

The Civic Engagement Artist Residency (CEAR) at Pacific Opera Victoria has been, without exaggeration, life changing. This program offers a safe and inclusive space that welcomed me as an emerging portfolio artist. Importantly, there is no age limit and it provides financial support, making CEAR accessible to artists like me who might otherwise be unable to participate due to costs. In today's post-pandemic world, art-making has become a privilege that not everyone can afford, and CEAR recognizes the importance of fostering artists from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

One of the standout aspects of this program is the opportunity to learn from mentors who are leaders in their respective fields. I arrived with a project concept and received extensive guidance on anything from writing to camera work. I constantly felt like no suggestion of mine was too outlandish, instead, I was offered creative solutions for my artistic decisions. This support enabled me to develop a complex multimedia project, and the openness to explore various ideas gave me the confidence to take artistic risks. In an industry known for its rejection, CEAR offered an entirely different and nurturing experience.

My digital project incorporated stop-motion animation, CGI, and AI effects, and I took on all video and audio editing myself (however, the program offers a professional editor for those who need support).

This experience not only expanded my skills but also led to freelance work as a video editor. It made me realize that there are no ideas too challenging to express; the key is to find the right tools. So when I finally got to work on our live installation for the Voices in Nature, I felt confident enough to break away from my very operatic artistic paradigm. I am so grateful to Rebecca Haas for connecting me with Natalie Rollins, who quickly became much more than my collaborator on this part of CEAR but also a friend and a creative inspiration. I'd say meeting Natalie and exploring our art became the most impactful part of my residency. The collaboration led us out of our comfort zones and into creative freedom, which, of course sounds like a cliché, but considering my conventional operatic background, the freedom of expression is not a given.

Beside the very practical aspect of digital production and building installations, CEAR also offered a lot of invaluable information on the business of artmaking: fundraising, networking, marketing - I brought back a notebook of important notes. All four of us in the program were encouraged to meet with any team member of the Pacific Opera Victoria and ask our questions about their work or hear their advice. It is a rare opportunity to have a one on one with a seasoned professional and run your future projects by them!

Overall, CEAR has sparked a significant transformation in me, encouraging a more proactive and confident approach to my artistry. Currently, I'm working on a project that

explores the connection between Cree and Ukrainian communities in Canada, an idea that emerged organically from my interactions at CEAR. My newfound knowledge of indigenous cultures and community engagement is highly relevant to my upcoming projects.

I hope that many more artists get to experience a program like the Civic Engagement Artist Residency. It's a life-changing experience that offers exceptional mentorship, creative freedom, and invaluable insights into both art and its business aspects - all the skills vital for the future portfolio artists.

--

Natalya Gennadi Matyusheva