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OPERA EDUCATION IN THE UPPER ELEMENTARY MUSIC CLASSROOM

A Thesis  
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Master of Music  
in the Department of Music  
The University of Mississippi

by

CARMEN L. TAYLOR

August 2015

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## ABSTRACT

Adults are increasingly becoming uninvolved with the arts and it is therefore important to cultivate a new audience, beginning with a well-rounded musical education for elementary-age children. Opera can easily be implemented as a part of a well-rounded musical education and can be taught in conjunction with multiple subjects. Anecdotal evidence suggests that children are exposed to negative stereotypes about opera without receiving proper education on the subject and are thus more likely to not be interested in opera as they grow older. A short survey was sent to fourth and fifth grade music teachers around the state of Mississippi to discover if and why teachers include opera in their curriculum. Seventy-three teachers responded to the survey revealing that more than half of the respondents do not include opera in their curriculum. The most popular factor indicated by “No” respondents was lack of time in the school year. All “Yes” respondents indicated that they believed opera can be used to teach multiple musical and non-musical subjects. Both “No” and “Yes” respondents indicated that student interest and student age affected their inclusion or omission of opera in their curriculum. Research also revealed that lack of resources for music programs affects many schools and school districts around the state of Mississippi.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply grateful for the mentorship and musical instruction provided by the Department of Music at the University of Mississippi throughout my years as an undergraduate and a graduate student. The support and guidance from my professors over the past six years has made me a better musician and a better individual.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION AND RELATED LITERATURE

Adults are increasingly becoming uninvolved with the arts and it is therefore important to cultivate a new audience, beginning with a well-rounded musical education for elementary-age children.<sup>1</sup> Studies suggest that children are more open to new ideas and new music and become increasingly closed to these concepts as they grow older.<sup>2</sup> Opera can easily be included in a well-rounded musical education and has been successfully taught using several methods by teachers and opera company educational programs. Anecdotal evidence suggests that children are exposed to negative stereotypes about opera without receiving proper education on the subject and are thus more likely not to be interested in opera as they grow older. Other influences such as teacher attitude, friends, and family can have a positive or negative influence on students' attitudes towards opera and classical music. The purpose of this study is discover if elementary teachers in Mississippi include opera education in their curriculum and to discover the various reasons why they do or do not include it.

In 2012, the National Endowment for the Arts surveyed adults on their engagement with the arts.<sup>1</sup> An overall declining trend in adult involvement with classical music and opera was established with information from previous surveys. Courtney Crappell's article, "Is the Value of

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1. "How a Nation Engages with Art: Highlights from the 2012 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts," (Report, National Endowment for the Arts, September 2013), 48 pgs.

2. David J. Hargreaves and Adrian C. North, "The Development of Musical Preferences across the Life Span," (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, Illinois March 24-28, 1997).



Classical Music Getting Lost In Translation?” highlights the challenge for classical musicians today to convey the importance of classical music to an audience that increasingly views classical music as culturally irrelevant and “incomprehensibly complex.”<sup>3</sup> Daniel Asia’s article, “Diminuendo: Classical Music and the Academy,” describes the decline in appreciation for classical music and music in universities as a result of a cultural shift in focus on the importance of popular music.<sup>4</sup> Patrick Giles wrote an article entitled, “Has Generation X lost its way to the opera?” which highlights the decline in opera’s young audience members. Generation X, the generation born after the “baby boomers,” has the potential to contribute to a bright future for opera in the twenty-first century.<sup>5</sup> In an article published in *Opera News* magazine, Matthew Gurewitsch interviewed four major opera house general managers. Several of the interviewed managers held the opinion that lack of rigorous music education creates an unschooled audience, which in turn causes a decline in a young audience and causes opera companies to present limited repertoires.<sup>6</sup> In recent years, many opera companies around the U.S. have struggled financially, many scaling back productions or closing. Most recently, the New York City Opera filed for bankruptcy and closed in the fall of 2013. During the 2013-2014 season, the San Diego Opera faced closure but was saved after a fierce campaign revived the company’s finances.

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3. Courtney Crappell, “Is the Value of Classical Music Getting Lost In Translation?” *American Music Teacher* 61, no. 2 (Oct/Nov 2011): 8-14.

4. Daniel Asia, “Diminuendo: Classical Music and the Academy,” *Academic Questions* 23, no. 2 (June 2010): 186-195.

5. Patrick Giles, “Has Generation X lost its way to the opera?” *Opera News* 64, no. 8 (February 2000): 28-31.

6. Matthew Gurewitsch, “Are Unschooled Audiences Changing the Face of Opera?” *Opera News* 67, no. 6 (December 2002): 40-43

To show the value of opera education, the value of music education must first be recognized. Donald A. Hodges and Mary Luehrsen published an article entitled, “The Impact of a Funded Research Program on Music Education Policy,” which reviews a research program, “Sounds of Learning: The Impact of Music Education.” This research program served to highlight the importance of music education in the lives of children with the goal of influencing policy makers to make music education available for all children. This article revealed that children received not only benefits in musical skill, but also emotional, life, and social benefits from music education.<sup>7</sup> In the document titled, “Why Music Education?” the National Association for Music Education outlines the benefits of a musical education with four categories of benefits: success in society, success in school and learning, success in developing intelligence, and success in life. The organization presents the most basic reason for a music education is that music is “a part of the fabric of our society.” The document also provides multiple examples of students who are involved in music who achieved higher academic goals. Musical instruction has also been found to improve other intelligences in children such as verbal and analytical skills and has been linked to social and emotional growth.<sup>8</sup> The Child Development and Arts Education report explains that “arts experiences” boost early childhood development.<sup>9</sup> In all ages, “arts experiences” have great social and emotional value, helping

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7. Donald A. Hodges and Mary Luehrsen, “The Impact of a Funded Research Program on Music Education Policy,” *Arts Education Policy Review* 111, no. 2 (2010): 71-78.

