

## 'Don Carlo(s) Alive!'— A Wonderful Educational Project

**T**he Shakespeare Theatre and the Washington Opera did more than produce rare performances of Schiller's play *Don Carlos*, and Verdi's adaptation of that in his opera *Don Carlo*, in the nation's capital this spring. They also took unique advantage of the fact that both works were being staged at approximately the same time, to collaborate on a wonderful educational project, "Don Carlo(s) Alive!," which allowed students and teachers in nine schools—public, private, and parochial—in the Washington metropolitan area, to explore the music, drama, literature, and history of these two works, over the course of several months.

"Don Carlo(s) Alive!" began in November and December 2000, with professional development workshops for teachers, to help the teachers, who were selected by application, increase the students' understanding of the play and the opera, as the Shakespeare Theatre's Education Director, Dawn McAndrews, reports in her interview below. After

those workshops, the teachers attended the final dress rehearsal of Schiller's *Don Carlos* on Jan. 14, 2001.

During February 12-16, the Shakespeare Theatre mounted in-school workshops at all participating schools, allowing the students to explore the process of creating characters and making choices, with educators and artists from the Shakespeare Theatre. Then, during February 26-March 7, artists from The Washington Opera's Education Department introduced students to the music of *Don Carlo*, and to their lives as artists. On March 6, participating students and teachers attended a performance of the play at the Shakespeare Theater, and on March 14, they attended the final dress rehearsal of the opera at the John F. Kennedy Center. Finally, during the week of March 19-26, follow-up visits by the Shakespeare Theatre, gave students an opportunity to discuss their reactions to both the play and the opera with artists of both disciplines.

*The Shakespeare Theatre is planning a similar collaboration next fall, with Arena Stage, as both theaters will be staging Greek tragedies. The Shakespeare Theatre plans a three-hour adaptation (using new translations by Nick Rudall) of Sophocles's Oedipus Trilogy (Oedipus Rex, Oedipus at Colonnus, and Antigone), and Arena Stage will do Agamemnon and His Daughters, adapted by Kenneth Cavander from plays by Euripedes, Sophocles, and Aeschylus. They plan events around these parallel productions, although nothing is definite yet, according to Dawn McAndrews.*

*To get a live sense of the impact of this unique project on the teachers and students involved, Fidelio also interviewed Thomas Edison High School drama teacher Brad Rickle and School Without Walls High School teacher Joan Moten, both of whose students participated in the project.*

*Thomas Edison is located in Alexandria, Va., right across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C. As Mr. Rickle makes clear in his interview, it was a wonderful, enriching experience for all involved, and one that, it is to be hoped, will be repeated in cities across the nation.*

—Marianna Wertz

## 'The playwright packed everything into the verse structure . . .'

*Dawn McAndrews, Director of Education for The Shakespeare Theatre in Washington, D.C., spoke about this year's "Don Carlo(s) Alive!" project with Marianna Wertz, vice president of the Schiller Institute, on April 12.*

**Fidelio:** You began the "Don Carlo(s) Alive!" project back in November.

**McAndrews:** We started with the teachers months in advance. Dr. Gitta Honnegger, from Catholic University, came in and did the first workshop, on

Schiller. Then, a month later, someone from the opera, Sorab Modi, came in and did a workshop with the teachers and the docents from the opera, on Verdi and the different versions of the opera. The teachers were given copies of the script, our guide to this season's plays, a teacher curriculum guide, the libretto, a copy of the CD, lots of information, so that they had plenty of time to plan out how they would start to include this in their curriculum when we started the program with

students in January. So they had essentially two months to think, "Okay, this is how I'm going to fit this into my curriculum. These are the days of the week when I'm going to cover this, and these are when the guest artists are coming."

**Fidelio:** Can you give me an idea of the content of that, with respect to Schiller? Our audience is very focussed on Schiller.

**McAndrews:** What Dr. Honnegger

talked about was very specifically focussed on a chronology of Schiller as a writer, and the different periods of his writing and where he was in his life. For instance, the four years it took to write *Don Carlos*, his teaching history under an assumed name, and his falling in and out of grace and living in exile, so to speak. She talked a lot about how his life and the relationships he was having connected to how he was able to write the play, why he went back and re-wrote the first part in verse, how it shifts from Don Carlos to Posa, given the philosophical shift in his own beliefs.

