

Faculty Report

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College Professional Studies and Fine Arts

Proposal Title *Faculty Field Study For Musical Theatre Graduate Programs*

Country Visited Sweden

Institution Visited *Hogskolan for Teater—Opera och Musikal (Artisten)*
University of Gothenburg, Sweden

Dates of Travel March 28 — April 4, 2008

Number of Participants

- SDSU MFA Musical Theatre Students — 8
- Gothenburg University *Artisten* Musical Theatre Students — 23
- SDSU Faculty — 2
- Gothenburg Faculty/Staff — 5

Previous IP proposals submitted and grants awarded

2002, Dr. Rick Simas; 2004, Dr. Terry O'Donnell & Professor Paula Kalustian

Have all required reports been submitted? Yes

Other funding for this activity

Individual donors, scholarships, and grants to support student airfare and housing

Proposal Abstract

OIP funds were allocated to underwrite travel and housing expenses to support two SDSU School of School of Theatre, Television and Film faculty members' one-week residency in Gothenburg, Sweden. With additional support from other sources, Dr. Rick Simas, Professor Paula Kalustian and the entire MFA Musical Theatre Class of 2008 (8 graduate students) traveled to Gothenburg University (*Artisten*), to interact (including study, rehearsal, and performance) with *Artisten* students and faculty in their graduate musical theatre program. This

activity enhanced educational experiences currently offered in our SDSU graduate program by immersing our students in analogous performance activity within another culture. The Gothenburg residency satisfied all SDSU MFA Degree requirements for an off-campus residency (Theatre 627/746).

TRAVEL REPORT

I. OVERVIEW — INTENTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

SDSU Master of Fine Arts Musical Theatre Students (8) and SDSU TTF Faculty (2) collaborated in a variety of scholarly and performance activities with host faculty, staff and students. Gothenburg University (*Hogskolan for Teater—Opera och Musikal: Artisten*) is an established institution for musical theatre education and performance in Scandinavia. Our residency there included master classes, artist demonstrations, voice study, student rehearsal/workshop studies, and a performance showcase presentation. Through a variety of activities and interactions, faculty and students explored musical theatre repertoire, rehearsal techniques, and performance styles.

The OIP grant supported activities of Dr. Rick Simas and Professor Paula Kalustian (both of the School of Theatre, Television, and Film). They collaborated with Dr. Terry O'Donnell (TTF/Music and Dance), Dr. Anne-Charlotte Harvey (TTF, Emeritus), and Wendy Thomson (TTF Staff Pianist) in preparation for this cultural exchange/performance experience. Student airfare and housing were funded through other resources.

II. BACKGROUND/PREPARATION FOR THE TRIP ABROAD

• **Previous Activities:** In Spring 2002, Dr. Rick Simas received an OIP grant to observe and evaluate musical theatre training in Sweden at the *Ballettakademi* in Stockholm and Gothenburg, and the graduate training program at the University of Gothenburg's School of Drama, Opera, and Musical Theatre (*Artisten*). Dr. Simas concluded that a residency by our SDSU faculty and students would be a valuable educational experience for the graduate musical theatre programs of both SDSU and the University of Gothenburg.

(For further information on his initial contact and its role in establishing an ongoing cultural exchange between these two institutions, see Part VI (Additional Information): Overview by Dr. Rick Simas of his Initial Contact with Artisten Faculty and Students (2002).

In Fall 2003, Sven-Eric Dahlberg (Program Director) and Erik Fagerborn (freelance stage director and *Artisten* adjunct faculty) were in residence at SDSU to observe classes, rehearsals, and performances of the SDSU MFA Musical Theatre Program. At this time, plans were made to structure and implement a Spring 2004 *Artisten* residency.

CPSFA earmarked funds from the "Adopt a Rising Star" Scholarship to cover 8 MFA students' airfare and housing expenses to participate in Spring 2004 in an Audition Showcase with theatrical agents and casting directors in New York City. This was followed by the Gothenburg residency, which was scheduled to compliment the New York City activities.

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A number of donors to the musical theatre program made contributions toward student expenses, and the San Diego chapter of the Swedish Women's Educational Association (SWEA) also made a generous contribution to support the Gothenburg residency.