8. “Why Music Education? 2007,” (Report, National Association for Music Education 2007). Accessed March 3, 2015. <http://musiced.nafme.org/resources/why-music-education-2007/>.

9. The College Board, “Child Development and Arts Education: A Review of Current Research and Best Practices,” The National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, (January 2012): 8.

students to “make sense of their world, make connections between disparate ideas, and make connections between the self and others.”

The “2003 Mississippi Visual and Performing Arts Framework” provides an outline of suggested benchmarks and competencies for grades K-12 in the state of Mississippi. The benchmarks include creating and performing, critical analysis, history and culture, aesthetics, and connections. The outline leaves enough ambiguity to allow opera to be included in the music curriculum with the discretion of its inclusion left to the teacher or school district.<sup>10</sup> The 1994 National Standards for Arts Education details several voluntary standards for Grades K – 4. Standards 6 through 9 include “Listening to, analyzing, and describing music,” “Evaluating music and music performances,” “Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts,” and “Understanding music in relation to history and culture.” Studying the genre of opera can easily fit into any of these standards.<sup>11</sup> In 1990, Wanda T. May published a study entitled, “Music Experts’ Views of an Ideal Curriculum. Elementary Subjects Center Series No. 28,” which compared the views of six music education experts concerned with elementary music education.<sup>12</sup> Opera was used several times in a variety of ways in the experts’ descriptions of ideal curriculum. The conclusions of this study left the very likely possibility for opera to be included in any ideal elementary music curriculum.

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10. “2003 Mississippi Visual and Performing Arts Framework,” (Government document, Mississippi Department of Education), 197 pgs, Accessed March 17, 2014, <http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/docs/curriculum-and-instructions-library/music.pdf?sfvrsn=2>.

11. “K – 4 Standards in Dance, Music, Theater and Visual Arts,” (Web page, ARTSEdge, 1994), Accessed February 24, 2015. <http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/educators/standards/full-text/K-4-standards#Music>.

12. Wanda T. May, “Music Experts’ Views of an Ideal Curriculum. Elementary Subjects Center Series No. 28,” (Report, The Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects at Michigan State University, 1990), 115 pgs.

Several arguments could be made against teaching opera to children. The Julliard Repertory Project Report sought to collect quality music examples for teaching elementary children. The report mainly focused on simple songs, glee-club and choir songs, and instrumental songs. In regards to opera, the report found that opera had to be rejected from the collection for several reasons. The difficulty of the vocal and instrumental parts found in opera were too great for children and required too much rearranging. The children surveyed in the study rejected texts that dealt with love, perhaps the most common subject in opera. Some texts were found to be too difficult to comprehend and some texts focused on subjects inappropriate for children, such as “drunkenness” and “blood and gore.” However, the children responded well to imaginative and “fun and fable-type” texts.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the drawbacks listed in the Julliard Repertory Project, there are many successes of teaching opera in the classroom. A group in Australia conducted a study on a group of preschool children who learned about Mozart’s opera, *The Magic Flute*. The preschoolers first learned the story from a children’s story book and then watched a serialized version of the Metropolitan Opera’s production of *The Magic Flute* in English. The children were able to discuss the story and characters, and discuss their emotional responses to the performance.<sup>14</sup> Frederick Burrack and Carla Jo Maltas’s article entitled, “Engaging elementary-age children in opera,” describes a study conducted with students and teachers from eight elementary and middle

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13. George Dickey. “Development of an Enlarged Music Repertory for Kindergarten Through Grade Six (Julliard Repertory Project). Final Report,” (Government report, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, December 1967): 29, 59.

14. Aleksandra Acker, Jan Deans, Jill Ferris, and Berenice Nyland, “How do you make a bear look like a butterfly? Exploring the Metropolitan Opera’s production of Mozart’s Magic flute with a group of preschool children,” *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood* 38, no. 1 (March 2013): 29-34.

schools that examined the use of opera in the curriculum and students' response to a live opera.<sup>15</sup> Participants recognized the value of opera in the curriculum and the value of students viewing a live opera. Kristen Berman's article, "The Benefits of Exploring Opera for the Social and Emotional Development of High-Ability Students," highlights the many benefits that high-ability students can receive from learning about opera.<sup>16</sup> She lists possible benefits such as positive social development, positive emotional development, ethical awareness, and self-expression. Carl Faust's article entitled, "Brava! Why you should use opera in your classroom," highlights the benefits of using opera in the classroom. Opera can be used to teach a variety of musical subjects and can appeal to a variety of learners.<sup>17</sup> In the article "Old Texts and Opera – Inciting Students to Read," Yaroslav Senyshyn describes his experience with inciting a group of special education secondary school students to read. He was able to cultivate students' interest in reading by choosing dramatic texts for them to read. He used the literary element of Leoncavallo's opera *I Pagliacci* to create an interest in the students. Once the students read the story and discussed the historical and dramatic elements, they then became interested in the music and the opera itself.<sup>18</sup> Tristan Kraft and Paul Driscoll's article, "The Classroom Connection," highlights the implementation and success of the Metropolitan Opera's educational program, "The Met: HD Live in the Schools," in several schools. Elements of the operas

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15. Frederick W. Burrack and Carla Jo Maltas, "Engaging elementary-age children in opera," *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education* 25, no. 1 (Fall-Winter 2006): 82-89.

