

My time at POV has been a discovery of my artistry as a creator. For the past few years, I have been dreaming of creating spaces of co-creation with audiences. To go farther than just talking with the audience, inviting them to listen and reflect on what they hear. I was hoping to have them fully involved, being part of the creation, informing me of what the art form should be. I thought that this could free my understanding of what opera should be with all the codes and traditions that were taught to me through formal education. Those spaces would be egalitarian, places I would not be the expert but where we would create a collective project.

I had never found where I could create those projects. They require a decent amount of resources that I could not find. Rebecca allowed me to invent them. She gave me a carte blanche to create any project and she offered me the support and resources to do so. Therefore, my time with POV was a time of experimentation and learning.

One moment that will stick with me forever will be the Open House. I had pitched the idea to Rebecca that I should have the audience direct my staging. The goal was to introduce people to the basic concept of staging an opera while doing it in a hands-on activity and not through a lecture. The fear was that people would not engage, they'd be scared to commit and offer ideas. How wrong was I ! People got invested quickly and as soon as someone was giving an idea, someone else would add another level. It became an exchange between audience members, and I was not leading the activity anymore, audience members were. It was a huge learning for me to realize that opera doesn't need to be a complex art form that has barriers for some people. With very simple and playful activities, we can make everyone engaged in the art form.

The other fascinating thing that came out about this was the idea that we can empower people to use their creative side and not shy away from it. Someone came to me after the experience, letting me know that they didn't want to express their idea because they thought it wasn't grand enough. They also judge other's ideas. It all changed when I performed the staging at the end because it was good. This experience is allowing me to see the benefits to engage everyone in more than a dialogue but in the co-creation and deconstruction of opera. Not only will it bring more people to the shows but it will also be a way for artist and opera companies to reinvent their practice.

I feel confident to pitch my project to opera companies. I feel confident to create those projects. I feel confident to explore new sides of my practice. This is something that I've been longing for years but never found the courage, nor the resources to try. POV CEQ's program gave me the opportunity to jump in and try what I wasn't sure would work. To allow people to try something they are sure will work is great. But to allow people to explore projects they are not sure will be a success is so valuable. Failing can lead to more learning than succeeding. We need more spaces open to exploring risky projects. Thank you for allowing me to try so many projects. It was a life changer!

- Simon Chalifoux