

YAP (Young Artist) Summer Programs

What are they? How do I choose one?

What can I do this summer? This is a time when you can expand your experience, skills, and professional network in a summer opera program. There are literally hundreds of summer programs in the United States and in Europe to choose from. How can you do your research and choose one right for you?

Considerations that will be helpful to you:

1. Performance Opportunities

Does the program offer worthwhile opportunities for all participants or are only a few singers cast in roles and the rest sing in the chorus? If it is a pay-to-sing program, is there a difference in the fee for a full role versus a chorus position?

2. Casting Policies

Do the number of public performances equal the number of casts so that each cast would perform at least once? In other words, if you have been selected for one of four casts for an opera, but there are only two public performances advertised, does that mean that two casts (and, possibly, you) would not perform?

When you are paying to perform a role, make sure you get something in writing that states the role you have been offered and the number of performances you are guaranteed.

3. Repertoire

Is the advertised repertoire appropriate for you? You should look for operas or opportunities that fit your voice type.

4. Level of Participants

A lot of Young Artist Programs post the bios of their artists on their websites. Read those to see what each program seems to look for and then determine if your age and experience match the artists they have hired in the past. If so, then you should consider that program next year.

For pay-to-sing and training programs, check their websites to see what level or age of participant they are looking for. Sometimes the photos on their websites can also give you a general idea if the singers are college age or professionals.

5. Faculty

It is important to research who the full-time faculty are and who are "guest teachers". Sometimes a program will put a "big name" on their poster to attract applicants, but in reality that person may teach only two to three days during the program and may work with only a few singers in a masterclass setting. It is important to learn about the faculty you would work with on a regular basis.

Also, find out the singer-teacher ratio. If there are 80 singers in a program with eight faculty, you will most likely not benefit from the lack of individual attention.

6. Audition Fees

Program application and audition fees can vary widely, and you are not always guaranteed an audition. Considering that many of the programs receive 900-1,000 applications for 400-500 audition spots, you should contact the company and inquire about their policies regarding refunds of application fees if you are not granted a live audition.

7. Program Costs

Calculating what it would cost you to attend a program is not always easy. In a pay-to-sing program or training program, the application, tuition, and room and board costs should be pretty clear. You may also need to add transportation and incidental expenses to the cost of those programs. With a YAP, even though you receive a stipend or fee, there can be other costs which you must bear such as your own transportation and housing.

8. Financial Assistance

Some programs offer full or partial scholarships, some offer work-study options, and a few offer fundraising suggestions. Research these options and plan ahead if you will need financial aid to attend a summer program. Also, talk to your teacher about ways to raise money from local contacts and school grants.

Doing the Research

You have several helpful options for researching summer programs:

1. *Classical Singer Magazine* (summer program and YAP directories, forums, summer program singer surveys, archived articles): www.classicalsinger.com

Every January Classical Singer Magazine presents their Summer Program Issue.

Call them to get an archive issue.

2. OPERA America's Artist Resources & Archives:
www.operaamerica.org/content/learningLab/artistic

3. YAP (young artist program) Tracker: www.yaptracker.com (\$50 per year)

New Forum for Classical Singers: www.nfcs.net

Kim Witman (of Wolf Trap Opera) blog, <http://www.wolftrapopera.org/blog/>