16. Kristin Berman, "The Benefits of Exploring Opera for the Social and Emotional Development of High-Ability Students," *Gifted Child Today* 26, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 46.

17. Carl Faust, "Brava! Why you should use opera in your classroom," *Education Digest* 76, no. 4 (December 2010): 55.

18. Yaroslav Senyshyn, "Old Texts and Opera – Inciting Students to Read," *Educational Leadership* 62, no. 7 (April 2005): 74-77.

broadcast in this program were used in the classroom to relate to a variety of subjects.<sup>19</sup> In his article “The Art of the Opera,” David L. King describes his lesson plans that draw connections between the artwork of Chagall and Wagner’s *Die Walküre* and *Lohengrin*, and Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*. He has used this lesson plan with elementary students, high school students, and graduate students, with the elementary students being the most responsive.<sup>20</sup>

In 1993, a non-music teacher named Anita Bland wrote an article describing her middle school class’s participation in the “Creating Original Opera” program sponsored by the Metropolitan Opera Guild. She highlights the benefits her students received from creating their own opera and recommends that other teachers use opera in their classroom.<sup>21</sup> Eileen Hower’s article “Creating an Opera with Seventh Graders,” describes the process in which she collaborated with an art teacher at her school to teach their seventh grade students how to compose, design, and perform an original opera.<sup>22</sup> She was able to teach the basics of musicianship and composition using the Orff method during the creation of this original opera. In the article “Many Ways is the Way,” Pamela J. Rossi describes how a bilingual first grade class was able to benefit from the process of creating an original opera in multiple areas of

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19. Paul F. Driscoll and Tristan Kraft, “The Classroom Connection,” *Opera News* 78, no. 2 (August 2012): 24-28.

20. David L. King, “The Art of the Opera,” *Teaching Pre K – 8* 24, no. 6 (March 1994): 52-54.

21. Anita Bland, "Original opera in middle school," *Music Educators Journal* 79, no. 6 (February 1993): 27.

22. Eileen Hower, “Creating an Opera with Seventh Graders: Working with other teachers in their school system, educators can help students write and produce an opera – while teaching the basics of musicianship,” *Music Educators Journal* 85, no. 21 (March 1999): 21-25.

intelligence such as linguistics, literacy, and music.<sup>23</sup>

Much like the Metropolitan Opera, many other opera companies have created their own educational outreach programs in efforts to continue cultivating and educating new audiences. The article, “The Value of Young Opera-tunities,” which was published in *Classical Singer* magazine, highlights the efforts of several opera companies to reach out to children. The company Opera for the Young based in Madison, Wisconsin, tours local schools, giving performances and providing opportunities for the children to participate in the performance. The company estimates that since 1970, it has introduced opera to more than 2 million children. In 2012, the Florentine Opera company, based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, toured their production of the children’s opera, *The Three Little Pigs* and performed for more than 13,000 elementary school children and their families. The Indianapolis Opera Ensemble tours reductions of full-scale operas designed for children. Prior to the performance, the ensemble sends an educational packet to teachers so that they can prepare their students for the opera. In a period of over 26 years, OPERA Iowa has shared opera in the schools with over 700,000 children and their families. OPERA Iowa performs operas geared specifically toward an elementary-age audience. The company also provides lesson plans to educate the students before they see the performance.<sup>24</sup>

These opera educational outreach programs target elementary-age children because research suggests that children are more receptive to new music before they reach middle school. The British study, “The Development of Musical Preference Across the Life Span,” found that a

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23. Pamela J. Rossi, “Many Ways is the Way: Supporting the Languages and Literacies of Culturally, Linguistically, and Developmentally Diverse Children,” *Bilingual Review/La Revista Bilingüe* 24, no. ½ (January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1999): 175-191.

24. Megan Gloss, “The Value of Young Opera-tunities,” *Classical Singer* 25, no. 6 (June 2012): 28-35.

liking for classical music styles generally increases over a lifespan, with a decrease in the years of age 18-24 and 25-49.<sup>25</sup> It also found a correlation that musical tolerance over a lifetime may be dependent on the person's familiarity with the musical style. In the study "Music Style Preferences of Different Age Listeners," researchers found that preference for "art music" declines from first grade to fourth grade, but increased in the fifth grade.<sup>26</sup> However, the listening examples used for "art music" in this study did not include opera and only used instrumental examples. Wendy Sims's article, "Effects of Attending an In-School Opera Performance on Attitudes of Fourth-, Fifth-, and Sixth-Grade Students," describes a study on the responses of upper elementary students to an in-school performance of an opera.<sup>27</sup> The opera had a positive effect on the attitudes of fifth and sixth graders. Fourth graders consistently gave higher ratings and more positive responses, suggesting that this age group would be an ideal target for including opera in the curriculum.

Several factors can affect a teacher's design of the music curriculum. Carlos R. Abril and Brent M. Gault conducted a study labeled, "The State of Music in the Elementary School: The Principal's Perspective," in which elementary school principals were surveyed on their perception of their school's music curriculum. The survey revealed that principals were generally satisfied with their music program's ability to reach music education standards. However, the study participants listed several factors such as the "No Child Left Behind Act,"

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25. Hargreaves and North, "The Development of Musical Preferences across the Life Span."

26. Albert Leblanc, Wendy L. Sims, Carolyn Siivola, and Mary Obert, "Music Style Preferences of Different Age Listeners," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 44, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 49-59.