In Spring 2005, *Artisten* students and faculty traveled to SDSU to participate in a residency. Activities included a series of master classes on acting, singing, and dance by SDSU full-time and adjunct faculty. While at SDSU, *Artisten* students visited cultural centers throughout Southern California and interacted with SDSU students and staff, as well as local theatre artists. At the end of the residency, students and faculty presented a successful public performance in the Don Powell Theatre at San Diego State University, followed by a reception on the Powell stage hosted by SWEA, which included local Swedish dignitaries.

SDSU students and faculty again planned a week-long residency at *Artisten*. However, sufficient funding could not be secured, and unfortunately, the exchange could not take place.

In Spring 2007, *Artisten* students and faculty traveled to SDSU to participate in their second residency. Students took classes, learned new repertoire, and visited cultural and entertainment attractions throughout Southern California. At the end of the residency, students and faculty presented a sold-out concert performance at the Hall of Champions, followed by a reception at the Sweden House, both in Balboa Park, hosted by SWEA and including local Swedish dignitaries.

• COLLABORATORS AND E-MAIL CONTACTS

***Artisten* administrators and selected faculty for the residency**

Anna Maria Koziomtzis
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Vernon Mound
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Sven-Eric Dahlberg
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Derek Barnes
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Margareta Hanning
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Faculty and staff representing SDSU

Professor Paula Kalustian
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Dr. Rick Simas
Acting and Stage Direction
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Music preparation and lyric translation (SDSU)

Dr. Terry O'Donnell
Music and Musical Direction
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Wendy Thomson
Staff Pianist, Vocal Coach
wendolynn@aol.com

Dr. Anne-Charlotte Harvey
Emeritus, Theatre Faculty
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• ARTISTEN (GOTHENBURG UNIVERSITY) COMPARED TO SDSU

The SDSU Master of Fine Arts Musical Theatre Program is one of only four such graduate programs in the United States. Its course of study offers a rigorous academic and performance skills program for students seeking excellence in musical theatre. The program's graduates have appeared on Broadway, in national and international tours, in regional theatres, and on local stages. Other alumni write, produce, direct, choreograph, and serve on the faculties of schools and universities nationwide.

The *Artisten* program is the only accredited educational institution for musical theatre training in Scandinavia. In many ways, musical theatre training at *Artisten* is comparable to that of the SDSU graduate program. Admission to both programs is highly selective and requires a rigorous audition/admission process. Where the programs primarily differ is that the curriculum of the two-year SDSU program is a unique combination of academic and performance skills training. Presently, *Artisten*'s three-year program is devoted almost entirely to skills training. However, they've been in discussion to include academic course work within their curriculum.

III. ACTIVITY SUMMARY

• **Friday, March 28**

Left Lindbergh Field, San Diego at 8am. Arrived 3:40pm at Dulles International Airport, Virginia. Left Dulles at 6:20pm.

• **Saturday, March 29**

Arrived in Copenhagen at 7:15am. Left Copenhagen at 8:35am, and arrived 9:20am at *Landvetter Airport*, Gothenburg. Students checked in at student apartments or bed-and-breakfast (*Eklanda*), and faculty checked in at *Hotel Lorensberg*. Free day for students to explore Gothenburg.

• **Sunday, March 30**

Students free to sightsee, shop, and rehearse for tomorrow's audition at *Artisten*. Faculty and students attend matinee performance of *Little Shop of Horrors* (Gothenburg's resident professional theatre company). SDSU's faculty attend informal dinner and planning session with *Artisten* faculty at local restaurant.

• **Monday, March 31**

Voice master class with Professor Derek Barnes—warm-up and improvisation. Auditions for solo performances in April 4 *Artisten* concert. Music ensemble and duet rehearsals. Faculty meeting to cast April 4 concert. SDSU students attend performance of *King and I* presented by *Artisten*.

• **Tuesday, April 1**

Ensemble, duet, and individual rehearsals. Reception at City Hall for official welcoming and Q & A with Chamber of Commerce representatives. SDSU students attend performance of *Assassins* presented by *Artisten*. SDSU faculty create program order and create written program for April 4 concert.

• **Wednesday, April, 2**

Voice master class with Derek Barnes—warm-up and improvisation. Ensemble and individual music rehearsals, voice coaching, and staging rehearsals. Yoga class for SDSU and *Artisten* students taught by *Artisten* faculty member Anthoula Papadakis. Afternoon tour of the Gothenburg Opera House.

