

Transformations: Sing Your Story

Project Review – August 2018

UTRGV – Transforming Our World Strategic Plan Initiative



Klarissa Muñiz (Sophomore, BM Education) & Ann Baltz
UTRGV Photo by Veronica Gaona

OVERVIEW

“Transformations: Sing Your Story” was a semester-long project that examined the personal barriers of UTRGV Opera Theater students, and how despite these challenges, they persevere to earn their college degrees and transform their families, communities, and the world.

The project included a week-long residency with guest director, Ann Baltz, the Artistic Director of *OperaWorks*. Collaborating with the students and UTRGV faculty members Cathy Compton and Daniel Hunter-Holly, Ann Baltz created “I am,” the project’s culminating performance work. Integrating prepared music with improvised dialogue, the bi-lingual performances told the stories of people from different backgrounds who must deal with the challenges of life’s transitions: children leaving home for an education, relationships that cross cultural divides, love lost and found, and teachers who help students navigate their changing lives in and out of school.



Jorge Loera (Sophomore, BM Education) & Brandon Binder (Senior, BM Education)

UTRGV Photo by Veronica Gaona

PARTNERS

Ann Baltz

Creator and Artistic Director of the legendary training program *OperaWorks*, Ms. Baltz was an inspiring collaborator throughout the creative process.

Alejandra Mazariegos

Ms. Mazariegos, a mental health consultant within UTRGV's Counseling Center, was an invaluable resource throughout the semester. Attending rehearsals and performance, she met individually with all of the students to discuss the personal barriers that were used as inspiration for the performance project.

Veronica Gaona

As a student photographer and UTRGV staff member, Ms. Gaona used her artistic eye to document several of the rehearsals.

Southwest Key Program

Residents of the Southwest Key Program attended the Sunday performance of "I am." In addition to viewing the show, these students received a tour of the TSC Arts Center, participated in a sing-a-long on stage, led by faculty member Cathy Compton, and visited with the cast in the dressing rooms after the performance.

Lopez High School

Students at Lopez High School participated in a master class on performance techniques, led by Ann Baltz.



Jorge Loera (Sophomore, BM Education) & Ann Baltz
UTRGV Photo by Veronica Gaona



Alejandra Mazariegos
UTRGV Photo by Veronica Gaona



UTRGV Photos by Veronica Gaona

UTRGV Opera Theater

"Transformations: Sing Your Story" Project

presents

I am



learning
building
creating
changing
succeeding



Saturday, April 21 - 7 pm

Sunday, April 22 - 3 pm

TSC Arts Center - Brownsville

UTRGV
School of Music

UTRGV The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

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Nationally acclaimed opera educator to work with UTRGV students on bringing original story to the stage



Ann Baltz

WHAT: UTRGV Strategic Plan grant funds opera residency and public performances

WHEN: Saturday, April 21 at 7 p.m. and Sunday, April 22 at 3 p.m.

WHERE: TSC Arts Center, 90 Taylor Ave., Brownsville, TX 78520

RIO GRANDE VALLEY, TEXAS – APRIL 2, 2018 – Ann Baltz, founder and artistic director of the nationally acclaimed OperaWorks training program for singers, will be in residence at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley from April 17-22.

An opera educator, director and coach/pianist based in Los Angeles, Baltz is working with UTRGV Opera Theater faculty and students to develop a show that explores students' real collegiate lives in the Valley through music and theater.

Performances are 7 p.m. Saturday, April 21, and 3 p.m. Sunday, April 22, at the TSC Arts Center in Brownsville.

Baltz said the performance piece she creates with students will explore turning points in the lives of each of the characters.

"This is a story about people from different backgrounds who must deal with the challenges of life's transitions – children leaving home for an education, relationships that cross cultural differences, love lost and found, and teachers who navigate their students' educational and personal challenges," she said.

Students will perform songs and arias from art song, music theater, popular, folk and operatic repertoire. Baltz has connected the diverse music with an original story inspired by personal narratives written by the UTRGV student performers.

She said she hopes the process will be meaningful for students in their off-stage lives, as well.