27. Wendy L. Sims, "Effects of Attending an In-School Opera Performance on Attitudes of Fourth-, Fifth-, and Sixth-Grade Students," *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, no. 114 (Fall 1992): 47-58.



budget, standardized tests, and scheduling to all have negative effects on the music programs at their schools.<sup>28</sup> In Madrid, Spain, a study was conducted to explore the value that children ascribe to attending performances of opera, classical music, and dance through a Teatro Real youth program. The study found that the teacher's attitude towards the performance and their treatment of the corresponding music lessons influenced the attitudes of their students. Students with an active teacher had a more positive attitude toward the musical experience and students with an uninterested teacher had a more negative attitude. Teachers who took an active approach ascribed great value towards the musical experience, and sought to implement a comprehensive approach to teaching their students to develop an aesthetic judgement and expand their musical knowledge. Teachers that took an interested approach wanted to provide their students with the opportunity to experience something new, but were unable to fully prepare students and follow-up with supplementary materials. Several interested teachers expressed concern that they lacked proper musical knowledge or teaching skills to prepare the students. Teachers that took an uninterested approach had no preparation or follow-up lessons for the musical experience. The study also found several other factors to influence perception of musical experiences. As consecutively older students were interviewed, the students were more influenced by their peers. Some students rejected these performances based on the generational belief that "classical" music belongs to adults. Students were also influenced by negative attitudes from their family.<sup>29</sup>

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28. Carlos R. Abril and Brent M. Gault, "The State of Music in the Elementary School: The Principal's Perspective," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 54, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 6-20.

29. Constanza Rincón and Gabriel Rusinek, "Attending Musical Performances: Teachers' and Students' Expectations and Experiences at a Youth Programme in Madrid," *Journal of New Music Research* 39, no. 2 (2010): 147-158.

## CHAPTER II

### METHOD AND RESULTS

A six-question survey was created and administered online at “surveymonkey.com.”

Question 1 asked, “Which of the following grades do you teach? (check all that apply).” Only two answer choices were given: “Fourth” and “Fifth.” Question 2 asked, “Do you include opera in your curriculum?” Answer choices for Question 2 were either “yes” or “no.” Question 3 asked, “If your answer to Question 2 was ‘No,’ please provide one or more reasons why you do not include opera in your curriculum. (check all that apply).” The respondent was then given a list of answer choices. More than one response was allowed. Possible answer choices:

- There is not enough time in the school year to include opera in the curriculum.
- Opera cannot be used to teach the fundamentals of music.
- Elementary music classes should be primarily performance-driven (instrumental).
- I do not feel comfortable teaching this subject.
- My students are not old enough to appreciate opera.
- I prefer to spend program finances on other musical subjects.
- My students do not display an interest in opera.
- Students should spend more time learning about contemporary and popular music.
- My school is not located in a region where field trips to the opera or participating in an opera company’s educational program is not a possibility.
- Other (please specify)

Question 4 then asked, “If your answer to Question 2 was ‘No,’ would you be willing to reconsider your stance if you attended an opera education workshop or received some other training in opera education, learning the benefits of opera education and how to include it in your curriculum? (optional).” The only answer choices for this question were “yes” or “no.”

Question 5 asked, “If your answer to Question 2 was “Yes,” please provide one or more reasons why you include opera in your curriculum. (check all that apply).” The respondent was

then given a list of answer choices. More than one response was allowed. Possible answer choices:

- Opera can be taught in conjunction with other non-musical subjects such as history, literature, art, and reading skills.
- The many artistic elements displayed in opera (such as drama, theatre, music, singing, acting, plot, etc.) are all important for children to learn.
- I feel comfortable teaching opera to my students.
- I enjoy listening to or watching opera in my personal time.
- Opera can be used in a performance-driven classroom.
- Opera can be used to teach the fundamentals of music.
- My students are old enough to appreciate opera.
- My students display an interest in opera.
- My school is located in a region where field trips to the opera or participating in an opera company's educational program are a possibility.
- Classical music groups such as opera companies are struggling, so it is important to cultivate a new and younger audience.
- Other (please specify)

Finally, Question 6 asked, "If your answer to Question 2 was "Yes," please briefly describe ways that you have included opera in your curriculum. (optional)." This question only accepted free response answers. See Appendix A for the exact format of the survey. A link to the survey was then emailed to 236 fourth and fifth grade public school elementary music teachers around the state of Mississippi.

Out of the 236 teachers that received the survey link, 73 teachers responded creating a 30.93% response rate. Question 1 had a 100% response rate. Responses to Question 1 indicated that a majority of the respondents, 86.3%, taught both fourth and fifth grade classes. The remaining responses indicated that 10.96% of the respondents taught fourth grade and that 2.74% taught fifth grade. Question 2 had a 100% response rate. Both "Yes" and "No" responses for Question 2 were nearly even: 47.95% responded "Yes" and 52.05% responded "No."

Several respondents incorrectly answered questions that did not correspond with their answer to Question 2. Several respondents incorrectly answered both Questions 3 and 5.

Several respondents also incorrectly answered Question 4. Only answers that corresponded with the respondents' answer to Question 2 were counted in the total results. Based on additional answers given in the survey, two respondents incorrectly answered Question 2 with a "No." Their answers were changed to a "Yes" and are included in the total number of "Yes" responses.

