THIS PROJECT BE SUPPORTED?

How much of the project support will come from the Brabson Foundation?

\$10,000 out of a total Program Budget of \$56,124.

What have you requested from other organizations?

In addition to reaching out to our existing funders for continued support, we are in the process of an intensive fund raising campaign through which we are approaching a wide variety of different foundations, as well as individual members of the community. As many foundations have already indicated that they will not be authorizing any grants to organizations that they do not already support, the continued support of The Brabson Foundation is particularly crucial this season.

What efforts have you made to leverage your requests?

As a small organization, ALT is working to leverage these requests in strategic and cost-effective ways. Although the strategy differs from one prospective funder to the next, these initiatives include:

- Establishing personal contact with each prospective funder, when possible, to make sure ALT is accurately identifying the unique place where our needs intersect with that particular funder's philanthropic interests in a meaningful and mutually beneficial way.
- Assisting the Board and other internal/external investors in their efforts to reach out to those individuals with whom they have a personal relationship.
- Strengthening current partnerships with other non-profit organizations around the city and nationally, many of which are recipients of support from the funders listed in the attachment.
- Periodically updating prospective funders via newsletters, media releases, marketing initiatives and face-to-face meetings on artistic, administrative and fundraising advances.
- Attending symposia and other educational events to which organizations are invited to hear funders speak or are invited to meet funders personally.

A strategic plan has been initiated to ensure long-term sustainability of the program. During the 2009-2010 season, we will begin offering short-term tuition based classes with some of our faculty. In this way, we will be able to make some of our artistic resources available to emerging artists who are not ready for the full program, or who are not able to participate in a full time residency due to other commitments, while simultaneously securing a stream of income to support the residency program. In addition, all of ALT's commissions provide for subsidiary rights participation. Starting in 2010, the share of royalties from productions of works developed at ALT (beginning with *The Golden Ticket*) will provide a guaranteed additional stream of income to support ongoing education and development opportunities for future composers and librettists.

WHO WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR SEEING THE PROJECT THROUGH TO COMPLETION?

What is his/her relationship to your organization? What are his/her credentials?

Producing Artistic Director, Lawrence Edelson. Mr. Edelson's biography may be found on page 2 of the enclosed Annual Report.

WHAT IS THE BUDGET FOR THIS PROJECT? (Please include an itemized budget for this project, including a timeline with milestones.)

\$56,124, which includes a portion of operating expense dedicated to the CLDP. Please note that the program budget has been scaled back from previous 2009 estimates due to the current economic climate. The attached budget accurately reflects the anticipated program expense, with time periods noted as appropriate.

HOW WILL YOU EVALUATE THE SUCCESS OF YOUR PROJECT WHEN IT IS COMPLETE?

ALT has established both qualitative and quantitative ways to measure our success in reaching our goals for the program. Qualitatively, our Advisory Board and Artistic Staff evaluates participants' work at their time of acceptance into the program and after their residency to evaluate how well the program has addressed their individual development needs. Each participant is interviewed privately, and also participates in a focus group following the conclusion of the program in order to evaluate how effective ALT has been at meeting their goals and needs. This information helps us to further refine the program for future participants. Quantitatively, ALT will actively track participants' future activity to see if their work over time is more successful at entering the repertoire of opera companies, if it is produced more often than current industry norms for new works, and if they are works that attract more diverse audiences.

ARE YOU A PAST GRANTEE OF THIS FOUNDATION? Yes

2007 Grant Recipient: \$10,000.

2008 Grant Recipient: \$10,000.

ENCLOSED: 2008 Annual Report, 2009 Budget, Funders List, Recent Press, Proof of 501(c)(3) Status, CD Sample of The Golden Ticket.