"In my experience with previous productions of this sort, the performers emerge from this process more confident, and with a clearer picture of who they are as unique individuals," she said.

UTRGV Opera Theater directors Cathy Compton and Daniel Hunter-Holly and pianist Oliver Jia have been preparing students for the residency through music rehearsals, dramatic coaching, and movement and improvisation exercises.

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Opera educator to work with UTRGV students

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Posted: Tuesday, April 3, 2018 4:43 pm

Special to the Star

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Nationally Acclaimed Opera Educator to Work with UTRGV Students on Bringing Original Story to the Stage

April 13, 2018 | Filed under: Valley | Posted by: admin

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Ann Baltz Photo: Courtesy Photo

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'West Side Story' gets professional assist

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Posted: Monday, April 23, 2018 10:27 pm

By GARY LONG | Staff Writer

The 30 performers in the cast of "West Side Story" at Lopez Early College High School had the opportunity last week to work with nationally acclaimed voice and acting coach Ann Baltz.

The Lopez production of West Side Story is scheduled for June 1-3. Baltz is here for two weeks working with theater students at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, so while she's in town she took time out one day last week to work with students in the West Side Story





Estoy

Sábado, 21 de Abril - 7 pm
Domingo, 22 de Abril - 3 pm

TSC Arts Center - Brownsville
patron.utrgv.edu

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creando
cambiando
teniendo éxito*

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I am

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Estoy

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I am

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Estoy

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I am

Saturday, April 21 - 7 pm
Sunday, April 22 - 3 pm

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PERFORMANCE VIDEOS

Saturday, April 21, 2018
TSC Arts Center, Brownsville
<https://youtu.be/nG4Cb3ivhrE>



Guillermo Gonzalez (Freshman, BM Education) &
Klarissa Muñiz (Sophomore, BM Education)

Sunday, April 22, 2018
TSC Arts Center, Brownsville
https://youtu.be/A45_pRbks90



Rosario Olvera (Junior, BM Education) &
Ignacio Cruz (Sophomore, BM Education)

Sunday, April 22, 2018
TSC Arts Center, Brownsville
<https://youtu.be/ZT5g2YPUWoc>



Post-performance talk-back session

STUDENT FEEDBACK

On Improvisation:

- We normally do not delve into the world of improvisation and it was eye opening to perform scenes in such a way.
- I felt we learned to improvise in real circumstances and how to develop a character.
- It was such a different experience from anything I've done. Improvisation is such an important part of being a performer and I loved how much we learned.
- Having to perform through improvisation makes you think fast and keep going no matter what happens. Because everything we do is usually memorized and rehearsed so many times, it can lack color and interest.
- It was a great improvisational, growing experience.

On the "Transformations: Sing Your Story" Project:

- I loved the concept, performance, and the process of this. It helps us all to realize the importance to empathize with others.
- It was fun to create our own performance and dive into the characters we had chosen for ourselves.
- It was very challenging and made me more confident in my acting choices.
- I was able to develop my character and connect with it emotionally to discover what makes me feel good and what does not.
- This experience taught me how to think differently about my performance and what I can do grow as a musician.



Chloe Vergara (Junior, BM Education) & Michael Marks (Sophomore, BM Education)
UTRGV Photo by Veronica Gaona

On Working with Ann Baltz:

- The experience with Ann Baltz was amazing! She made everything so fun and entertaining.
- Ann believed in me and made me see everything so differently. At first I was stubborn because I didn't want to act so I tried not to do much and be in the background, but Ann made me feel sassy and made me feel like the center of attention during my scene.
- Working with Ann changed the way I thought about what I can or can't do.
- Ms. Ann taught us all so many things. She truly helped us break through our shells and release creativity beyond our limitations.
- I had a great experience working with Ann. Her insight was extremely helpful! I was amazed by how even though here instructions were simple, they would transform that scene/song completely.
- Ann was also so sweet and patient with us and I appreciate all she was able to share with us.