The "No" respondents were prompted to answer Question 3. Responses are displayed in Table 1 below and are organized from most popular to least popular. Only one "No" respondent did not answer Question 3. More than half of the "No" respondents indicated, "There is not enough time in the school year to include opera in the curriculum" as a reason for not including opera in their curriculum. This could be a result of increased focus on standardized testing or scheduling conflicts. Free responses left in the "Other" answer choice mention testing and

Table 1. Question 3 Responses

Answer Choice	Responses
A. There is not enough time in the school year to include opera in the curriculum.	57.89%
B. My students do not display an interest in opera.	39.47%
C. My school is not located in a region where field trips to the opera or participating in an opera company's educational program is not a possibility.	34.21%
D. My students are not old enough to appreciate opera.	28.95%
E. I do not feel comfortable teaching this subject.	23.68%
F. Other (please specify)	18.42%
G. I prefer to spend program finances on other musical subjects.	10.53%
H. Elementary music classes should be primarily performance-driven (instrumental).	2.63%
J. Students should spend more time learning about contemporary and popular music.	2.63%
K. Opera cannot be used to teach the fundamentals of music.	0%

Table 2. Question 3 “Other” Responses

Respondent Number	Free Response Answer
4	“I am an instrumentalist teaching in a minority school. My interest is non western musical traditions. My students prefer rap, hip-hop, and RnB. My goal is to get the students to grow a knowledge of multiple musical genres that can tie into the students’ current preferences. I also teach from modern music, paying attention to preferences and taste, to older music from those genres and show contextual parallels towards other regional music. Opera does not lend itself to easily drawing connections to other countries. The closest connection would be gamelan, but the students would need more exposure before becoming interested in Indonesian music.”
6	“Occasionally, I teach <i>The Magic Flute</i> , but time is so limited and the kids in my school are more rural kids. I see each class once a week, for less than an hour. Their interests aren’t there, which brings out behavior issues.”
11	“I haven’t thought about it but I will try to include opera in the new school year.”
58	“Due to scheduling I focus on basic music principles.”
61	“I can barely get my kids to be interested in music that they don’t hear on the radio every day. It would take years of opening up their minds to teach them about opera.”
65	“Actually, I love opera and yes it can be included in the elementary music curriculum. This year, due to “new assessments,” there wasn’t enough time to include the lessons.”

scheduling as a problem. For Question 3, 18% of respondents answered “Other;” see Table 2 for the free response answers written by “No” respondents. Respondents 6, 58, and 65 all mention “time” as a negative factor. A “Yes” respondent incorrectly answered “Other” on Question 3 and wrote: “I only see these grades once a week for a one hour block each. If testing, weather, pull-outs etc. cancel a week, there is not a good flow/connection to the learning process. I do teach a little, they listen a little and show a short segment but time constraints do not allow a complete lesson. Example: I only saw the groups once in January.”

“No” respondents were then prompted to answer Question 4. Question 4 was theoretical in nature, and was intended to test the openness of the “No” teachers to the possibility of adding opera to their curriculum. Of the 38 “No” respondents, 27 respondents answered Question 4:

71.05% responded “Yes” and “26.32% responded “No.” This openness of the teachers to opera in the curriculum, combined with the 34.21% response rate for answer choice C and the 23.68% response rate for answer choice E (see Table 1), could be a indication that a substantial group of teachers lack the proper resources or knowledge of proper resources to include opera in their elementary curriculum. Another indication for this is that for Question 5, only 17.14% of “Yes” respondents chose answer choice KK (see Table 3) indicating that they were geographically located in an area where resources were readily available.

Table 3. Question 5 Responses

Answer Choice	Responses
AA. The many artistic elements displayed in opera (such as drama, theatre, music, singing, acting, plot, etc.) are all important for children to learn.	100%
BB. Opera can be taught in conjunction with other non-musical subjects such as history, literature, art, and reading skills.	80%
CC. I feel comfortable teaching opera to my students.	54.29%
DD. Opera can be used to teach the fundamentals of music.	54.29%
EE. I enjoy listening to or watching opera in my personal time.	45.71%
FF. Classical music groups such as opera companies are struggling, so it is important to cultivate a new and younger audience	42.86%
GG. My students are old enough to appreciate opera.	42.86%
HH. Opera can be used in a performance-driven classroom.	34.29%
JJ. Other (please specify)	25.71%
KK. My school is located in a region where field trips to the opera or participating in an opera company’s educational program are a possibility.	17.14%
LL. My students display an interest in opera.	11.43%

The “Yes” respondents were prompted to answer Questions 5 and 6. Responses for Question 5 are displayed in Table 3 and are organized from most popular to least popular. All of the “Yes” respondents indicated that answer choice AA was a reason for including opera in their curriculum. The response rates for answer choices AA and BB, 100% and 80%

respectively, combined suggest that most teachers that include opera, do so because they recognize the potential for teaching multiple subjects, both musical and non-musical, through opera.

For Question 5, 25.71% of “Yes” respondents answered “Other.” See Table 5 for these free response answers. Many of the answers describe their use of opera and could have also been used to answer Question 6. All of the respondents who answered “Other” on Question 5 also answered Question 6. Eighty percent of “Yes” respondents answered Question 6. See Appendix B to view all free response answers to Question 6. Free response answers for Questions 5 and 6 revealed that several respondents had similar approaches to teaching opera. Several respondents mentioned using specific operas as examples; the most popular operas mentioned were Bizet’s *Carmen*, Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*, and Rossini’s *The Barber of Seville*. Four respondents specifically discuss opera singers; two respondents specifically mentioned the famous Mississippian and operatic soprano Leontyne Price. Six respondents mentioned using professional music organizations. One respondent discussed partnering with the local symphony and one respondent utilizes opera singers from a local college. Two respondents mentioned utilizing the local opera company, Mississippi Opera. Two respondents participate in Carnegie Hall’s “Link Up” curriculum. One respondent takes part in the Metropolitan Opera Guild’s “Creating Original Opera” program and directs the students who create and perform their own opera. Two other respondents also mentioned having their students perform excerpts from operas such as *Carmen* and Mozart’s *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. Two respondents compare and contrast musicals and opera. Four respondents discussed introducing opera through teaching about composers. Many respondents also discussed various ways that they use opera to relate to a variety of subjects.