• **Thursday, April, 3**

Spacing rehearsal in *Artisten* Concert Hall. Warm-up and improvisation with Prof. Derek Barnes. Dress rehearsal in *Artisten* Concert Hall. Evening performance and reception afterwards.

• **Friday April, 4**

Left *Landvetter Airport*, Gothenburg at 10:40am, and arrived in Copenhagen at 11:20am. Left Copenhagen at 12:20pm, and arrived 3:00pm at Dulles International Airport, Virginia. Left Dulles International Airport at 5:45pm, and arrived Lindbergh Field, San Diego at 8pm.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The Gothenburg residency offered a number of cultural, pedagogic, rehearsal process, and performance opportunities for SDSU MFA musical theatre students:

- Study abroad to explore cultural differences in musical theatre training and performance
- Comparison of audition techniques and performance styles in American and Central European musical theatre

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- Learning experiences with international students in a unique arts-training environment,
- Bilingual performance opportunities in ensemble singing (English, Swedish)
- Bilingual performance opportunities in duet scenes and songs (English, Norwegian, Swedish, Spanish)
- Mentoring opportunities for American students to share with Swedish artists
- Mentoring opportunities for Swedish students to share with American artists
- Performance experience with a Swedish audience
- Fulfilling MFA curriculum goals for international travel experience

• ***SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROJECT—EXCHANGE RESIDENCY FUTURE PLANS***

The faculty members of both programs will continue to exchange ideas about future collaborations. The SDSU faculty hope to bring Professor Derek Barnes from London to do a series of master classes with the SDSU MFA Class of 2010. *Artisten* faculty and administrators hope to bring students and faculty to SDSU in 2009 for an exchange residency. Other plans are under consideration.

• ***SDSU FACULTY FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES***

The SDSU Musical Theatre faculty thanked donors who supported the Spring 2008 collaboration between the *Artisten* and SDSU programs.

Follow-up activities included: oral summary reports, viewing rehearsal and concert video, listen to audio rehearsal and performance excerpts, reviewing programs, photos, and readings from selected student written evaluations.

On May 20, at a formal reception in La Jolla, several SDSU students performed for and shared experiences with the Swedish Women's Educational Association (SWEA) of their residency in Gothenburg.

V. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: STUDENT EVALUATIONS

Upon returning to San Diego, SDSU MFA Musical Theatre students were asked to evaluate the International Programs exchange between graduate students and faculty of SDSU's MFA Musical Theatre Program and students and faculty of Gothenburg University's *Hogskolan for Teater, Oper och Musikal (Artisten)* in Gothenburg, Sweden. All students have given permission for their names to be included with their statements. The following are a selection of responses from these evaluations:

Joseph Almohaya – Class of 2008

The exchange that the MFA students had with the Gothenburg students was, for me, more about comparing our similarities and also some of our differences with each other in relation to performance skills within the art of musical theatre. The *Artisten* students demonstrated a "natural" ability of performing and being "in the moment" of their pieces, which was wonderful to see. Conversely, the MFA's technical skills were very much apparent — being able to process

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and find reasoning behind the actual doing, the “why”. It was also interesting to see that how we break down songs is similar. I had some time to break down my duet with Frida, one of the *Artisten* students, and they break down their songs in much the same way—by attaching action to thought.

Cheryl Cline – Class of 2008

The student exchange with students from *Artisten*, University of Gothenburg was a very special part of our MFA musical theatre program. Starting last year when students from *Artisten* came to SDSU, and again with us returning the visit to Gothenburg this March, the experience of working with people who share the same passion for musical theatre bond us in a unique way. What amazed me the most is how we instantly became lifelong friends. My favorite part of the week was working on duets, trios and group songs. Seeing how differently they work, and watching them adapt to our methods was inspiring. They were so eager to learn from our professors, and learned a lot about movement in the few short days we worked together. I will remember this experience fondly, and value all that I have learned from the exchange.

