



# The OMA Outlook

## **WELCOME LETTER**

It is a pleasure to welcome you to our first issue of THE OMA OUTLOOK, the newsletter for Opening Minds through the Arts (OMA) Project. Our intention is to keep you, our supporters and participants, informed and excited. We hope you will find this first issue inspiring and that you will want to utilize the Arizona Tax-Credit Program as a way to support this important project. Please see the article explaining the program

We recently received our first evaluation from WestEd, a national firm enlisted to provide unbiased evaluations on an annual basis. The data is so encouraging and shows statistically significant improvement in scores in reading and writing, particularly among second language learners. Data also showed that students in our OMA schools are consistently outperforming those in the control schools, and that teachers in OMA schools more often utilize techniques described as "Best Practices" in their daily lessons.

In addition, key people in Washington, D.C. and in the Arizona Department of Education are acknowledging the promise shown in our results and are interested in studying the model for its potential as an agent for broad school reform. These are certainly challenging times for all of public education, and the OMA model represents a way to meet the challenges in educating our most at-risk students. We appreciate the support that all of you continue to provide to this project.

*Joan Ashcraft, A.Mus.D.*  
Director, TUSD Fine and Performing Arts

*Carolyn Kemmeries*  
OMA Project Coordinator, TUSD

**Donate \$250 To OMA Now,  
Pay \$250 Less In State Taxes**  
**On**



*By Carolyn Kemmeries*

In each issue of the "OMA Outlook" newsletter, you will find an article about a wonderful opportunity that every Arizona taxpayer has been provided. In an important moment of support for schools, our state legislators passed a bill that allows individual to contribute up to \$200.00 dollars to a school of that individual's choice, and it doesn't cost a penny!! The amount donated comes right off that person's tax bill as a credit for taxes due. If the taxpayer is filing jointly, the amount is raised to \$250.00.

Last year Arizonans contributed over \$2.8 million to public schools. They were able to designate the school of choice and state exactly which program they wanted to support. Choices were varied and included athletics, special clubs or organizations, special scholarships or a program like ours. Opening Minds Through the Arts (OMA) received nearly \$66,000.00, most of which was used to fund artists and provide instruments at our 4 research schools. This year the OMA project has expanded to include 25 schools where at least partial implementation of the OMA Model has occurred. Clearly the needs have expanded and increased support is vital. The OMA model has already increased student achievement in our research schools. That is why a donation to OMA is truly an opportunity to "Invest in Success".

The form we have provided in this newsletter lists all of the schools participating in the OMA project. You must make the check out to the school and then designate "OMA" in the memo portion of the check.

**If you are a taxpayer who makes quarterly payments, you can send your check and then deduct that from the amount you usually pay. Our children will benefit and so will our community.**

**(SEE LAST PAGE OF THE "OMA OUTLOOK" NEWSLETTER FOR TAX-CREDIT FORM.)**

**\* \* \* \* KASEY HAVAS \* \* \* \***

**Arizona Opera Company**

By Elaine Resnick, OMA Volunteer

While KASEY HAVAS, President of the Board of Trustees of Arizona Opera Company (AOC), leads a group that serves as an integral part of OMA, she believes that it has been her contact with Eugene Jones, past president of the Tucson Symphony, a board member of AOC, and a driving force in the creation of OMA, that truly sparked her interest in OMA.

The AOC is a community organization that serves the entire state of Arizona. Along with the Tucson Symphony and the University of Arizona School of Music, the AOC works to fulfill the mission of OMA to provide culturally challenged children stimulus through immersion in the arts to assist their learning in others areas.

With the help of Deanna Hoying, its Director of Education, the AOC brings opera to the schools and students to the opera. Over the last few years, the AOC performed parts of the operas *Hansel and Gretel* and *Cinderella* in OMA schools and received positive feedback. The AOC participates in educating OMA teachers, brings young singers to the classrooms, and takes students to opera rehearsals.