Table 4. Question 5 “Other” Responses

Respondent Number	Free Response Answer
8	“I teach in a low performing school. Every class is required to include writing assignments. I developed a compare and contrast lesson with ballet and opera using the <i>Barber of Seville</i> and Copeland's <i>Hoedown!</i> The kids actually love it!!”
10	“Exposure to all styles of music is important for a well rounded education and some students will never see or hear an opera unless they've seen it in the general music classroom.”
14	“Each year [...] my fourth graders create and produce an original opera. I have received training through the Metropolitan Opera Guild’s Creating Original Opera program. The process begins in September and concludes with a premier performance at our high school performing arts auditorium.”
27	“Although I did not teach opera specifically this year, I know that opera is an important part of understanding the many genres within the field to develop an appreciation for music they don’t hear every day. I had considered a field trip to see <i>Tosca</i> , however, I felt that the theme ‘...filled with lust, pain, outright evil, and life out of control’ [Mississippi Opera] was a bit too much for the children.”
29	“Pertaining to the ‘interest in opera’ – students have more of a misunderstanding about opera. They think that someone singing a very high note sounds like ‘opera.’ My goal in teaching opera is for students to understand what opera actually is and is not as well as relate it to things they understand, such as the plays we perform, to help them gain an appreciation for opera.”
38	“Opera has many connections to today’s entertainment, as well as contained innovations that are still practiced in media today, (e.g. musicals [film and stage], films in general, music videos, even video game music).”
52	“The theme for our 5 <sup>th</sup> grade music class is: ‘Lights Camera Action...Anything on Stage.’ Opera, fits into that criteria.”
69	“Opera was included in the "Link Up" curriculum provided by Carnegie Hall. Some of my students didn’t enjoy it, but some of my students REALLY did!”
72	“I teach pre-k – 6 <sup>th</sup> grade. Opera is entertaining to children at young ages. I find that they enjoy finding their ‘opera’ voice. Because I am able to expose them at such an early age, by the time they are in the 4 <sup>th</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> grade, they expect it as part of their lesson and have developed a general appreciation for it. I teach every genre of music, so opera is widely accepted throughout, with my students.”

One respondent mentioned that he or she was unable to take his or her students to a showing of *Tosca* performed by Mississippi Opera because the subject matter was not age appropriate for the students – an issue discussed in the Julliard Repertory Project Report.



However, it has been made evident through the plethora of free responses to Questions 5 and 6 that there are numerous other ways to teach opera to elementary age students.

In Questions 3 and 5, “No” and “Yes” respondents both indicated that student interest and age influenced their inclusion of opera. Nearly 40% of “No” respondents believe that their students show no interest in opera and nearly a third of “No” respondents indicated that they believe that their students are not old enough to appreciate opera. In the Question 3 responses, several respondents mentioned lack of student interest for not including opera. Respondent 4 described how he or she focuses on making connections between “non-western musical traditions” and the students’ preference for modern music. The respondent denotes, “Opera does not lend itself to easily drawing connections to other countries.” Respondent 6 wrote that he or she will occasionally teach *The Magic Flute* but, “Their interests aren’t there, which brings out behavior issues.” Respondent 61 wrote, “I can barely get my kids to be interested in music that they don’t hear on the radio every day. It would take years of opening up their minds to teach them about opera.”

Teachers’ perceptions of their students have an effect on what they teach their students. If teachers do not believe that their students can grasp a concept or that it is not possible to gain their interest, then it can have a negative effect on what they teach their students. Contrarily, 42.86% of “Yes” respondents indicated that they believe their students are old enough to appreciate opera, but only 11.43% indicated that their students show an interest in opera. It is important that the teacher works to spark the students’ interest in whatever subject the class is studying.

While gathering contact information for elementary music teachers around the state, it was discovered that 34 school districts in the state of Mississippi have no elementary music

program and that some districts have no music programs at all. It is still unknown if some districts have any music programs because several schools were unable to be contacted. Twelve school districts with multiple elementary schools only had one or two elementary schools with music classes. Several school secretaries and school principals informed me that music classes had been cut or would be cut next year from their school because of lack of funds. One “No” respondent incorrectly answered Question 6, but wrote a rather poignant response. The respondent first discusses that he or she has taught opera to the high school students, but they find musicals more relatable than opera. The respondent then described the elimination of elementary music for the next school year, however it was not made clear if the policy change affected just the respondent’s school or the entire school district:

“As of next year, all Elementary music, except Beginner Band has been eliminated. The reason is because the administration does not value Fine Arts and the State legislators do not fund music teachers. Therefore, in an effort to provide a band assistant, the other programs have been eliminated. There are seemingly no funds available to teach elementary music, or chorus, piano classes, as well as hire an assistant for an overcrowded band program. Sad, but true that opera is way down the line. I find it paradoxical that MS has such a rich heritage in the Arts, despite the public school system.”