We made one mention of the fact that it's not historically accurate, and that's not what Schiller is writing about. Then she really took them through a quick, but succinct biography, based on which plays came when, what was happening in his life, and a little bit of world events. She's not German, she's Austrian, but she has lived in Germany. She gave us a little bit of understanding of the political structure of the time and the city-states, and how Germany was coming together in nationalism, and the other revolutions in the world, and what the fervor and the climate were.

She tried to give us a little bit of an understanding of Germanic people and how the play is received. "Giving men the right to think," and that line, how it's received nationally. We talked a little bit about how many productions there were during the Nazi period, and how certain lines had to be cut, but people still got up on their feet and cheered. So she gave us a really thorough understanding of Schiller and his time, and then how his time responded to Schiller.

**Fidelio:** One of the things we often stress is that Schiller looked at the American Revolution as a model for Germany . . .

**McAndrews:** Yes.

**Fidelio:** . . . and then was disappointed in what happened in the French Revolution.

**McAndrews:** Yes. And we talked a lit-



Carol Rosegg

*Driven by emotional turmoil, Carlos commits an act of treason by threatening the person of his father the King.*

tle bit about how he was disappointed with the French Revolution.

**Fidelio:** He wrote that "a great time has found a little people."

**Fidelio:** You went to the schools yourself. Can you tell me how the students responded and what happened?

**McAndrews:** I think the presentations were set up with a good order to them, in that we tried to go back and forth between a visit to the theater, and then a visit from an opera person, and a visit from a theater person, so that we were constantly asking them to compare the two. When I went in and did the in-school visits for theater, we worked a little bit on poetry and verse, because, clearly, there's a reason why Schiller is writing this play in verse.

What I did was have them do some work in iambic pentameter, and then I took a passage from the first act of the play and took out all the dialogue around it, and just left Carlos's monologues from the first scene. Then I took a scene from the end of the play and had them look at Carlos's dialogues with Elizabeth at the end of the play, before they're caught. We read them, somewhat out of context, but just to see what we'd get emotionally. What I was trying to get them to understand is, that the

playwright really packed everything we need into the verse structure, and there's a reason why they write in verse and not prose, and to see what you can get from the rhythm.

We looked at points in the first scene where Carlos rambles and has short, choppy sentences, and his vocabulary isn't as sophisticated, and his sentence structure isn't as sophisticated, and he's blaming other people, and he's not taking responsibility, and he doesn't seem to be in control of his emotions and they can overtake them. He's looking for another father figure, and he's blaming his father and his upbringing, and he's whining.

Then we looked at the scene at the end, and he's not without emotion, but he seems more in control of his emotions. His vocabulary has increased, he's a much more mature character, and we can see the arc of the play.

It's done a little bit more through Socratic method, so that I'm not giving that to them, they're actually reading it, and then I ask them to interpret what they've read—what do you see, how does this feel, if you were the actor saying this, what would it tell you, and they gave all the answers.

**Fidelio:** Did you ever consult, or have

you heard of the fact that Schiller wrote the “Letters on Don Carlos”?

**McAndrews:** Yes, and I did actually look at some of them, when I was preparing some of the dramaturgical stuff over the summer. One of the things that I found interesting in certain libraries, is that you can only find material written on Schiller, in English in any case, from very early in the Twentieth century.

**Fidelio:** Right, except for what the Schiller Institute has done.

**McAndrews:** Exactly. There’s very, very little. Trying to find a Schiller scholar in the United States was extremely difficult. I did look at the “Don Carlos Letters,” I looked at a lot of other of his writings, “Theatre As a Moral Institution,” a lot of other things, to get a sense of how he was feeling as a whole person during the writing of *Don Carlos*.

**Fidelio:** I asked about this, because I wanted to see how you treated the character of the Marquis de Posa with the students, which is developed in those letters by Schiller, his limitations as a figure.

**McAndrews:** One of the things that we talked about in the follow-up visits, was the role of the Marquis de Posa. We talked a lot about the arc of the play through *Don Carlos*, not leaving out Posa, but I wanted them to really watch Carlos’s development, and how he’s affected in different scenes by everyone around him. How he can be talking to Posa and be extremely motivated to save The Netherlands, and then talk to his dad and crumble, and talk to his step-mother, and how the Romanticism really works through Carlos. I think that’s the thing that keeps the play together. While I know some critics have said that it shifts to Posa, and who are we watching; but, I think the thing that makes the Romanticism, the style, work, is how we watch the torment or the tempest that happens to Carlos. So we asked them to focus on that.

