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# Sabbatical Proposal

**Brent Wilson, Music Professor**

Proposal Date: November 1, 2018

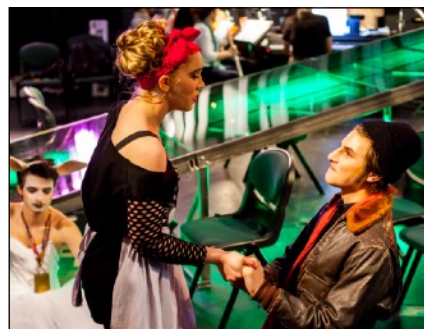
Proposed Leave: Fall, 2019

Previous Sabbaticals: 0

First contract with Ventura College: August, 2010

9th year of teaching at Ventura College

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Photos from recent productions at Ventura College

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## PURPOSE

### of sabbatical

My proposal for a fall sabbatical in the 2019-2020 academic year will consist of two major parts:

**1) ACADEMIC STUDIES:** It is my goal to pursue and obtain my doctorate degree in music (DMA), which will commence in the fall of 2019. Most of my studies can be done remotely after the first semester, but I plan to rigorously pursue this degree in my sabbatical as to front-load the demands of such studies.

**2) WORLD STAGED PREMIERE and MUSIC FESTIVAL:** Part of my pursuit during doctoral studies is to reinvigorate new life into Gian Carlo Menotti's musical dramas and operas. He was an immigrant to the USA from Italy, and remains one of the 20th century's most influential composers in opera, musical drama, and musical theater. Despite this prominence, over half of his compositions have not seen the stage since they were premiered. I have been granted permission from music licensing company G. Schirmer to adapt his television music drama *The Labyrinth* for performances at Ventura College. I plan on premiering this work at Ventura College after adapting the musical score during the sabbatical. This work would be performed in the spring of 2020, and would be an extremely exciting moment in the world of classical music, as it is uncommon to be able to discover these works by master composers. Undertaking such a project could ultimately lead to securing grant and Arts funding from organizations such as The National Endowment for the Arts, National Opera Association, and Opera America. Each of these organizations have categories and contests dedicated to the mounting of adventurous projects such as this.

## COMPONENTS

### of sabbatical

#### 1) ACADEMIC STUDIES

My desire to pursue the Doctor of Musical Arts degree stems from a need to understand more clearly the difficulties young singers face in the ever-changing landscape of Arts support in our communities. Twenty years ago, it was commonplace to attend a K-12 school,

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be made to sing in choir, read music, join a band, play in an orchestra, and be involved entirely with the performing arts. Fast-Forward to today, I consistently receive new students that want to pursue a “music career”, but have had no previous experience with any instrument or singing.

The focus of my studies in my undergraduate and graduate studies were largely dedicated to performance and how to become a professional performer, singer, actor, and musician. There was an emphasis on pedagogy for singers, but a clear distinction was made between music education and music performance when completing your studies in music. Music Education degrees are pursued if you want to teach K-12, or if you plan to continue through doctoral music education studies and then teach college students how to teach K-12 students. Music Performance is what most instrumentalists and vocalists pursue if they want to pursue careers in performing music, whether playing in ensembles, as a soloist, or if they want to eventually teach in academia beyond secondary school.

Pursuing a doctorate would allow me to spend more time dedicated to learning the best practices as a pedagogue for the significant increase in vocal faults that we are now experiencing. Both women and men have distinct disadvantages in today’s musical vacuum. Women can be influenced by what they might hear on the radio, sing along to the music, and belt out in their chest voices giving it no second thought. Over time, this can result in an overly developed chest voice with little emphasis on the middle and head voices, resulting in significant wear and tear on the instrument and in some cases leading to vocal polyps, nodes, and ultimately the need for surgery. Men receive little to no feedback on proper passaggio (the passage between your chest and head voice) practices, and therefore develop incredible tension in their upper registers, specifically in their break area. I consistently receive students that sing below a 6th grade level, not because of any fault of theirs, but due to not having the same opportunities growing up in a well-supported Arts community. These studies would help equip me with better tools to assist these students in their quest to achieve degrees in music.

