

# Looking back at Orpheus: Opera and cultural integration

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**Patricia Anne Simpson**

Montana State University, USA

## Abstract

The myth of Orpheus is intricately implicated in the origin of song. For centuries, myth and music have cooperated in a variety of genres, foremost among them in opera. The myth, open to reinterpretation across linguistic, national, and temporal boundaries, served as a starting point for an extracurricular opera project in the metropolitan region of Nuremberg. This article explores the goals, best practices, and outcomes of the Orpheus project, *Schau nicht zurück, Orfeo!* (Do Not Look Back, Orpheus!), that was organized around the principle of involving young adult learners in the creation and production of a work of art. The organizers also hoped to achieve a level of integration across German school systems, ethnic immigrant identities, and age groups. The result is a contemporary opera in which students contribute significantly to the artistic process of writing a libretto, composing music for choruses, and dancing in the opera's premiere.

## Keywords

extracurricular music education, immigration, integration, Orpheus, young adult learners

German public school systems face many challenges, from increasing incidents of violence (Freeman, 2007) to systemic marginalization of non-native speakers of the dominant official language. Like many school systems in Europe and the US, Germany's primary and secondary systems need to appeal to a wide range of young adult learners, especially but not exclusively those from recently immigrated families and backgrounds. More specifically, the German school system in some federal states channels young adults into three tracks: the *Hauptschule*, the *Realschule* and the *Gymnasium*.<sup>1</sup> In their configurational analysis of recent data about the secondary school model in Germany, Glaesser and Cooper (2010) provided empirical corroboration of inequality across the three-pronged system. Though some scholars and policy-makers note efforts at reform, Glaesser and Cooper continue to describe this educational model as "stratified and selective" (p. 1). While changing tracks is possible, for example, selection remains the norm. Glaesser and Cooper (2010)

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## Corresponding author:

Patricia Anne Simpson, Department of Modern Languages and Literature, Montana State University, Gaines 115A, P.O. Box 172980, Bozeman, MT 59717-2980, USA.

Email: psimpson.msu@gmail.com

wrote: “There is an ongoing move towards combining *Hauptschule* and *Realschule* in some *Länder*, but the *Gymnasium* seems to remain a sacred German institution” (p. 3).

Only students who successfully complete the *Abitur* or diploma from the latter institution are eligible to apply for university study. As a result, limitations are imposed on the pupils from the *Realschule* and *Hauptschule* that have a direct and long-term impact on their ability to choose a profession.

## Creating between the tracks

Much recent public debate has focused on the track of the *Gesamtschule*, a combined institution that has existed in some federal states to address the inequities in the three-track system. The tone of the debate became increasingly urgent after Germany’s below-average performance in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). PISA assesses the performance of math and science as well as reading ability for students who are 15 years old (grades 9 and 10). PISA 2000 results for Germany were labeled “shocking,” as performance in math and science was below the OECD average, and the group of “low performers” was large (Jude & Klieme, 2009, p. 7). Further, there was a strong correlation between socioeconomic factors, immigration background, and “low” performance. In 2003, the results placed Germany in “centerfield,” according to the website of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. On the positive side, the overall performance improved (and the upward trend has continued) in subsequent tests, which are conducted every 3 years, though some factors did not change. According to a report from the Federal Ministry of Education (2005):

Particularly unsettling is the fact that nothing has changed for the poorest pupils since the last PISA study. 22% of the pupils belong to the so-called “risk group”, i.e. pupils whose education results are not sufficient for successfully completing occupational training or getting a first job. (p. 1)

There is some evidence that in *Gesamtschulen*, socioeconomic background is not quite as influential a factor in determining pupils’ ability to learn and performance on standardized tests (Fend, 2008), yet the author notes that the odds of a child from a working-class family earning an advanced degree in comparison to those of a child from the educated classes is one to 12 (Fend, 2008). The debate about how to reform the school system, prompted by ethical and economic reasons alike, has become entrenched. An open letter to the education ministers and party politicians highlights the need for secondary school reform, noting that young men and many with “migration background” are affected by the lack of access to higher education (Hurrelmann et al. 2007, p. 1).

