

Visiting composer working with The Grand this summer

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Peter Michael von der Nahmer or “Mike the Composer” as Grace Hennig, vice-chair of the Grand’s board of directors calls him, will spend roughly two months living at the Grand. His work will explore the stories of the young and old members of the New Ulm community.

NEW ULM — A recipient of a visiting composer grant from the McKnight Foundation will be studying German-American heritage in New Ulm this spring and summer.

Composer Peter Michael von der Nahmer will spend two month-long periods at The Grand Center for Arts and Culture. The first will start May 8, running through June 12 and the second will be July 23 until the end of August.

Nahmer is working on two projects. *“Growing Young”* will focus on senior citizens’ reminiscences of their teenage years, with teenagers cast in the roles of their elders.

The second, *“Growing Wise”* will focus on teenagers’ telling stories of their heritage, themselves and their community through myths and legends of New Ulm.

“The whole concept and the whole idea of the end product is that I hope we will create a bond and a connection between the seniors and the teenagers,” Nahmer said. *“So when they watch each other’s stories they actually learn from each other.”*

The results will be five to 10 minute musical theater pieces that will be performed at the end of the two-part residency.

The Grand is in preliminary talks with State Street Theater Company about using its space. Stories will be written by New Ulm residents, with Nahmer’s assistance.

“The first part of the residency I am mostly going to teach the people of New Ulm how to write musical theater pieces,” Nahmer said. *“A general concept of what it means to create stories, what it means to create dialogues, how do you involve the songwriting and what all of this means.”*

During the time between his stays, Nahmer will maintain contact with collaborators to edit and perfect scripts and music. He returns in July to

prepare staging for the projects.

Nahmer and the Grand are asking teachers to encourage any students interested in art, theater and music to meet with them.

The composer explained musical theater as two spheres working in tandem: music and dialogue, or words.

“So if somebody is really interested in theater but does not have any background at all in music it does not matter because they will be the words person,” Nahmer said. *“Then I will show them how to create the lyrics and how to write the dialogue.”*

He expressed interest in seeing these as collaborations between students and other New Ulm residents.

Nahmer himself is of German-American-Cuban heritage. He was born in Munich, Germany but has ancestors from Boston.

“I am very interested in seeing how others feel about their heritage,” Nahmer said.

While he is in town, Nahmer will be collaborating with a number of people including: Brian Frink, art department chair at Minnesota State University, Mankato, Dr. Ann Vogel and he hopes to find an American Indian to work with.

“The whole concept of me working with other artists is having long, extensive sittings just talking and then figuring out what is the project that wants to evolve in-between us,” Nahmer said.

Much of the composer’s work will be collecting stories from the community. At 7 p.m. Sunday May 14 in the Grand the public is invited to meet Nahmer.

He also will accept one-on-one appointments with aspiring composers, artists

and others to give pointers and possible collaboration.

The project is made possible by a \$15,000 grant from the American Composers Forum on behalf of the McKnight Foundation.

The McKnight Foundation is dedicated to supporting Minnesota artists and is one of the largest programs of its kind in the country.

“Minnesota in general has a lot of really, really awesome projects for composers, that you will not find in any other state,” Nahmer said. “Even compare to New York, even California, Minnesota really has some awesome things for composers.”

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