

“ We felt a part of the performance before it began. ”

# ALL-ACCESS OPERA

NASHVILLE OPERA

HAVING THE RIGHT TOOLS  
MEANS **OPERA FOR EVERYONE!**

# THERE ARE ENOUGH BARRIERS TO OUR ART FORM.

## AUTISM SHOULDN'T ADD ANOTHER.

As the prevalence of autism rises,\* an innovative program has emerged to make opera inclusive for ALL students. Nashville Opera's **ALL-ACCESS OPERA** offers **evidence-based toolkits for creating special, modified opera performances that bolster accessibility for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and other learning differences.** It is the first program of its kind in the country to be documented for replication in other communities.

### BACKGROUND

**ALL-ACCESS OPERA** evolved from a 5-year collaboration with Vanderbilt University's TRIAD (Treatment and Research Institute of Autism Spectrum Disorders), in which supports were developed to enhance Nashville Opera's annual educational tour to schools. **There was anecdotal evidence that these resources—our toolkit—benefitted not only children on the spectrum, but also those with other types of learning differences, and Nashville Opera needed hard data to prove it.** With an OPERA America Innovation Grant, supported by the Ann and Gordon Getty Foundation, Nashville Opera launched an Innovation Project to test and measure the toolkit's effectiveness. The results of that research are presented here.

### SO, WHAT TOOLS MAKE OPERA ACCESSIBLE?

The **ALL-ACCESS OPERA toolkit** includes **storyboards** teachers can use to help children understand the opera's plot and process the many emotions opera can evoke; **social stories** that outline the experience of attending an opera; and **tipsheets** on how to set up sensory-friendly performances with details such as creating a quiet space for students who need a break during the show. The easy-to-use toolkit comes with online training and can be implemented into existing educational programs.

### MEASURING SUCCESS

Nashville Opera has partnered with opera companies around the U.S.—Arizona Opera, Pensacola Opera, and Michigan Opera Theater—and trained staff at these companies on using the toolkits. **ACT Research**, a Minnesota-based research and evaluation consultancy, was engaged to help create surveys, poll program participants, and analyze results.

### WE NEEDED TO KNOW...

- Did the toolkit help create a positive experience?
- Which components were most helpful and how?
- Did the toolkit lead to additional unanticipated benefits for children and in what ways?

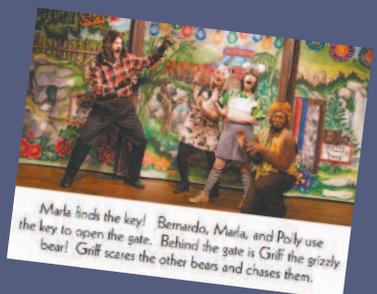
\* **AUTISM SPEAKS:** April 26, 2018. CDC Increases Estimate of Autism's Prevalence by 15%, up from 1 in 68 in 2014 to 1 in 59 in 2016. For boys, the prevalence is now 1 in 37.



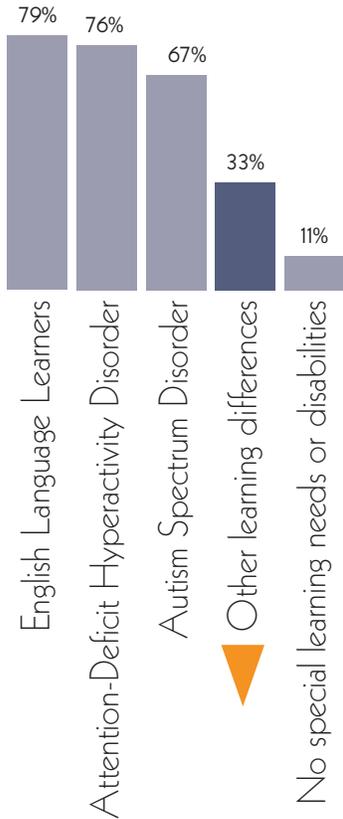
### STORYBOARD: THE HIT OF THE KIT!

“This tool helped students visually see what they were hearing. With differentiated learners, this is a necessity.