Within this political and cultural context, the Orpheus project was conceptualized on the principle that young adult learners from diverse backgrounds can contribute to the creation and production of an opera. The lofty ambition of the organizers involved creating a space outside of the conventional classroom in which some level of integration could take place among school students from different tracks, but also where all students and participants could become shareholders in the creative process itself. This project would involve the close cooperation between practicing professional artists and groups of school children in the collaborative effort. This one-time project was not intended to effect policy changes; nor could it address the large-scale, serious problems inherent in the divided school system. However, the primary goal of collaborative composition of a new opera was achieved, and at least the lives of many participants were enriched. From the perspective of my participation as the librettist in the creation of this new opera, I describe the cooperative

efforts and strategies employed in the course of the project's development and implementation to corroborate that claim.

Original applications for funding stressed the need to reach out to students with "migration background" in particular, though not exclusively. For reasons attributable in part to language skills, many children of recent immigrant families are assigned to a *Hauptschule* or *Realschule*. Moreover, they have little contact with students from other tracks, and in a contemporary democracy, subtle and overt class distinctions become part of this education and socialization system. Students who attend *Gymnasien* tend not to think of themselves as privileged or even exceptional: their contact with students from other tracks, based on anecdotal evidence, is minimal. One goal of the Orpheus project was to provide a non-curricular forum in which these divisions would dissolve in the group effort to create a contemporary opera.

In addition, students with a *Migrationshintergrund* or "migration background" often have little access to the cultural institutions associated with social privilege and education. In the discourse of public education, the schools are designated by percentage of pupils with "migration background" and by the presence of those from a *bildungsferne Schicht* (class distanced from education). There is widespread consensus about the need for reform, particularly because pupils who are assigned to the *Hauptschule* and *Realschule* tracks have diminished job prospects. A less-economically measurable but nonetheless significant impact of these institutionalized divisions is the exclusion from even local cultural institutions, such as museums and festivals, and consequently alienation from the possibly edifying and potentially exhilarating participation in cultural traditions particular to the site of the new homeland. Creating an opera with the goal of mitigating some of these social, economic, and cultural barriers was the purpose of the Orpheus project.

## Orpheus in Nuremberg

In Nuremberg, opera is prominent among the cultural traditions that can claim both extremely local status and global impact. This cultural territory served as a point of departure and inspiration for the concept, coordination, and implementation of the extracurricular opera project designed to foster integration on multiple levels, but also to incorporate life experience into the creation of art. This more aesthetic integration was part of the original goal of the composer Stefan Hakenberg. In an interview, Hakenberg noted the following:

Many societies today are characterized by migration. People have left their homes, have left their cultures, have left part of their identities behind and are trying to find a new life in a new environment, and I think that the legend of Orfeo and Euridice describes this experience in a particularly strong way. (Hakenberg, 2011)

With this motivation, the composer gathered a group of international artists and music educators to design a project aimed at creating an opera that would help alleviate the cultural and educational divisions implicit in a three-track school system and a divided society in which Germans are considered "hosts" and all others "guests." The original organizers included the composer Hakenberg, who is the Director of the Akademie der Tonkunst Darmstadt, and the mezzo-soprano Frances Pappas, who is also a founding member and artistic director of the Chamber Music Festival of Nuremberg. With a combination of public and private funding, the group commissioned an opera, conceptualized as a restaging of the 1762 opera *Orfeo ed Euridice*, music by Christoph Willibald Gluck, libretto by Raniero de' Calzabigi (1967/1762). Hakenberg and Pappas collaborated to identify other participants, among them the music director Peter Selwyn, the director Nina Kühner,

choreographers Riikka Läser and Ivo Bärtsch, actor Gero Nievelstein, and myself as the librettist and workshop leader.<sup>2</sup> With initial support from *akademie: der steg* and the International Chamber Music Festival of Nuremberg, the project organizers were able to secure funding from other sources, including the Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees), the Neues Museum in Nuremberg, IHK, and others. Hakenberg and Pappas initially drafted a plan for the new opera, and assembled the group of artists needed for the workshops. They also arranged the cooperation with five schools in the metropolitan region of Nuremberg.<sup>3</sup>

The purpose of the workshops was to create the text, music, and dance in cooperation with a group of approximately 130 German schoolchildren between the ages of 10 and 17 years. One goal of the project was to help integrate recent migrants and immigrants to Germany into the effort of creating new art; to acquaint students from different educational backgrounds with each other in order to address some of the divisions built into the current German system; and to reach students in so-called “Brennpunkt-Schulen” (schools with a majority of pupils from an immigrant background) and those in “bildungsferne Schichten” (technical term referring to students who have little or no access to arts education). Another goal was to bring the students from separate schools into contact with each other. Students could participate in any or all stages of the process, from the initial workshops (March 2008), to the composition workshops (summer 2009), to the rehearsals and dance performance in the opera production itself. *Schau nicht zurück, Orfeo!* premiered at the Internationale Gluck-Festspiele, which were hosted in Nuremberg in July 2010. The development of workshops, the learning strategies employed, and the results are described below.