Lindsey Gearhart – Class of 2008

What has struck me the most, not just about our trip to Sweden but also about the *Artisten* students who visited us last year, are the similarities rather than the differences between our two groups. It seems to me that there is a class of students halfway around the world in Sweden leading parallel lives to our own! Our time in Gothenburg was a reminder of how universal musical theatre is. I think too often our studies are focused only on theatre in our country, or on Broadway, and we forget how far reaching its effects are. The trip was definitely one of the most memorable experiences of our two years in the program, and something that will stay with me for a long time.

Jessica Knowles – Class of 2008

One of the most rewarding parts of our Sweden experience was watching the growth in the M3's. It was like watching a light click on in their heads. They all seemed to rise to a new performance level through their work with Paula and Rick. Along with that, the cultural experience was amazing. I don't think I have met warmer, more welcoming people in my life. Everyone we met at Gothenburg University welcomed us with open arms.

Steve Limones – Class of 2008

Less than two weeks ago, my colleagues and I from the MFA Musical Theatre Program participated in an educational exchange with students in the *Artisten* program from the University of Gothenburg in Sweden. We took classes together, participated in seminars and workshops, danced and performed together. To put it plainly, our eight days spent in Sweden are some of the best days of my life. But what made this experience so incredible was the connection we all had to one another. It's amazing to me that two groups of individuals, living halfway across the planet from each other, can be connected through the means of Musical Theatre. That alone brought us all together, and I now not only have colleagues in Sweden, but brothers and sisters, as well.

Maeve Martin – Class of 2008

Getting the opportunity to travel and study in Sweden was a life-changing experience. We were fortunate enough not only to be immersed in Swedish culture but also another country's love of musical theatre. The most interesting thing for me was to see so many Swedish musical theatre productions. We saw three productions while we were there and performed in one. To be an audience member and a participant in the Swedish theatre community was a great experience. It helped me not only as a performer but also as an educator. The people of Gothenburg were so hospitable. From the moment we got there, I felt welcomed and safe. The Gothenburg Town Council also gave us a reception. The city and culture were beautiful, and we were able to experience our passion of musical theatre from a completely new perspective.

Charlie Reuter – Class of 2008

Recently, our class of eight MFA candidates traveled to Gothenburg to participate in an educational exchange with the *Artisten* students of Gothenburg University. Together, we attended class, performed, ate, and even did Yoga! We attended performances of three American musicals in Swedish - and presented our final concert in four different languages. The backstage tour of the Gothenburg Opera, located along the water, simply blew us away with its hydraulic stage, ninety-piece orchestra pit, and million-dollar facility. Most importantly, we took the time to connect to the students we were working with. Last year, when a group from Sweden visited us, we bonded and shared a tearful final concert and goodbye. All of those graduates returned to visit us this year in Sweden, and we were able to hang out at their favorite night spot, *The Stage Door*. This trip allowed us to discover the culture of Gothenburg, and a great deal about ourselves. It would be impossible to accomplish this trip without the combined efforts of our teachers and the funds contributed by the OIP.

Andrew Smith – Class of 2008

Last year, I had an amazing time when the Swedes came here and stayed with me. It opened my eyes to European ideas and culture. It was an experience I know I'll remember for the rest of my life. This year, we had the privilege of going to Sweden as a group, and it changed my life. I loved everything about my experience: staying in Johan's home, eating a traditional Swedish breakfast, walking EVERYWHERE! It was amazing to be working on theatre in a country that heavily supports the arts and holds actors in high regard. Sometimes, here in the US, when you tell someone you're getting your Masters in Theatre, especially musical theatre, people scoff. There, actors seemed to be so much more appreciated and even gain financial support federally. I would love to return to Europe, especially Sweden, and work there someday. I will forever be thankful for the chance I had during grad school to visit.

VI. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: OVERVIEW BY DR. RICK SIMAS OF CIRCUMSTANCES LEADING TO AND INCLUDING INITIAL CONTACT WITH ARTISTEN FACULTY AND STUDENTS (2002)

To understand how the cultural exchange came about between San Diego State University's MFA Musical Theatre Program and the University of Gothenburg's *Hogskolan for Teater, Opera och Musikal (Artisten)*, it's necessary to go back a number of years before 2002—the year

when I first went to Sweden to research musical theatre training programs in Stockholm and Gothenburg. According to my colleague in the School of Theatre, Television and Film, emeritus faculty member Dr. Anne-Charlotte Harvey, who is Swedish and was for many years our school's International Programs representative, the first "connection" between the SDSU and Gothenburg programs began in the late 1980s. It was then that a Swedish scholar and expert in pop culture, Uno "Myggran" Ericsson, gave a scholarship to theatre and opera director Georg Malvius to study musical theatre training at SDSU, which had begun one of the nation's first MFA Musical Theatre Programs in 1982. There was no such program in Scandinavia at the time, and Ericsson had heard about the one at from Dr. Harvey. Malvius visited San Diego, and in 1992 he became Director of the first Musical Theatre Program in Scandinavia, at the University of Gothenburg.

