

FORWARD

We at Utah Festival Opera Company are very grateful to have **Opera by Children®**, our own exceptional education program, become part of your classroom experience. This manual was prepared for teachers, specialists, parents and any others who love children and believe that the arts are an important part of growth and learning.

It may surprise you to learn that Opera by Children has nothing to do with creating a fabulous story, music and performance – although that usually happens as a by-product. No, that is not our purpose. Our purpose is to use creative opera as a vehicle to reach children – all children – no matter what their talents, gifts or level of genius may be, and help them to discover their own self worth.

This discovery of self-worth occurs as the children are affirmed and validated by their peers and all of the adults working with them during the creation of their opera.

We have a few rules:

1. No one gets hurt
2. Everyone participates
3. It is entirely the children's work

Each child should be encouraged to contribute each day that you are spending time on the opera. And every contribution should receive positive feedback from you and the specialists working with you. This process requires that every adult accept the fact that this is not an adult-inspired or professionally created work. This is the children's work. The children write the words, they create the melodies, they paint the scenery, and they imagine and determine their own characterization and staging.

When it is time to begin creating costumes and scenery, we encourage you to allow the children to express and create their ideas by doing every bit of the work they possibly can. It is not important that the stage look like a Metropolitan Opera set. It needs to look as though children did it. The children need to be able to say ... "I painted that house; I drew that flower; I glued my hat together ... and on and on." And they need to hear "I love how you did that. You have some great ideas."

As a society, we are in danger of rearing children who are afraid to think for themselves for fear they will not do it right or may make a mistake. While creating an original opera, children are free from those restraints and may be praised for their own uniqueness in thinking and doing. This cannot always happen during math or science. But it is possible every moment that they spend on *their* opera.

As a direct result of the huge dose of affirmation that children receive during this time, it will naturally follow that their performance will improve in other more difficult, hard-core curriculum areas. After five years of following and directing this program, I am fully confident in saying that reading and writing always improve. A child's fears of participating

in the class are calmed. The class becomes a unified community of children who encourage and assist each other. The children trust the teacher.

We strongly encourage teachers to select subjects from their science or social studies core on which to base the story of the opera, so that the learning that takes place and the benefits of the opera have even a larger scope. Whatever a child sings, he will remember.

You are already part of a huge professional *children's cheering section*. We are grateful to be there with you. Whatever the children do, we tell them how wonderful they are. We tell them that we like what they have done. No matter how confused they may be, we try never to raise our voices. We do not second guess what the children create, or try to make them do it the way we might have done it, whether with words or music.

There is a lifetime for each of these children to learn how to do things "by the book." This is their opportunity to create something from within themselves and to learn to value their own original ideas; to trust themselves.

One concern many adults have is that the finished product may not make sense. Perhaps it will not to an adult. It may not sound musically coherent. It may look like children painted the scenery with no help whatsoever. My response to that is "Great!" That is just what we want. This is *opera by children* not by adults.

Lastly, may I advise you to remember that the children's performances are not a competition of any kind. They are like flowers – each one unique and beautiful. Some may be sweet little rosebuds and some may be showy golden sunflowers, but each will be a unique creation made perfect by the touch of children's eyes, ears, hands and voices.

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Opera by Children©
Education Director



Utah Festival Opera Company