## Preliminary workshops

After much prefatory organization, the initial workshops took place during one week in March 2008. The host school, a *Realschule* in urban Nuremberg, had the highest number of participating children. The school itself qualifies as a “Brennpunkt-Schule” (with 80% of the pupils from immigrant families). Prior to the first workshop, the composer and a producer met to select the theme of the opera project. Gluck was born near Nuremberg and serves as a local opera icon, even though he is reputed to have spent little time in the city. Nonetheless, the Orpheus material seemed to provide the perfect example of local and international culture, though there was legitimate concern about the admittedly weighty themes of love and death in the myth. Together, the composer Hakenberg and the singer and co-organizer Pappas, who would eventually appear in the role of Orfeo, drafted a revision of the material that would include the following: three acts, seven choruses, and a stipulated message about “looking back.” The 1762 Vienna version of the opera ends with a resuscitation of the twice-lost Eurydice. In a contemporary project, the end would have to accommodate more realistic sensibilities. There was consensus among the artists who decided not to bring the object of lost love back to life, but to preserve her spirit in song. Eurydice would be both absent and present. According to Hakenberg, “We don’t only die . . . Someone who dies is not really all away. There’s still something of that person with us, in us an energy, a memory that guides us in our everyday life” (2011).

The arc of the story thus determined and structured, the composer next met with me, the librettist. Hakenberg had drafted a spreadsheet with his idea for the new conceptualization of the opera, which deals with essential themes of love, death, beauty, loss, and redemption through art. The goal of integration encompassed many facets of this project: students with each other, classical music with contemporary culture, but also and perhaps foremost, creative impulses from an international group of artists and students. The composer and I agreed on strategies to conduct the workshops that would emphasize inclusion, not only of all participants, but of their language skills, artistic

abilities, and life experiences. The two of us also discussed ways of making the complex and difficult material accessible to the students and participants, aged 10–17.

There were five introductory workshops, each lasting 3 hours, that took place during March 2008. The artists provided an overview of the project, and played U2's "The Ground Beneath Her Feet" (2000) to give students an access point to what is admittedly difficult material. Salman Rushdie (2000) makes an appearance in the U2 music video, which incarnates the title song for the film *Million Dollar Hotel*. Students who had never heard of the Orpheus myth were able to recognize Rushdie and the band U2. Even this music video, a format with which most of the students were familiar, offers some challenges to the viewer, but the collective viewing and immediate discussion of the themes brought issues related to the Orpheus myth and its incarnation in contemporary rock music to the foreground; this experience was repeated with each of the groups with the goal of making the challenging material accessible to a range of students from different age groups, class backgrounds, and ethnic identities.

The selection of the particular myth of Orpheus posed some challenges to the students and participants, and warrants further justification. Hakenberg elaborates on the selection of Orpheus, referring to this myth as "one of the most basic legends we know as humans on this planet." He explains:

I think it is not only about love and losing someone that we love very much and wanting that person back, but in that it is about us wanting to live but having to face the fact that life is limited. (2011)

Through the workshops, this idea was conveyed to the participants. In viewing the U2 video, students identified the love between a man and a woman, discerned that it was unequal, and that the suicide at the end was a type of flight. It was difficult to realize that some of the participants were as young as ten; they demonstrated sophisticated abilities in reading the combination of images and song, even though English was not equally familiar to all.

The writing workshops themselves highlighted the linguistic diversity of the participants, and the facilitators made certain to emphasize that the multi-lingual abilities of the students and artists alike were an asset. The composer mentioned the 1762 Vienna performance of the precursor opera, a cooperation between Gluck and de' Calzabigi. The artists, though many based in Nuremberg, came from a variety of regions, but also from England, the US, and Canada. Hakenberg incorporated music based on Turkish folk instruments and a Japanese drum. The conductor, Peter Selwyn, who has an international reputation, is based in England, and he came to Nuremberg for the rehearsals and performances in July 2010. From the beginning, the students realized they were crucial contributors to the international effort that was based on local culture. Their diversity constituted strength.