~ PARTICIPATING TEACHER



## REPORTED LEARNING DIFFERENCES



## OTHER LEARNING DIFFERENCES REPORTED

Anxiety  
 Depression  
 Down Syndrome  
 Dyslexia  
 Emotional Disturbance  
 Exceptional Education  
 Jacob's Syndrome  
 Oppositional Defiance Disorder  
 Personality Disorder  
 PTSD  
 Sensory processing challenges  
 Social Emotional Deficiencies

## SURVEY RESULTS REACHING BEYOND AUTISM

Of the 75 survey respondents, 65 were teachers and 79% had experience working with or caring for children/students with a variety of learning or developmental disabilities.

- 100%** of program participants recommend others use this toolkit with children/students with learning disabilities or other needs.
- 92%** agreed the toolkit creates a more positive and engaging experience for students.
- 87%** agreed the toolkit makes them more likely to bring these students to a performance.
- 84%** of children attending performances were ages 5–9.
- 44%** of children/students attending performances are children of color. \*

### MAJOR IMPACTS OF THE TOOLKIT

- Builds excitement
- Promotes understanding
- Clarifies expectations
- Establishes predictability
- Decreases anxiety, worry, and fear

THE STORYBOARD WAS IDENTIFIED AS THE MOST HELPFUL PREPARATORY COMPONENT OF THE TOOLKIT, AS IT:

- Promotes understanding
- Helps teachers prepare students
- Creates expectations
- Builds engagement
- Supports retention of the story
- Bolsters literacy
- Helps students stay engaged
- Caters to students' learning styles

### A MORE POSITIVE OPERA EXPERIENCE

The social story and quiet space helped create an overall more positive experience for children/students. Program participants reported that the social story helped promote understanding, create expectations, and build engagement and that the quiet space was useful for children who needed a break.

“Live performances like this teach my students more than I can in one lesson. They leave an impact and an impression.

I think the toolkit is perfect.”

\* Estimate based on program participants' self-reports

# CONCLUSION

Based on survey results and teachers' feedback from this Innovation Project, Nashville Opera now has **conclusive evidence** that **the ALL-ACCESS OPERA toolkit helps not only children with special needs, but ALL children including English-Language Learners**. The user-friendly toolkit caters to a variety of learning styles, promotes understanding, creates a more positive learning experience, bolsters reading, and helps children stay engaged—all while supporting teachers.

Nashville Opera will continue to provide these resources upon request to opera companies aiming to make performances accessible and inclusive for all children. **Toolkits have been created for the following works:**

John Davies' *The Three Little Pigs*

John Davies' *The Billy Goat's Gruff*

John Davies' *Goldie B. Locks and the Three Singing Bears*

John Davies' *Jack and the Beanstalk*

Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel*

Mozart's *Mini Magic Flute* (2018-19 Arizona Opera production)

Anna Young's *Enchanted Forest*

Anna Young's *Bear Hug / Abrazo de Oso* (in English and Spanish)

## TEACHERS SAY

“ It helped students understand the story and helped them with reading skills.

**BUILDS PRIOR KNOWLEDGE**

They knew ahead of time what to expect on a level of their understanding. It was VERY nice to have this resource, instead of me having to break it down on my own for them!

**CREATES EXPECTATIONS**

My children attend the performance with a knowledge base and an appreciation for opera. They love the anticipation of the event and feel proud of what they have learned.

**BUILDS EXCITEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT**

Without the background knowledge, students would almost be lost in a sea of sensory experiences. The toolkit however, allows them to understand and interpret what they are seeing/hearing because they can put it in context.

**PROMOTES UNDERSTANDING**

The toolkit is expansive! I can pick and choose what I have time to cover. I don't see my kids often (only every 8th school day) so I have to give them bite-size pieces of info they can take with them rather than take multiple days on one lesson. The toolkit meets that objective with efficacy and reliability. ”

**HELPS TEACHERS PREPARE STUDENTS**

THE NATIONAL **OPERA** CENTER  
**AMERICA**

**INNOVATION GRANTS**

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NASHVILLE  
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