**Fidelio:** The idea of Romanticism is a catching point with the Schiller Insti-

tute, because “Romantic” is a false label for this thoroughly Classical author.

**McAndrews:** I completely understand that, yes, without question.

**Fidelio:** Is this kind of project going on anywhere else in the country, with this kind of cross-collaboration?

**McAndrews:** Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park has—I don’t know if it’s an after-school program, or something that they do with a group of other arts organizations—there is a conference called Crossing Paths, which is an interdisciplinary conference that’s held every other year. The second year of it is this year, and it will be in Indianapolis. The goal of that is to get more interdisciplinary programs. It’s an education directors’ conference, predominantly, so the idea is that we would get together in a place and start the ferment. Opera America may know a little bit more about what other opera companies are doing these collaborations.

It’s hard to sync up with another arts organization. This happened accidentally, that we were both producing at the same time.

**Fidelio:** You just noticed it and decided to collaborate?

**McAndrews:** Exactly. Next season, since the Shakespeare Theatre and Arena Stage will be opening their seasons with Greek plays, we are going to be doing a collaboration with Arena. We haven’t talked about any specifics yet. I don’t know if it will be seminar-style. So we will continue to look for opportunities to help enliven the curriculum with other arts organizations.

**Fidelio:** One last question: How would



*Queen Elizabeth and King Philip: “She is as much a revolutionary as Posa, and as Carlo eventually becomes.”*

Carol Rosegg

you sum up the effect this had on the students?

**McAndrews:** From the follow-up visits that I did, I would say that it exceeded our expectations. The students all commented that their experience in the theater and at the Kennedy Center was definitely enhanced by the workshops; that they had had no exposure to opera before this. Those students who read the play and then saw the opera, were really able to converse about the differences, and ask astute questions about choices that the directors made, choices that the actors made, how we interpreted the texts, why did we cut certain scenes out, why did we make the Grand Inquisitor the way we did, why did we not have a baroque, ornate palace. A lot of really in-depth questions.

So, if our goal is to encourage the arts to be maintained as important in the curriculum, and that students will come and will appreciate it, and do want to be encouraged to think in those ways, then I think we were successful.

# ‘The students were really drawn to the character of Posa . . .’

*Brad Rickle teaches drama at Thomas Edison High School in Alexandria, Va. He and his drama students, who are in the 11th grade, participated in the “Don Carlo(s) Alive!” project this year. He spoke with Marianna Wertz on March 27.*

**Fidelio:** Tell me about the project.

**Rickle:** The project centered around students reading the play and the Shakespeare Theatre and the Washington Opera, both of their education departments, brought in folks to do workshops with the kids on both productions, the opera and the play.

**Fidelio:** Could you describe the workshops?

**Rickle:** Dawn McAndrews, the education director of the Shakespeare Theatre, did a fantastic job. She came in one day and did a lot of work with the kids with language, got them up on their feet, led a post-show discussion with them last week, to talk about the play and what they thought about the production of *Don Carlos* at the Shakespeare Theatre.

All of the instructors went to, I believe it was two workshops. One focussed on the play, and the other one on the opera. The opera folks sent us two opera singers, and they did a workshop on singing opera. That was fantastic.

**Fidelio:** Did they talk about *bel canto*?

**Rickle:** Yes, and they did demonstrations. One gal sang in her nightclub voice, pop-singer-type voice, and then sang something with her opera voice, so that the students could hear the difference between those two things. That was fascinating. Then there was another gentleman who sang as well. They talked about what you have to do to sing opera, what the demands of that are.

**Fidelio:** Like foreign language?

**Rickle:** Yes, and that was good, because



*The paradoxical Marquis Posa (left), played by the Shakespeare Theatre’s Andrew Long, is “won over to the delusion he can bring his ideals to fruition working through the King.”*

they talked about the foreign languages that they needed to know and how they learned them; the physical, vocal requirements; the commitment that’s involved in it.

Dawn focussed a lot on [director] Michael Kahn’s ideas about the production, and what he and [set designer] Ming Cho Lee were trying to make come alive in the play. We focussed a lot on the performance of the actors.