In addition, the diversity of the artists in turn reflected that of the participating students, but also remained true to the international, collaborative model practiced in the mid-18th century. In terms of opera history, Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* marked the first successful installment of the genre in which an emotional vocabulary and gender difference constitute central themes. Furthermore, Gluck adopted the material to accommodate national and international preferences and performance environments. In 1762, the role of Orfeo was sung by an alto-castrato, consistent with mid-18th-century practices. In 1774, however, for the production in France, Gluck rewrote the part for a male tenor as French theater practice did not approve of castrati (Finch, 2009). The practice of casting mezzo-sopranos in these traditional "trouser roles," especially with relation to the Orpheus material, opens a space for updating myth and its treatment of gender roles by occupying older forms with newer politics.

In the Nuremberg Orpheus project, the participating students used the occasion to think about not only chronological differences in their creative and cooperative efforts to “re-purpose” Orpheus, but also about the transformation of identity refracted through the lens of ethnic background, religion, popular culture, and gender. In her stunning book on the figure of Enlightenment Orpheus, Vanessa Agnew observes, “Orpheus stood at the head of the operatic tradition with Peri and Monteverdi and continued to be well represented in musical works throughout the eighteenth century.” Further, she examines the role of Orphic discourses in establishing

ethical paradigms for one of our most pressing contemporary concerns: managing the boundaries of the societies in which we live. Instead of the right of blood or soil, criteria that are thought inherent to the subject, Orphic discourse is based on a form of social action. (2008, p. 9)

Though concerned principally with the relationship among 18th-century travel writing, music, and otherness, Agnew’s analysis highlights the range of the Orpheus material’s ability to determine a sense of belonging – or lack thereof – through listening and being open to the narratives of music.

The plan was to establish a common ground during the introductions to multiple workshops with different groups of students, then to work in breakout groups (dance, acting, music), and reconvene to present and perform work that had been done in each subgroup. As the librettist, I had a unique experience on the first day of workshops: when Gero Nievelstein, the actor and organizer, introduced me as a writer from the US, the students burst into spontaneous applause, some chanted “Yes, we can!”, echoing the campaign slogan from the US presidential race. The workshop group was multi-racial, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic; the participants, none of voting age, were inspired by the election of Barack Obama to the White House, and the children were seemingly unaffected by the anti-American sentiment that had often characterized German public opinion in previous years. This school was visibly less well-funded than the others, and the students were the most diverse, though all were equally welcoming to the artists and workshop leaders.

### **Collective composition: The writing workshops**

During the 35 hours of workshops during that week, I had the opportunity to work with different groups of students, with about 20–25 students in each group. The plan was to draft the seven choruses with these students from regional schools. The groups of students worked together fairly well, but it was difficult not to notice how different the schools were in appearance. In the center of Nuremberg, several participating schools met together for convenience. In that school, there was no toilet paper or soap in the bathrooms. We learned that there had been persistent problems, so supplies were withheld to discourage vandalism. These workshops, despite the physical surroundings, were charged with great energy and a bit of creative chaos. It was difficult, however, to get students from different schools to work together, so the organizers interrupted the workshops to engage in community-building activities, such as brainstorming a name for the group (“Team Libretto”), doing stretching and movement exercises in a circle, and chanting together. These efforts met with some success.

In another venue, a public girls’ school not too far away from the center of the city, the organizers observed significant differences. The music rooms were soundproof, the instruments new, and the hallways were bright and full of installation art. Here an air of calm creativity prevailed. Still further away, the students met in an historic, renovated auditorium that was equipped with state-of-the-art sound systems and instruments. The economic disparities within the public system were obvious, but the process of collective writing served to focus energies toward a common goal.

The organizers shared the work of each separate workshop session with all participants to foster the weaving of common threads throughout the text.

It was important to extend the sense of equality and community among the artists to all participants. When the director and actor, Nievelstein, informed each group of students that all would use the informal “you” (du/ihr) form with everyone, the students seemed slightly disbelieving. He stressed the cooperative nature of the enterprise and assured the students that this form of familiar address was standard in the theater, for example. This informality made each of the students stakeholders in the project and established a level playing field. The form of address, which includes children calling adults by their first names, was challenging at first, but by the end of the week, the first-name basis was solid. Teachers were supposed to be present at all times during the workshops, and the contributions and patience of the teachers, parents, and guardians of the participants were crucial. But equally significant were the working relationships and bonds between the artists and the students, as these were based in a common project that was not immediately related to schoolwork. The final performances seemed distant at the time of the workshops, and not all students would participate until the end; some commitments would waver, but everything did come together for the July 2010 premiere.