## **2) WORLD STAGED PREMIERE and MUSIC FESTIVAL**

Gian Carlo Menotti remains at the top of contributors to American operas, musical dramas, and Broadway in the 20th century. He was an immigrant to the USA from Italy, was partner to the American composer Samuel Barber, and displayed an incredible sense of stage

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awareness and drama in his compositions. He is the recipient of two Pulitzer prizes for was commissioned by both NBC and CBS him to write operas and music dramas for TV.

I have recently received permission to create a piano/vocal score from Menotti's original score of his NBC opera *The Labyrinth*, an opera that was aired on television in 1963. It has never been performed after the performance for television, and much of the reason is that there is no rehearsal score that was adapted from his full score. When rehearsing operas or musicals, you will have a score that is a reduction of the full score enabling a pianist to play for the staging rehearsals with the actors. It is both inefficient in time and costs to have an orchestra be present at the actor/singer rehearsals, as it usually takes 3 weeks of rehearsals to be able to stage a full opera/musical, while orchestra musicians only need 2 or 3 rehearsals with the music to be able to perform it. The singers and actors take longer due to blocking, choreography, sets, costumes, acting, and other things dealt with when on stage.

I plan to use this project as part of my dissertation for my doctoral degree, while providing Ventura College and the students an opportunity to make a world premiere of an opera by Gian Carlo Menotti, which was written nearly 60 years ago.

## VALUE

### of sabbatical to VCCCD and Ventura College

Upon return from sabbatical, I plan to implement new techniques and strategies gained in academic studies to recruit from local high schools and provide them with opportunities to grow as singers and musicians at Ventura College. They are not given those opportunities in the framework of their studies, and this will inspire more arts involvement in K-12 programs in Ventura County and boost numbers for the College.

Additionally, to give a premiere of an opera by Gian Carlo Menotti will certainly not go unnoticed in the music world. He remains an important figure in a singer's repertoire, and breathing new life into his compositions would be a great honor and privilege. This piece would be the gateway for me to build a summer American Opera/Musical Theatre institute that would be focused on training young and emerging singers in performance practices. Part of the mission statement of this festival would be to support works and commissions by immigrant, minority, and female composers. *The Labyrinth* would be a cornerstone of the inaugural season, but moving forward, the festival would put importance on supporting new works by contemporary composers in the aforementioned demographics.

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## VALUE

### of sabbatical to VC students

My true passion at VC is our students. I put great importance on molding these young minds into young adults, giving them the proper tools to becoming better musicians and persons. Additional training to diagnose and correct this growing trend of vocal faults will benefit the majority of our students that come in as vocalists. Giving these students opportunities from an earlier age will help them have the basic skills necessary once they begin their rigorous academic studies. Additionally, the opportunity to perform a premiere by Gian Carlo Menotti will give them a chance that few could recreate. These productions will be submitted to the National Opera Association and to Opera America for consideration in their respective academic contests, both with potential funding and grant awards. The effect of a summer program dedicated to training young artists would be an incredible addition to our community in Ventura County, and will result in a cultural shift for this region.

## VALUE

### of sabbatical to the teacher

The saying goes, “teachers make the worst students”. There probably is truth to that, but I am eager to allow myself the opportunity to absorb new and different information and process that information for our students. The beginning of my doctoral studies will kickstart a new growth of concepts and strategies I can implement in the classroom and community.

I like to pride myself on being somewhat of a Menotti-nerd, and I have performed, directed, or conducted about 10 of his operas in the past. Being able to bring a piece that he wrote to life, for the first time on stage, would be an honor. He has played a significant part in the growth of singing programs throughout the US, and his made-for-TV operas created staged musical dramas assessable to anyone with a TV in the 50s, 60s, and 70s. It would be a dream to share his musical language with Ventura College, VC students, and the community.

Thank you for your consideration,

Brent Wilson