Like this school, quite a significant number of schools and school districts around the state struggle to have any music program, much less one that includes opera. This deprivation of a musical education can be injurious to the many elementary age children in these school districts.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **CONCLUSION**

A musical education can be one of the most valuable components of a child's primary education. It is important that children not only receive a musical education, but a well-rounded musical education. Including opera in the music curriculum can be a valuable asset for music teachers as they construct their curriculum. With opera as a component of the music curriculum, a student can be taught about many subjects, such as music, history, literature, theater, and more. As classical music and opera continue to fall by the wayside of our popular culture, it is important to cultivate a new audience to keep these art forms alive. Perhaps the best and most open-minded audience to engage is elementary age children, before they enter the pre-teen middle school years. If children this age are not introduced to opera, it is less likely that they will ever show a preference for this musical genre as they grow older. As revealed by the survey, student interest in opera is already low and it is important for teachers to cultivate an appreciation of opera. Otherwise, students may never come into contact with opera since it is no longer a significant component of popular society.

More than half of the elementary music teachers surveyed revealed that they do not teach opera to fourth and fifth grade students. Lack of funding and "time" (perhaps because of testing) seem to be the most significant deterrents to these teachers including opera in their curriculum. However, a majority of teachers that do not include opera indicated that they are open to including it if shown the benefits of teaching opera in their music class. The teachers that do

include opera in their curriculum recognize that it can be used to teach multiple subjects. As revealed by this study, three solutions to creating a well-rounded music education, one that includes opera, are adequate funding for school music programs, a renewed emphasis on the arts in schools, and teacher education.

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## LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: IMAGE OF SURVEY

Figure 1. Image of survey.

**Opera Education In the Upper Elementary Classroom**

If you teach 4th and/or 5th grade music classes, please take this short 5 minute survey.

**\* 1. Which of the following grades do you teach? (check all that apply)**

Fourth

Fifth

**\* 2. Do you include opera in your curriculum?**

Yes

No

**3. If your answer to Question 2 was "No," please provide one or more reasons why you do not include opera in your curriculum. (check all that apply)**

There is not enough time in the school year to include opera in the curriculum.

Opera cannot be used to teach the fundamentals of music.

Elementary music classes should be primarily performance-driven (instrumental).

I do not feel comfortable teaching this subject.

My students are not old enough to appreciate opera.

I prefer to spend program finances on other musical subjects.

My students do not display an interest in opera.

Students should spend more time learning about contemporary and popular music.

My school is not located in a region where field trips to the opera or participating in an opera company's educational program is not a possibility.

Other (please specify)

**4. If your answer to Question 2 was "No," would you be willing to reconsider your stance if you attended an opera education workshop or received some other training in opera education, learning the benefits of opera education and how to include it in your curriculum? (optional)**

- yes
- no

**5. If your answer to Question 2 was "Yes," please provide one or more reasons why you include opera in your curriculum. (check all that apply)**

- Opera can be taught in conjunction with other non-musical subjects such as history, literature, art, and reading skills.
- The many artistic elements displayed in opera (such as drama, theatre, music, singing, acting, plot, etc.) are all important for children to learn.
- I feel comfortable teaching opera to my students.
- I enjoy listening to or watching opera in my personal time.
- Opera can be used in a performance-driven classroom.
- Opera can be used to teach the fundamentals of music.
- My students are old enough to appreciate opera.
- My students display an interest in opera.
- My school is located in a region where field trips to the opera or participating in an opera company's educational program are a possibility.
- Classical music groups such as opera companies are struggling, so it is important to cultivate a new and younger audience.

Other (please specify)

**6. If your answer to Question 2 was "Yes," please briefly describe ways that you have included opera in your curriculum. (optional)**

Done

APPENDIX B: QUESTION 6 ANSWERS

Table 5. Question 6 Answers.

Respondent Number	Free Response Answer
7	"I do a very brief introduction."
9	"I didn't have the opportunity to include it as much as I would like but I have been able to connect opera when we were studying other things. When we studied American composers I included their operas in the lesson and we listened to Leontyne Price and talked about her impact on the opera world at that time in America. I plan to incorporate it more in the future and do a unit on it."
10	"I used Rossini's <i>William Tell</i> , <i>The Marriage of Figaro</i> , and Mozart's <i>Magic Flute</i> . I am always surprised to see how fascinated my students are in the theatrics of opera as well as the style of opera singing. I incorporate reading the book, discussing myths and legends, and then watching the opera performed. Reading the story helps students follow the storyline when they later watch the opera sung in Italian or a different language. Exploring opera in music allows me to include cross-curricular study from subjects such as English - (reading, listening, comprehension, comparison, etc.) and history when we study opera."
13	"I have taught the difference in musicals and operas. I have also shown different visual and audio examples. I want to make sure to expose my students to as many career options as possible."
14	"School wide, we focus on a Composer of the Month - August - May. Depending on the composer, music from operas as well as facts about the composer are reviewed daily. Our library has a broad selection of opera stories, many with recordings included. Our students have attended dress rehearsal for Mississippi Opera Association productions. Opera is also studied as part of the music curriculum. See number 5 for info regarding our school opera production."
16	"I usually touch on opera after the students have learned about the instruments of an orchestra. When my students are getting know about composers, I will prepare a bulletin board that I can teach from with a large picture of the composer. I will introduce them to the composer by reading aloud a short biography. Sometimes, the students will receive a worksheet to complete. The students listen to short excerpts of the composer's works."
17	"I show short segments of opera with focus on instruments/ensemble, breath control, voicing and harmony. 'Hall of the Mountain King' - folk tale, movement, dynamics i.e. basics of music; <i>Amadeus</i> movie - social studies/history comparison and inform, terms/vocabulary of the stage; short excerpts from various operas for movement and style comparison."