The AOC sponsored two three-week workshops open to teachers in the OMA schools. Using the Music-Words-Opera curriculum of Opera America, a national service organization with which the AOC is affiliated, teachers learned specific techniques to bring opera into the classroom. OMA teachers brought the training back to their classrooms. In the first half of the year, students studied a great opera. In the second half of the school year the students created and produced their own operas.

Kasey says that as a young child, music was a huge piece in her life. She even performed operas in the attic charging neighbors five cents to attend. Music is still a huge piece of her life. Having seen OMA study results, Kasey knows that music in the environment increases test scores, attention spans, and helps kids to stay in school. When she retires as president of the AOC she intends to remain involved with OMA as she considers it not only an interesting project, but an important one.

**BOOTH-FICKETT LOVES THE OPERA**

By Debby Buus, Music Specialist

Fifth grade STUDENTS at Booth-Fickett are writing and producing an opera. After a study of *Aida* and *Madame Butterfly*, writing character maps and story maps, and acting out different scenes, we wrote our own stories. The classes selected the best story, and we began the process of turning it into dialogue. By the time we finished, the story was no longer totally aligned with the original, as it took some different turns due to character development.

We have just begun to turn the dialogue into music, a long, but fun process, as students debate how a particular line should be sung. At present, the title of our opera is *Fifth Grade Attitude*, although that is always subject to change. As the title indicates, this opera is based on real 5<sup>th</sup> grade interpersonal conflicts, as opposed to last year's opera which was a fairy tale with a twist.

**Student Quotes on the OMA programs at Booth-Fickett:**

*"I think the quartet is fun, and we learn more about history. You get to learn things you don't learn in other classrooms."*

*"Opera is amazing! It does things to people. It can make people cry, laugh, and especially applaud."*

*"Studying opera is a great experience for us to learn what has been going on over hundreds of years, and it's a fun."*

*"In theater, it's fun to be somebody else. We also write about theater and we wrote comic strips."*

*"Theater is good; it teaches you not to be shy. If you're a shy person, you should do this project."*

**Letters From Lynn/Urquides Elementary**

By Anna Castillo, Kindergarten Teacher

I am so grateful for the wonderful opportunity that my Kindergartners have had to learn through music by being involved in the OMA Project. They truly love learning with our musicians, Anna and Jenny. I asked my students to write letters about what they have learned, because I believe they can say it best.

Dear Anna and Jenny,

"I learned a lot about music. I learned about Mozart, crescendo, hearing music and bouncing balls. I feel overjoyed when you come to our school."

Your friend, *Angelica*

"I like your music because the music makes me ecstatic because you play beautiful."

Your friend, *Aliah*

"Your songs are like a dream. I learned about different countries. We went to China and Mexico."

Your friend, *Danielle*

"I love when you teach me how to play music. How do you know everything?"

Your friend, *Francesca*

# AN OMA TOUR OF CORBET ELEMENTARY

By Joyce Dillon, Principal of Corbett

As you walk in the front doors at Corbett Elementary one of the first things you will notice is the sound of music in our hallways. Classical music enriches all our lives daily through music in our hallways program. Corbett is one of the original schools to implement the Opening Minds Through Arts (OMA) Project in TUSD. We are fortunate to have Rachael Nelson as a full time music teacher. She brings music to life for our students in connection with what they are learning in the classrooms.

We believe that students benefit from the study of music at school because it contributes significantly to student achievement. It does this in four important ways: success in school, success in developing intelligence, success in society, and in life.

Brain-based research has shown the possibility of improving brain capacity and function through early musical instruction. OMA clearly illustrates the impact of music when used as a tool to improve academics. To observe a classroom during OMA teacher-artist visits is quite an experience. Come with me on a day at Corbett on an OMA adventure.

Our first stop is in the Kindergarten classroom where students work with Tucson Symphony Orchestra members 2 times a week developing auditory acuity and a rich language base. Students are busy setting different colored Popsicle sticks on the floor. As you observe more closely you'll see the sticks represent notes and rhythms. Students are actually composing music! The visiting artists-teachers play the students' compositions. The children's' faces beam with pride when their composition is played. They have understood complex mathematical concepts through the use of different rhythms and made strong language connections through writing their own music.

