

Committee: Finance Committee	Date: 13 January 2015
Subject: Cultural Engagement with China – Request for funding from the Finance Committee Contingency Fund	Public
Report of: Principal, Guildhall School of Music & Drama	For decision

Summary

1. The Guildhall School is engaging intensively with China in the context of the UK-China Year of Cultural Exchange, 2015. An opportunity has arisen at relatively short notice for the Guildhall School to take an opera scenes production to Shanghai for two performances at the Shanghai Grand Theatre on 3 and 4 April 2015. This would be an excellent way of raising the School's profile in China, in support of its longer-term strategy to increase student recruitment in the Far East.
2. An agreement has been reached with the Shanghai theatre to mount this production on a cost-sharing basis, with a cost to the School of just under £30,000 for travel and freight. Shanghai Grand Theatre will meet all the costs of transfers, accommodation and meals for the 26 students and staff involved.
3. At this late stage in the financial year, the School does not have sufficient resources remaining in its budget to take this opportunity and is therefore making an application for additional revenue support from the Finance Committee's City's Cash Contingency Fund.
4. At present there is £249,000 remaining in the City's Cash Contingency Fund for 2014/15.

Recommendation

The Committee is recommended to approve funding of £28,859.86 to meet the transport and freight costs of taking the Guildhall School's opera scenes to Shanghai in April 2015, to be drawn from the Finance Committee's 2014/15 City's Cash Contingency fund.

Main report

Background

1. The Guildhall School of Music & Drama is intensifying its engagement with China in order to promote student recruitment and improved cultural relations. The School and the City of London Corporation are also seeking Chinese sources of philanthropic funding to ensure the long-term financial sustainability of the School.

2. In 2009, the Guildhall School and the Barbican Centre hosted a UK-China arts and education forum that has produced some staff and student exchanges with the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing. Discussions are under way to provide a one-year training course for actors from the Central Academy of Drama in London. For the past two years the School has held auditions in China for applicants to the BMus and MMus programmes. Three students and three members of staff also accompanied Alderman Nick Anstee to Beijing and Shanghai during his mayoralty.
3. For the past year, the School, in the person of the Principal, has been working more intensively with other leading UK arts institutions (including the South Bank, Sadler's Wells and the National Theatre) to organise a follow-up forum in Shanghai as part of the Shanghai International Arts Festival in October 2015. 2015 is the UK-China Year of Cultural Exchange, and there will be an opportunity for the School to input into the high-level person-to-person dialogue that will take place later in the year.
4. This work has been taken forward with the support of the Chinese Minister Counsellor for Culture in London, Mr Xiang Xiaowei, the Chinese Ministry of Culture and the British Council. A series of planning meetings took place in Shanghai and Beijing in October 2014, which the Principal attended as the guest of the Chinese authorities.

Proposal

5. Subsequently, the School has received an invitation to take its award-winning opera scenes production to China for two performances in the studio at the Shanghai Grand Theatre on 3 and 4 April 2015. The proposal is that the School would meet the transport and freight costs, and the theatre would meet all the participant costs from the point of arrival. In due course, it is expected that the School would receive a reciprocal visit from a Chinese opera group and other arts practitioners in support of an Anglo-Chinese professional development programme. The School would like to be able to take up this opportunity.
6. Opera scenes are not a full-scale operatic production, but a programme of scenes from several different operas interwoven within a single concept to form a continuous performance. Opera scenes are normally performed in a studio theatre setting with a repetiteur rather than an orchestra and aim to provide a more 'immersive' experience than is common with a full-scale operatic production. The set is minimal but costumes, props and lighting are consistent with opera-house expectations.
7. Artistic leaders in China are showing considerable interest in western immersive theatre and are particularly keen to learn from our considerable experience in presenting opera in intimate settings. The benefits to the School are that this project would give our students (singers and technical crew) more experience in touring a production, and would help to raise the School's profile in China. The group who would go to Shanghai may include an exceptionally gifted Chinese counter-tenor, Meili Li, who would be an excellent ambassador for the School.

Cost and application

8. The cost of travel, visas and freight for 26 persons is detailed in the table below. Freight charges cover carriage of costumes and props (scenic items will be constructed in China at local expense). Differential flight costs reflect the fact that five production, design and lighting crew will fly out in advance at a slightly higher tariff.

	£
12 singers @ £821.36	9,856.32
2 repetiteurs @ £821.36	1,642.72
Director	821.36
Conductor	821.36
3 stage managers @ £821.36	2,464.08
2 lighting dept @ £877.46	1,754.92
2 costume dept @ £821.36	1,642.72
2 production managers @ £877.46	1,754.92
1 designer (student) @ £877.46	877.46
Visas @ £124 per person	3,224.00
Shipping	4,000.00
Total requested	28,859.86

Conclusion

9. The proposal to take Guildhall Opera Scenes to Shanghai is an excellent opportunity to raise the profile of the School in China in a year when there will be intense high-level interest in UK-Chinese cultural relations. It would support the School's strategy to improve non-EU student recruitment and its developing international strategy in support of the UK creative economy. The project would also enhance and strengthen the City of London's commitment to building good relations and mutual understanding with China and provide the Lord Mayor with a 'good news' story during his mayoralty.

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