18	“When introducing new composers we always talk about their history, dates, type of music they composed and listening selections. When an opera is discussed we listen and discuss everything in the opera from the story behind the opera, instrumentation, time period, stage, and question and answer session.”
20	“I often use opera when I am discussing voice types (referring to soprano, mezzo-soprano, contralto, tenor, baritone, bass). We talk about the different types of opera (dramatic, tragedy, comedic, fantasy, etc.) and compare them to different types of literature. When studying careers in music, I include opera as well as designing sets, stage managing, costume design, etc. Sometimes I focus on one particular opera and look at it from various angles. I performed a great deal in operas so my knowledge base is strong and as a result, I feel very comfortable and obligated to share opera with my students.”
24	“I teach my students the difference in opera and musicals. We watch and listen to excerpts from both. I teach my students to appreciate it and show them how difficult it is.”
27	“‘Opera can be taught in conjunction with other non-musical subjects such as history, literature, art, and reading skills.’ This best describes the way I include opera in my curriculum. It helps to develop student interest and appreciation for opera.”
28	“We teach this unit by comparing and contrasting oratorio and opera. This allows us to introduce students to two new music genres. In addition, this unit is simple to adapt to Core Curriculum goals in language arts, which pleases administrators.”
29	“I teach about opera in conjunction with my other music topics; incorporating it along the way. I do not have a specific opera unit that I teach. With fourth graders you might be able to specifically teach about opera for one or two lessons but I find that I get more interest from them if I incorporate it throughout all my other topics.”
33	“I use <i>Music Express</i> magazine in my classroom and in the curriculum opera is introduced. I show Chinese opera and use my Mimio to introduce it.”
36	“Some listening and discussions....Watched movie <i>Rossini's Ghost</i> .”
37	“I talk about opera by introducing it with specific composers, i.e. Mozart and then talk about opera as a genre of music on its own.”
38	“My music classes are of the ‘once or twice a week for forty-five minutes’ variety, so I typically isolate specific topics for each class. At some point I always explain opera and play some various musical clips. When we discuss Mozart, I emphasize his opera and keyboard music. Wagner is discussed, if more so for his orchestration innovations. I typically don't spend much time on Baroque or earlier because the students (and myself) seem to find it harder to appreciate. At some point I try to find a chorus for the students to sing from an opera such as Mozart's ‘Singt dem großen Bassa Lieder’ so that they have a tiny little exposure to performing opera music.”
39	“This school year (2014-2015) students performed in a program with the local symphony that taught them excerpts from Bizet's opera <i>Carmen</i> . In addition to this, my students are taught how an understanding of the other arts and disciplines contributes to the quality of music and opera is a fine example.”

42	“We've studied famous opera singers through their music curriculum, including history, culture, and singers. We've done compare/contrast with past and modern day opera singers.”
45	“We overview the plots, characters, and story elements of various operas, and correlate how the musical elements correlate to the dramatic and literary elements. I have taught this with <i>The Magic Flute</i> and <i>The Barber of Seville</i> . My students love the Queen of the Night aria.”
47	“I always include music history studies about composers in my lessons each year. When we study composers I always talk about, play recordings, or demonstrate different styles of music such as opera, piano, ballet, orchestra music, and stringed instruments. It is important to me that my students are exposed to a variety of musical genres. We talk about similarities and differences in popular music from different time periods as well as today. Also, my students LOVE to hear me sing and play these differing styles of music that they are not used to hearing on an everyday basis.”
50	“I want them to appreciate opera and change any negative preconceptions they have toward opera. 4th graders study <i>Carmen</i> , how Bizet, a Frenchman, used the Paris Library to write a Spanish opera with African flavor--the first truly cosmopolitan opera. I tell them the story and show video excerpts of some scenes. They study phrase length, half step motive of the habanero and learn what an overture is. So I incorporate melody, history, culture, composer, and more as students analyze, synthesize, describe, and more.”
52	“I give a very quick synopsis on the history of opera and performing [early Greek days]. I told them about George Bizet, and typed up an easier version of <i>Carmen</i> , put some costumes together, and handed out scripts. The students acted it out, and for different scenes, like when Escamillio waltzed out into bullfighting ring, and when we did the mock bullfight [yes a student was a bull], we played famous songs like "Prelude" from the <i>Carmen Symphony</i> . I find then when the students act out operas, they understand and appreciate them more. I also had them close their eyes and listen to an opera singer, sing a lovely version of ‘O Mio Babbino Caro.’ After the giggling stopped, I had them open their eyes, and meet Holly Stell, who was only 13 at the time, and all of their attitudes changed.”
57	“Included in a unit from the state framework of how music relates to other subjects.”
62	“We participate in a program called “Link Up” that usually includes opera. I've found that if I teach the story line of an opera before I introduce the music, the kids will more readily watch it and be interested.”
69	“We listen to an opera selection and discuss the way music tells a story, we discuss history, and the dramatics required to deliver such a performance.”
72	“I include opera as a type of music all by itself, and show many excerpts from different operas. I have had opera performers come and perform from the local college. I use it to help children find their ‘head voice.’ It is a vital part of Black History month with Leontyne Price being from Mississippi.”

\*One response was omitted from this list because it did not directly answer the question.



## VITA

CARMEN L. TAYLOR

### EDUCATION

M.M., Music Education, University of Mississippi, August 2015

Thesis: Opera Education in the Upper Elementary Music Classroom

B.A., Music; Minor, Italian, University of Mississippi, May 2013

### TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Graduate Instructor, Music Theory, University of Mississippi, 2014-2015

Graduate Instructor, Introduction to Music, University of Mississippi, 2014-2015

### HONORS

Member of Pi Kappa Lambda, Eta Nu Chapter, 2013 – present

Graduated with Magna Cum Laude honors, May 2013

Chancellor's Honor Roll & Dean's Honor Roll, 2009 – 2013