Four years later, in 1996, an undergraduate student in the Theatre Department named Michael Dalager, whose passion was musical theatre, decided he wanted to study abroad in Sweden, preferably studying theatre—or more specifically, musical theatre. (He'd decided to study in Sweden as his ethnicity is Swedish and Filipino, although he had been raised mostly in the American Filipino culture.) Dalager discussed with Dr. Harvey his desire to study in Sweden. As there was no international program established in Sweden in the area of theatre, Mike decided to spend a year there studying political science, learning to speak Swedish, and seeing musical productions, many of which he learned were performed in Swedish. At about the time that his year abroad was coming to an end, there was a casting call for the Stockholm production of *Miss Saigon*, for which Mike auditioned and was cast in the ensemble and went on to play the leading role of the "Engineer." While in Sweden, Michael did some research on musical-theatre training in Scandinavia, as he found that a number of the performers with whom he was working had been trained at *Artisten* (the University of Gothenburg), or the *Balletakademien*, which has schools in both Stockholm and Gothenburg.

Having been in contact with Michael, I worked with Dr. Harvey on securing an OIP grant. With the aid of both of them, I arranged meetings with faculty and administrators from both *Artisten* and the *Balletakademien*, and on April 19, 2002, I flew to Stockholm, where Michael met me. There, I attended several musicals in order to get an idea of the skill level of musical theatre performers in Sweden. I was surprised by how adept they were at performing what we consider to essentially be an American art form. I also attended a workshop performance of a new musical in which Michael was appearing with a number of accomplished performers I'd seen in other shows in Stockholm. We visited the *Balletakademien* there, although Michael had told me that the school in Stockholm primarily trains dancers. By the time I left Stockholm on April 23, I felt I had a pretty good sense of musical theatre training, performers, theatres, and productions there. Mike and I took the train to Gothenburg, where we met administrators and faculty of *Artisten*—including Margareta Hanning and Sven-Eric Dahlberg—with whom we attended a concert production that night of *Porgy & Bess*. We spent the next day at the Gothenburg *Balletakademien*, where we met the school's director, Bo Westerholm, and observed tap and musical theatre classes. That evening, I attended performances at *Artisten* of *Kiss Me, Kate* and *West Side Story* performed by the school's two classes of musical theatre students. The following day, Michael and I met with administrators at *Artisten* to discuss the possibility of an exchange between our schools, and I demonstrated to the musical theatre classes using Michael as my student the

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methods that we use in America to coach musical theatre students. I then went about coaching all ten of the *Artisten* students, which went well. That evening, Michael and I attended a dance recital at the *Balletakademien* and spoke further with the school's director, Bo Westerholm. The following day, Michael took the train back to Stockholm, and I attended the evening performance of *Lulu* at the Gothenburg Opera House. On Saturday morning, April 27, I flew back to San Diego after a week's stay in Sweden.

As *Artisten*'s musical theatre program is a graduate level course of study, and their students are primarily singer-actors (as opposed to those at the *Balletakademien*, who are primarily dancers), it seemed a good fit for a cultural exchange with SDSU's MFA Musical Theatre Program. Fortunately, the director of the program, Sven-Eric Dahlberg, agreed, for he and an adjunct faculty member of the program, Erik Fägerborn, came to visit us at SDSU in October of the following year. From that time, the exchange has steadily developed, as noted in Part II of this report, "Background/Preparation for the Trip Abroad." The only drawback was in Spring 2006, when sufficient funding could not be found for the MFA Class of 2006 to travel to Gothenburg, and the cultural exchange was aborted that year.

**All information should be sent to The Office of International Programs via e-mail:
oip@mail.sdsu.edu**