## Chorus strategies

The composer had set the content and the arc of the narrative for the seven choruses. With help from some teachers and Pappas, I worked with the groups to meet these ends using different exercises and prompts. The age difference seemed vast given the range (10–17 years). I used PowerPoint prompts, familiar from foreign-language pedagogy, to provide a common starting point. I then constructed a series of fill-in-the-blank exercises, word games, and group narratives about the challenging themes of loss, love, and memory. In order to appeal to and motivate all participants, I also asked the students to draw pictures of monsters (for the Furies), the heroes (for the heroes of the Elysian Fields), and then to share the images and discuss them in small groups. The pictures gave everyone insight into the visual imaginations of the students, but also engaged different types of learners and creative processes. One child who did not speak German comfortably contributed one of the more surreal images of a monster, and the drawing elicited abundant admiring feedback and associative phrases.

The first chorus consists of a traditional welcome. The chorus was intended to comment, not to act, and would ultimately be performed by professional singers. The purpose was to offer greetings to the audience, account for yet another Orpheus opera, and offer insight into the languages of the participants. First drafts included greetings in Vietnamese, Kazakh, Turkish, Hindi, Mandarin, Greek, Russian, Polish, Serbo-Croatian, and German. Several students went home, checked with parents or relatives to get the correct spelling and pronunciation of greetings they had only ever heard, and brought the corrections back for editing. Some of the teachers helped with longer Turkish phrases, and the mezzo-soprano and one participant from a foster home helped with the Greek. Several lines in Greek recur throughout the opera, which was written in German as the unifying language of the group, to reflect as well the original language of written forms of the Orpheus myth. In introducing the material, I referred to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, but also to U2’s music and range of plays, poems, novels, short stories, and films, from Argentina to India, from Brazil to Boston. The composer brought a sense of local “ownership” to the material by highlighting Gluck’s nearby birthplace and his legacy for opera in Nuremberg. The cumulative effect of this international authorship was to break down any barriers, real or imagined, between the students and the creation of art.

There were some surprises as well. Some of the older participants insisted they could only express their feelings in English, so they wrote several stanzas in English. Some lines made the final cut. The groups included students who were not in school, but in social institutions and of the same age. After some initial problems with motivating the diverse groups of students and non-students, the participants from outside the school systems were integrated into the larger group as well. There was quite, for example, considerable tension among some of the girls, and their friends were pitted against each other. The rivalry between two students briefly included physical contact, shoving, and pushing, while partisan onlookers filmed the jostling with their mobile phones. I asked both the girls to work on some lines in their shared first language, so for a while at least their energy was channeled into a kind of competitive composition. One girl helped me during the breaks. I have near-native fluency in German, but am not a native speaker, and some of the girls wanted to make sure all the punctuation was correct. All participants contributed what they could.

There were inevitably some road bumps. Several students, for example were not collected at the conclusion of the workshop; others did not follow their teachers' directives to meet outside for the trip back to school. Some simply were distracted. Still, there was a common purpose, a structure to achieve it, and a performance to prepare for on the final Saturday of the libretto workshops.

The writing workshops concluded after one week. A public performance of the libretto choruses took place in the school auditorium in Nuremberg. This concert-like performance provided a forum to present the preliminary results of the writing workshops. With little to no rehearsal, a small group of approximately 15 students helped read the texts from my laptop computer screen – there was no access to a printer or Xerox machine to help on a Saturday afternoon in a severely underfunded school. Parents, friends, siblings, and the artists and some producers assembled in the auditorium to hear the choruses. I announced the collective author of the material as “Team Libretto,” having borrowed a page from the sports playbook during a workshop to help the students develop a sense of spirit and also work off some extra energy and voice. With some coaching, the students read the freshly-written and edited choruses. The performance was rewarded with appreciative applause.