A first grade classroom is busy working with three University of Arizona opera students. First grade students learn the story line of an opera through role-play. They are practicing how to show emotion, by utilizing body language and tone of voice. Each child is developing strong language and literacy skills by writing and creating a finished opera they will perform in May. They have acquired a clear understanding of beginning, middle and end (sequence) and how to convey expression, directly linked to the skills needed to write successfully.

Let's visit a second grade class that is on the stage doing creative dance. The teacher-artists have asked the class to use their bodies to represent different geometric shapes as they listen to music. Students clearly know what they are talking about as they move in a variety of patterns to show those shapes. Every child is smiling and demonstrating a geometric shape

physically. Students have to problem-solve and work together to make the shapes. Math skills and critical thinking are integrated seamlessly, engaging all children.

In the next issue of our OMA Newsletter, we will continue our tour by taking you into grades 3, 4, and 5. Be sure to join us on that leg of our journey. In the meantime, come visit us and see for yourself how fine arts has transformed the lives of our children and built strong connections to CORE curriculum in order to improve student achievement.

## OMA at Peter Howell Elementary

By Jan Vesely, Principal of Howell

The November, 2002, issue of the *Tucson Lifestyle* magazine featured an article about our project, **Opening Minds Through the Arts** (OMA). That article did a great job of reinforcing our belief that education is not an either-or scenario. It's not the arts versus a rigorous, demanding curriculum. The arts provide a path for all learners, those who learn in more traditional ways as well as those who find success with alternative methods of presenting curriculum. We insist on challenging, rigorous, work in all the disciplines (including the arts), along with regular, accurate and purposeful assessment and strong standards in learning.

At Peter Howell we have noticed the following effects from the OMA project: a.) measurable improvement in **second language** acquisition, b.) tests are yielding higher spatial intelligence scores and enhanced auditory acuity c.) music is used to support and extend literacy development (as measured by first grade Stanford 9 scores); d.) students at all levels, from delayed to gifted, are being challenged; e.) students, formerly not engaged, are now being reached f.) the school environment has been transformed to one of discovery and excitement g.) love of learning has been rekindled in students tired of being filled up with just facts.

The arts are not only fundamental to success in our demanding, highly technical, fast moving world, they are what makes us most human, most complete as a people. At a time when higher standards are being thrust on all of us, arts have an even bigger place. There is no evidence that higher standards actually produce better human beings unless accompanied by better quality teaching, more targeted resources, greater opportunities for underserved populations, stronger roles models, high expectations, and a dozen other key variables.

The fact is, children are unique; and educators need different approaches and strategies to reach a wide range of learners. At Peter Howell we are deeply committed to making a significant, positive, and lasting contribution to the education of all children. We are, above all, advocates for improving education. It has been through our research that we have come to support the arts and solidified our commitment to OMA.

# Opening Minds Through The Arts

*“Integrating the Arts into the Core Curriculum  
Improves Student Achievement.”*

Please Send Your “OMA” Tax Credit Donations to:  
**Dr. Joan Ashcraft, TUSD Fine and Performing Arts**  
**Tucson Unified School District**  
**2025 East Winsett**  
**Tucson, Arizona 85719**



Taxpayer's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Social Security Number (required by state) \_\_\_\_\_

In order to receive a tax-credit, **your check must be made out to a school**. (Write: “OMA” in memo section)  
To date the OMA schools include: Banks, Blenman, Booth/Fickett, Borman, Cavett, Corbett, Davidson, Duffy, Dunham, Fort Lowell, Johnson, Keen, Kellond, Lawrence, Lynn/Urquides, Lyons, Menlo Park, Mission View, Ochoa, Oyama, Peter Howell, Pueblo Gardens, Reynolds, Richey, Robins, Rogers, Van Buskirk, Whitmore, and Wright.

*You will be sent a receipt acknowledging your contribution*