Ann Baltz & Jorge Loera (Sophomore, BM Education)
UTRGV Photo by Veronica Gaona

The University of Texas
Rio Grande Valley

School of Music

4 May 2018

To whom it may concern:

I had the pleasure of attending the UTRGV Bravo Opera Company's production of "Transformations: Sing your Story" on Saturday, April 21. It was an evening of incredible improvisation, acting, and singing, followed by a fantastic question-and-answer session with the production's student performers, guest artist Ann Baltz of OperaWorks, and faculty members, Daniel Hunter-Holly and Cathy Compton.

The performance itself was spectacular—part improv and part popular song, it was beautiful, poignant, comical, touching, and all the things you want opera theater to be, and it especially resonated because it was based on the stories of our students. While I believe there is value in learning standard classical repertoire and works from the canon, it is also equally important to expose students to modern opera techniques, improvisation, and to demonstrate the power of good storytelling through music. Because these stories were loosely based on the lives of the student performers, the performance itself was quite moving and touching. I felt a strong connection with my students' joys and struggles and found a bit of myself in their stories as well. I am not ashamed to admit that I shed a few tears.

The question-and-answer session that followed gave students a chance to further articulate their point of view and to demonstrate the transformational experience they shared with Ann Baltz as they recounted their time spent with her including their preparation leading up to her arrival. They discussed the details of putting the story together, shaping character development, and the challenges of acting through improvisation rather than memorizing lines and cues. Most importantly, they shared how much they learned about themselves and their colleagues throughout this process and how the entire experience gave them more empathy toward their peers.

As a member of the UTRGV School of Music faculty based here in Brownsville, I am especially proud to call these students mine. As the title suggests, the show was indeed "transformational" – not only for them, but for the audience as well. I applaud and thank them for a job well done.



Dr. Rachel Mitchell
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April 25, 2018

Dear Ms. Compton and Dr. Hunter-Holly,

Congratulations on the outstanding opera performance your students did titled, "I Am." I have been a supporter of the opera since its beginnings at our legacy institution, the University of Texas at Brownsville. I believe this was the first time our rich local heritage was celebrated. What a powerful way to celebrate our dual cultures, and also the personal stories of our students which are universal to all students struggling with change at a time of life that involves a lot of new opportunities and decisions.

While our UTRGV theme is "Transformations," because our university is in its beginning stages, the opera brought back personal memories for me as I reflected on my own transformations. It is a difficult time of life for many, being a young adult, on the verge of transforming from a college student to an adult working as a professional in society.

I hope this idea for the opera can continue. I believe it has potential to be performed outside the Rio Grande Valley, and share with others our wonderful culture and universal themes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sally Trenfield". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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**The University of Texas
Rio Grande Valley**

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Sally Trenfield

Lecturer

Department of Music

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ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN & CORE PRIORITIES

“Transformations: Sing Your Story” reinforced UTRGV’s Mission, Vision, and Values, through its creative embodiment of UTRGV’s Transforming Our World Strategic Plan and Core Priorities.

Student Success:

- UTRGV music students empowered to thrive as innovative leaders through experiential learning in the process of creating a new performance piece
- The project focused on personal and cultural barriers to success, using counseling, music, and art to recognize and overcome the inherent challenges students face.
- Through student-driven narratives, musical improvisation, and engagement with underserved community groups, students directly experienced a variety of career and advanced study options.

Educational Opportunities:

- The project addressed culturally-relevant educational opportunities by focusing on music of Mexican, Mexican-American, and American composers; additionally, students’ own experiences were an essential aspect for the development of the performance project’s narrative arc.

Community Engagement:

- Connected to alumni and potential future Vaqueros with Ann Baltz master class at Lopez High School
- Community partnership with the Southwest Key Program
- Post-concert talkbacks that encouraged dialog between performers and audience members

Health and Medical Education:

- Developed a cohesive artistic program with ongoing feedback from the UTRGV Counseling Center and the project’s mental health consultant.
- Students were continually connected to university resources that promote mental health and well-being.

Research Impacting the RGV and Beyond:

- Through music, art, and mental health awareness, the project directly addressed many of the cultural, political, and socioeconomic issues of the RGV



Ann Baltz & Monica Garza (Junior, BM Education)

UTRGV Photos by Veronica Gaona



UTRGV Photos by Veronica Gaona