Several parents approached the artists afterwards and confessed that they never believed students that age could write that way. Later that night, in a debriefing with the artists, I shared a printed copy of the texts. They read silently and with astonishment as they finished one page and passed it down to the next person. Occasionally one silent reader would marvel over a turn of phrase and ask me its origin. One phrase echoed the sense of loss Orpheus experienced on the wedding day when he loses his beloved Eurydice, who is bitten by a poisonous snake and dies: “Der Schatten ohne Sonne, die Musik ohne Ton” (Shadow without sunshine, music without sound). That particular phrase was the result of an exercise in which I prompted the students to think about things that seem to go together “naturally,” then worked past the clichés to produce something fresh and immediate.

## **Composition workshops**

After the libretto workshops concluded, the composer and I remained in contact about the finer points of the collaboration, from elaborate explanations of grammar to loftier moments of intent. I completed the work, incorporating phrases from the choruses, as well as inspiration from the pictures, notes from the workshops, and allusions to other interpretations of the myth.

The composer coordinated 10 music workshops with the students (some of whom participated in the preliminary workshops as well), with the goal of co-writing the music for the choruses. With attention to notation, among other things, the participants succeeded in producing the final



versions. According to Hakenberg, one student wrote the entire seventh chorus herself. Hakenberg emphasized the importance of diverse contributors to the project: “Ich habe es mit einzelnen Kindern zu tun, die ganz unterschiedliche Stimmen in die Oper einbringen” (I am working with individual children who bring completely different voices to the opera; quoted in Mitsching, 2009, p. 28). The students expressed similar surprise as those who participated in the writing workshops. They did not realize what they could do until someone asked them and they tried it.

According to a workshop report and an interview with the composer, the composition participants developed a sense of their own creativity, a commitment to teamwork, and a new awareness of music in their lives. Hakenberg emphasized the importance of the collaboration with students. He met with the participants on 10 weekends to compose the choruses together. He describes their contribution in the following way:

We discussed the text at length and in detail, we spoke the text together, we started to sing it, to feel it, to improvise different layers of content and learn how they felt when put together. I used the material the we collaborated upon and that was the result of all the collaborations . . . I'm very grateful to those young people for sharing their time with me and their ideas with me that all found their way into the score. [Their input] gave me the opportunity to have pieces in the score that seem to have somewhat different voices. (Hakenberg, 2011)

Hakenberg stresses the contributions of the students. The co-composers would take a bow and accept the recognition of an appreciate audience after both performances in July. At the conclusion of the composition workshops, 5 months remained before the performances.

## Performing Orpheus

The opera premiered at the Internationale Gluck-Opern-Festspiele, 16–23 July 2010, in Nuremberg. The selected venue for *Schau nicht zurück, Orfeo!* was an outdoor stage in front of the New Museum. Designed by Susanne Pische, who is a set and costume designer at the Staatstheater Nürnberg, the black stage set was two-tiered, connected by an angled “slide” that connected the upper- and the underworld. With choreography by Läser and Bärtsch, the children’s ballet integrated the workshops with the final performances. A total of 26 students performed a challenging contemporary choreography, developed from some gestures that had originated in the preliminary dance exercises for the workshops and fully articulated by the professional dancers and choreographers, Läser and Bärtsch. Pische’s costumes transformed (without a change) the ballet corps from shrouded Furies into benign citizens of Elysium. The musicians, under the expert conducting of Selwyn, overcame site challenges, including oppressive heat and a thunderstorm that delayed the opening night by an hour, to deliver two strong performances. The original concept, along with much of the preparation and organizational efforts, is credited to the mezzo-soprano Frances Pappas, who sang the role of Orfeo, moving the audience to tears on more than one occasion. Present in the workshops from the beginning, Pappas’ performance won the lasting admiration of the participating students who knew in great detail the extent of her work on the project.

The spirit of teamwork reigned supreme. Volunteers mopped up the soggy stage, and the sound engineer reconnected computer screens needed to represent the conductor and his cues to the singers, who could not see him directly as the musicians were located in a covered venue beside the main stage. One member of the chorus remarked on the freshness of the libretto. Another,

after the first performance, commented on how unusual it seemed to sing opera in Turkish. Here, too,

the sense of collective effort overcame cultural stereotypes about opera as a cultural genre. In his essay, "Ein Türke geht nicht in die Oper" (A Turk doesn't go to the opera), Zafer Şenocak (1992) uses the form to draw a dividing line between the cultivated German self and the opposite Turkish "other" in order to break down simplistic binary oppositions that still have a purchase on contemporary attitudes. The effort to "look back," as part of this Orpheus project, was conceived in part as possible path for moving forward. More specifically, the incorporation of Turkish lines in a German opera, especially since many of the students spoke Turkish at home, was one creative strategy used to overcome the perhaps facile opposition Şenocak writes about in his essay.

