

Opera UTEP + El Paso Opera = EPO Junior Artists

LACE Initiative Report, Summer 2025

In the summer of 2025, three Opera UTEP singers (Renée Guzman, Jada Granados, and Rae Franco) worked as paid interns for El Paso Opera, through which they gained experience as performers, production assistants, arts administrators, and community ambassadors.



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Principal Community Partner

El Paso Opera
Arianne Marcee, Executive Director
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Community Outreach Partner

Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI)
Lynn Provenzano, Director

Access the entire report.



Introduction

Through the support of the UTEP College of Liberal Arts Community Engagement (LACE) Initiative, three students from UTEP's Opera Workshop class served as paid interns with El Paso Opera (EPO) in June and July of 2025.

Known as the 2025 EPO Junior Artists (JAs), the students performed for the community, assisted in EPO office operations and donor development, and supported the production team for EPO's June show, BON APPETIT. Through this internship, students earned a tangible professional credential that supports career readiness in both full-time and project-based artistic and administrative work.

Learning Outcomes

The JAs gained practical, transferable skills including professional communication, time management, teamwork, and public engagement. Their post-internship reflections demonstrate analytical thinking and the ability to connect academic learning to real-world practice, strengthening confidence, clarifying career goals, and improving performance and responsibility in Opera Workshop and other coursework.

“It was the first time that I had the opportunity to take what I learned from university and apply it in the workplace.”
– Jada Granados, Music Education Major

Artists in Action



El Paso Opera Junior Artists performed on a series of four “Coffee Shop Concerts,” representing EPO in a collaboration with the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI). The photo above is from the concert at Más y Menos, with the JAs (in white t-shirts), EPO and OLLI staff members, and piano accompanist Dr. Esequiel Meza, Jr.

“I learned that the community genuinely cares about what we are doing, and it truly impacts them. Many people were grateful to learn about El Paso Opera and how it contributes to the community. They learned that this organization exists to serve them, and that they in turn are valued and appreciated.”
– Renée Guzman, Music Education Major

“Speaking to community members and business owners was a challenge for me at first, but I gained skills that will help me be a more effective communicator and listener.”
– Rae Franco, Voice Performance Major

Through “Casa Concerts,” the Junior Artists brought music directly into private homes and retirement communities, creating intimate, meaningful connections.



Scope of Work

Production Assistants

The Junior Artists worked behind the scenes for EPO's June production of BON APPETIT by assisting with props, backstage organization, and stage management. They worked closely with the professional production team and cast and creative staff during rehearsals and performances, gaining hands-on experience with the logistical and collaborative demands of operatic production.

Performers

The Junior Artists performed in coffee shops, private homes, and retirement communities, bringing opera into informal settings, resulting in direct engagement with the community. They gained experience performing for diverse audiences while helping make opera more accessible and welcoming. After each performance, the JAs answered questions and talked with audience members about the arts in our community.

Office & Admin Support

JAs supported El Paso Opera's administrative operations through office work, inventory organization, phone outreach, and assistance with fundraising, including interactions with local businesses for silent auction items. This experience introduced them to nonprofit arts administration and provided insight into the essential, year-round operational work that supports successful artistic programming.

Community Impact

- **300+ hours** of direct student engagement delivered across performance, outreach, and support activities
- **Weekly outreach performances over two months**, including coffee shops, private homes, and retirement communities that introduced opera to new audiences in informal, accessible settings
- **Hundreds of community members reached**, including individuals with limited access to live performances
- **Expanded public awareness of El Paso Opera** through face-to-face interaction and community dialogue
- **Strengthened community relationships** through repeated engagement rather than one-time events
- **Increased visibility of the arts as a shared community resource** rather than a traditional concert experience

“At our four Coffee Shop Concerts, the student interns brought energy and talent to their engagement with community members.”

Through Casa Concerts, they offered intimate in-home performances followed by meaningful visits for housebound patrons.

These efforts greatly expanded the number of people we were able to reach, and the student interns were directly responsible for that impact.

– Arianne Marcee, Executive Director, El Paso Opera



RAE FRANCO
Senior Voice Performance Major

JADA GRANADOS
Senior Music Education Major

RENÉE GUZMAN
Junior Music Education Major

Conclusion

The 2025 LACE interns provided El Paso Opera with substantial support across artistic, operational, fundraising, and outreach efforts. Their work strengthened the organization's capacity while accelerating students' professional development through real-world responsibility and applied learning.

The partnership between Opera UTEP and El Paso Opera demonstrates how targeted support through the LACE Initiative creates **reciprocal institutional value**. UTEP students gain workforce-ready experience and professional confidence, while El Paso Opera benefits from skilled, mission-aligned labor that expands community access and public engagement, delivering **measurable educational and community returns**.