She asked the kids a lot of questions about what did they think about the performances, because they had read the script. Then in my classroom, we worked on learning about Schiller, learning about the time period in which the play was written, what was going on, not only in terms of dramatic literature, but just what was happening in the world at that time.

I also had the kids memorize a monologue from the play. Any character they wanted. So, some of them did Posa, some of them did Carlos, some of them did the Queen, about a minute or

minute and a half for each one.

The thing that had attracted me to the program was, I had seen a production of *Don Carlos* at Stratford two seasons ago. I had never heard of Schiller, I had never heard of the play, but I really liked the production that they did there.

**Fidelio:** Do you specialize in Shakespeare?

**Rickle:** I’m pretty much a generalist, because I teach high school. One of my passions is Shakespeare. Of course, I loved the play, because it was so connected to, I would say, a combination of *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, to a certain extent. Plus, it was a period and a dramatist that students in high school normally wouldn’t be exposed to.

I knew the play, and I thought the kids would really get into the passion of that play.

**Fidelio:** What did the kids say about the play?

**Rickle:** They loved it. They were really drawn to the character of Posa, in particular.

**Fidelio:** The famous scene between Posa and the King?

**Rickle:** Yes. And, of course, they loved the scene when he was killed, too! So shocking, the gunfire, and the way that it was staged to surprise them. They all kind of jumped up in their seats. That doesn't happen in the theater very often.

For them to watch a play of that length, and be into it the whole time, means the theater really did its job, really held their interest, which is not easy to do. The kids really enjoyed the whole experience.

**Fidelio:** Was this the first opera for many of them?

**Rickle:** Yes. I would say for probably 80 percent of them, it was the first opera they had been to.

**Fidelio:** Is this the first time you participated in such a program?

**Rickle:** I think it's the first time they've offered something like this. I think it was just a unique time-frame, in the sense that the opera was doing the same show that the theater did. So, I think they got together, they got grant money, and put this program together.

I jumped at the opportunity to take advantage of the program. You had to fill out a little application about why you wanted to do it, and what you hoped to get out of it.

I think any time students have an opportunity to see live theater, we need to take advantage of that. Because it's great to read the script, and we read scripts and do little scenes from them sometimes, but to see it come alive is very exciting for students.

**Fidelio:** Schiller is almost never performed in America . . .

**Rickle:** Right . . .

**Fidelio:** . . . and he was much better known in the period of the Lincoln Presidency, when Germans immigrated here in great numbers.

**Rickle:** I didn't know that.

**Fidelio:** Schiller was inspired by the

## 'Influences of History, Language, Art'

Joan Moten, a teacher at the School Without Walls Senior High School in Washington, D.C., reported on the impact of the "Don Carlo(s) Alive!" project on the thirty students from the school's "Music Theatre" and the "From Bach to Rap" classes who participated in the program. The school also participated in last year's Shakespeare Theatre/Washington Opera "Opera Alive!" project, which examined Shakespeare's *Othello* and Verdi's *Otello*.

Student discussion of what had been learned from the program included:

- The differences between the stage and musical productions, beyond the obvious.

- An increased understanding and appreciation of opera.

- The discipline and focus required to pursue a vocal music operatic career.

- The in-depth preparation required for the sets, staging, costumes, and lighting necessary for a stage production.

- The style of dress of the time period, with an opportunity for some to actually wear authentic outfits.

- Further biographical information about Friedrich Schiller and Giuseppe Verdi.

- The interdisciplinary influences, such as History, Social Studies, Theatre, Foreign Language, Art, as well as Music.

American Revolution. He wanted for Germany what had happened in America.

**Rickle:** Ah! I see!

**Fidelio:** He had lived through the French Revolution, and saw the hideousness of what that turned into. He wrote that "a great moment has found a little people." So, it's a shame, that people in America don't know him. That's why we founded the Schiller Institute.

**Rickle:** That's great. I was pleasantly surprised at how engaged the students were, with his language, with his themes, with his characters. They were really intrigued by the whole context of the play. They were fascinated with the Grand Inquisitor at the ending. They really got into it!

Just to take them to see the play would have been fine, but the workshops and all the study that was done, in preparation for it, really helped a lot.

**Fidelio:** It sounds like a wonderful program.

**Rickle:** It really was. I'm so happy that we had a chance to participate in it.



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