

May 17, 2012

Gail Cleary
Cleary-Kumm Foundation
301 Sky Harbour Drive
La Crosse, WI 54601

Dear Ms. Cleary,

The University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Department of Theatre Arts, through the UW-L Foundation, respectfully requests your consideration of this proposal for support of the opening production of our 2012-2013 season: *Mirror of the Invisible World* by Mary Zimmerman.

About UW-L Theatre

The Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse provides students with the tools necessary to function as complete artists and self-realized individuals, combining theatrical training with a strong liberal arts curriculum. Our degree programs create a community of study through core classes while still facilitating focused training for each student based on their skills and interests. The curriculum allows concentrations in six distinct emphases of study: general theatre, design/technology, performance, music theatre, stage management and arts administration. We strive to balance vigorous classroom learning with practical production work, allowing for a well-rounded college experience with an emphasis on the collaborative and creative process.

Our six-show season during the academic year and annual summer production enables the Department to provide high-quality musical and dramatic works for the greater La Crosse area, reaching an average audience of 14,000 patrons. A key component of our mission is to produce a broad range of works, especially those which allow audiences to explore important topics in a new light and develop a greater understanding of themselves and our community. Community recognition is evidenced in the season ticket subscriptions and production attendance over the last five years, along with critical acclaim by area reviewers and adjudicators from the American College Theatre Festival. Specific effort is placed on the creation of a counterpoint between classic works and contemporary voices in order to provide participants and audiences with a rich blend of viewpoints and production styles.

The Wisconsin Premiere of *Mirror of the Invisible World*

Mirror of the Invisible World allows the Department to achieve several of these goals in a single production, and to provide a unique learning opportunity for our students through the return of alumnus Jason Knox, a professional sound designer with an impressive career.

Mirror of the Invisible World adapts a 12th century work largely unknown to contemporary audiences—the *Haft Paykar* by poet Nizami of Ganja—about the life and adventures of legendary Persian King Bahram Gur. The play dramatizes a section of the poem in which the king falls in love with the portraits of seven princesses from seven different countries, and then marries and builds each one a pavilion of a different color. Bahram visits one princess each night, and he listens as they spin mystical stories that teach him the meaning of patience, compassion, honesty, goodness and love (Goodman Theater, 2010).

Playwright Mary Zimmerman is a MacArthur Fellow and a Tony Award winner. She holds concurrent appointments as a Resident Director at the Goodman Theater in Chicago, an Associate Artist of the Seattle Repertory Theatre, and a Professor of Performance Studies at Northwestern University. Her plays can routinely be found on the seasons of professional and academic theatre companies around the country and the scripts are recognized literary works on their own, routinely used for academic study. *Mirror of the Invisible World* is an unpublished play, making our success in obtaining permission to produce it an even more special opportunity for UW-L students and the La Crosse community. Our production will be the Wisconsin premiere of the work.

When it was first produced by the Goodman Theater in Chicago, the play was hailed as “Zimmerman at her imaginative best” (USA Today 1997). Artistic Director Robert Falls remounted the production as a cornerstone of the company’s twentieth anniversary season, commenting that “*Mirror of the Invisible World* is an inter-cultural conversation—a profoundly universal experience of the nature of romance, the many facets of beauty and the incredible grace of the Middle East. I can think of no better capstone for our season of exploration than this wondrous journey into a world that is ancient and removed from our own—but whose wisdom and beauty transcends the centuries with wit, clarity and uncommon brilliance.”

Zimmerman herself has spoken of the power of the work. “For all the trappings of exoticism that this poetic, loving text has—princesses from different lands and appearances of angels, riddles, disguise and adventure—there is a deep familiarity to what happens to the people of the stories. Hostile political rhetoric emphasizes difference and otherness, but masterful works of art speak to what is common in all human experience, allowing us to see ourselves in others.”

By choosing this script, the Department of Theatre Arts has succeeded in providing students and audiences the chance to experience this lesser-known work of an acclaimed playwright. We will further engage all of the participants in conversation about grace, tolerance, and understanding of cultures dissimilar to our own.

We have also selected this production as our entry in the American College Theatre Festival for 2012-2013. Adjudicators will visit campus during the performances to evaluate the direction, acting, and design work. Individual students can be recognized for special achievement, and we hope to be invited to perform the show as part of the Regional Festival in January 2013. Approximately one hundred productions are entered in the festival each season, eight of which are selected for this honor. UW-L productions have been selected twice previously. The experience of touring a show provides additional educational experiences for all students involved, and allows us to showcase the talent of our students, faculty, and staff in a multi-state forum.

Even if the production is not selected for performance, by entering the work we are able to bring students to the festival and enable them to participate in the workshops, seminars, and design/acting competitions.

A third opportunity provided by this play is the return of alumnus Jason Knox. Jason graduated from UW-L in 2005. He went on to earn a Masters of Fine Arts degree in sound design from Purdue University, and is now a working professional. His musical compositions and sound designs have been featured in productions throughout the United States as well as internationally in Canada, China, and the Czech Republic. We have invited Jason to return to La Crosse as an artist-in-residence. He will work with two student assistants to design sound and compose original music for *Mirror*. Jason will also teach master classes in sound design and technology—providing hands-on training at an advanced level not typically possible.

The Need for Additional Support

The demands of a play set in seven different international locations, built to tour, and the opportunity to include a guest artist in our season require the Department to stretch beyond the support we receive through the university student apportionment fees and anticipated ticket sales. Your partnership will enable us to fully realize the following opportunities:

Description	Funds requested
<i>Compensation for Sound Designer Jason Knox</i>	\$1,500
<i>Sound Production Support:</i> to enable us to take full advantage of our guest artist, including design, equipment, and system expenses	\$500
<i>Scenic Production Support:</i> to enable us to fully realize the world of this play and to construct it in such a way that it can be easily toured to Michigan for the American College Theatre Festival	\$1,000
<i>Attendance at the American College Theatre Festival (Region III) in January 2013.</i> To participate in the festival, the department shares with students the cost of registration, and pays for the transportation and housing during the one-week festival (constant cost whether or not the show also tours)	\$2,500
<i>Publicity:</i> to support a portion of the advertising and printing expenses for promoting the Wisconsin premiere of this play	\$500
<i>Total request for support</i>	<i>\$6,000</i>

Due to its 501 (c)(3) status, the UW-L Foundation will act as the fiscal receiver for the funds to support this project.

We hope you agree that the opportunity to learn, laugh, and come together as a community is a valuable gift. The Department of Theatre Arts is proud to provide this through our work, and we look forward to enhancing these efforts with your partnership. If you have any questions or are in need of any additional information in order to consider this request, please do not hesitate to contact Laurie Kinckman by phone at (608) 785-6690 or by email at lkincman@uwlax.edu.

Very Sincerely,

Laurie Kinckman
Production Manager
Department of Theatre Arts

Enclosures:
Full Project Budget
501(c)(3) documentation for UW-L Foundation