There was some evidence that the project's goals of integration across school tracks and buy-in to the creative process, while achieved, could not transcend all differences. Above all, the purpose of the project was to create an opera and include young adult learners in that process, and the participants were students, not test subjects. While it is difficult to judge the lasting effects of the project, a few conclusions can be observed.

## Conclusions

The one-time project is now over, but the lessons learned are ongoing. It is challenging to measure the success of the project in terms of overall integration, and the ultimate goal was to produce a work of art. Informal evidence indicates that the young adult participants found pleasure and excitement in creating the opera. The consensus from the participating students was that workshops were incredibly fun. One sixth-grader: "didn't really like this type of music before, classical and opera, but now I get goose bumps when I hear someone singing it" (quoted in Nievelstein, 2010, p. 49). Other participants bought keyboards and other instruments during the course of the workshops, or joined choral groups. Many intend to continue in music education as a profession.

As a result of their work with the opera, several children transferred schools, and while this was not an intended goal, it is evidence that the participation in the project motivated some students to seek greater opportunities. The impulse to work toward a common creative end has been encouraged in all who participated in bringing the opera to the stage. Both public performances were recorded and filmed, and both sponsors and participants will receive a copy of the opera, along with a promotional bonus feature about the efforts and their results. In summarizing the project and the best practices, I hear a quiet voice of objection in my own head about the implicit unfairness of relying on this type of extracurricular endeavor to foster cooperation and education that should be a right, not a privilege. This project, however, may serve as a model for similar efforts to integrate students and young adult learners into the creative process of composing and performing a contemporary work of art.

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## Notes

1. The *Hauptschule* provides basic general education: the *Realschule* more extensive general education. The *Gymnasium*, the most academic of the three tracks in this system, provides students with a diploma (*Abitur*) that allows them to study at universities. Alternatively, some of the states have *Gesamtschulen*, comprehensive schools that combine the three tracks.

2. Selwyn is based in London. He has directed more than 50 operas at prominent international venues, and is a co-founder of the International Chamber Music Festival of Nuremberg. Kühner lives and works as a director in Munich. She has previous experience working with an opera for children ("Ich bin du," Nürnberger Oper, 2002), and has also cooperated on performances through the International Chamber Music Festival. Läser and Bärtsch are dancers and choreographers who had worked together before. Läser and Bärtsch were both dancers with the Tanztheater Nürnberg for 7 years. They choreographed pieces together for the Internationale Gluck-Opern-Festspiele Nürnberg, Nievelstein, who also wrote the program copy for the Internationale Gluck-Opern-Festspiele Nürnberg (2010), was engaged as an actor for the Staatstheater Nürnberg; he now is affiliated with the Landestheater Salzburg.
3. The participating schools included the Daniel-Johann-Preisler Schule Nürnberg, the Franz-Ludwig-Gymnasium Bamberg, the Veit-Stoß-Realschule Nürnberg, the Olympia Morata Gymnasium Schweinfurt, and the Dr. Theo-Schoeller-Schule Nürnberg. Other participants included young adults from foster care and teenage parent groups.

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### Author biography

Patricia Anne Simpson is Professor of German Studies at Montana State University, where she also teaches in the Women's and Gender Studies program. She earned a PhD at Yale University in Germanic Languages and Literatures, and has taught at the University of Michigan, Hunter College, and Kenyon College. She has published articles and book chapters on German Classicism, Romanticism, and Idealist philosophy, and also on issues of contemporary culture and literature. Her books include *The Erotics of War in German Romanticism* (2006), *Cultures of Violence in the New German Street* (2012), and the forthcoming *Re-imagining the European Family: Cultures of Immigration*. She is co-editor of *The Enlightened Eye: Goethe and Visual Culture* (2007), *Enlightened War: German Theories and Cultures of Warfare from Frederick the Great to Clausewitz* (2011), and the forthcoming *Religion, Reason, and Culture in the Age of Goethe*. Simpson has received grants from DAAD, Fulbright-Hays, and the German Historical Institute. Additionally, she was Project Director and Principal Investigator for a US Department of Education Title VI UISFL grant (2008–2010). Simpson is currently completing a book on play in pedagogical theory and practices in the German-speaking transatlantic world, and co-editing a volume about right-wing extremism and media in the US and Europe.