



# A Visit to William Blake's Inn: a project proposal

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# Executive Summary

## Objective

The Lacuna Group, with the support of and cooperation with the Newnan Cultural Arts Commission, will stage an international world premiere of a musical work.

## Goals

- To strengthen the ties between Newnan and its sister city of Ayr and to foster deeper personal connections by inviting 25 students from Scotland to participate.
- To enhance the Newnan-Coweta area's reputation as a center for the creative arts, both in its schools and its community.
- To provide students in the Coweta County School System with the opportunity to take part in a world premiere musical production, and to meet fellow students from Scotland.
- To provide a forum for creative theatre artists of the Newnan-Coweta area.

## Proposal

We propose a stage production of *A Visit to William Blake's Inn*, music by Dale Lyles, based on the Newbery Award-winning book by Nancy Willard. This production would take place in the Centre for the Performing and Visual Arts, sponsored by a local coalition of forces: Global Achievers, Lacuna Group, City of Newnan, Coweta County School System, Newnan Theatre Company, and private donors.

## Background

In January 2003, Global Achievers, in conjunction with the Newnan Community Theatre Company, took seventeen students to Scotland to take part in a production of *The Tale o' Tam*, Scottish Opera for All's version of "Tam o' Shanter" for children.

In addition to the American and Scottish students, there were students from Norway and Germany in the program. All the overseas students were housed in a local agricultural college. We were shown the sights, especially those connected to Robert Burns, and entertained in locally flavorful ways. Over the week and a half that we were there, students rehearsed with Scottish Opera's directors and choreographers, and on the final Friday, we performed at the Royal Theatre in Kilmarnock.

All in all, it was an amazing experience, and those of us lucky enough to participate agreed that Newnan should host its own version, providing a similar opportunity for overseas students to see what Newnan is like and what we're capable of.

## Lacuna Group

In the spring of 2006, a group of theatre artists staged a production of *Auntie Mame* as a fundraiser for the Newnan Hospital Auxiliary and the Newnan-Coweta Historical Society. The production was a huge success, and this group of people decided to continue working together through a theatre study group. They named it Lacuna Group. They have been meeting for nearly a year now, exploring what it means to “do theatre.”

## *A Visit to William Blake’s Inn*

*A Visit to William Blake’s Inn* is a song cycle by Lacuna member Dale Lyles. It is based on a book of children’s poetry by Nancy Willard, which won the Newbery Award in 1982, becoming the first book of poetry to be awarded the most prestigious prize in children’s literature.

In September of 2003, Nancy Willard gave her permission for Dale to set her book to music. He finished composition in September of 2006. On January 10, 2007, Lacuna presented a complete concert version for people with some interest in the project, and it was decided at that time to explore the possibility of a complete production.

As currently envisioned by Lacuna, *William Blake’s Inn* would involve the following performance forces:

- children’s chorus, around 60-75, including 25 from Scotland
- children soloists
- small adult chorus (perhaps eight, who would double as soloists)
- dancers/actors/puppeteers
- small orchestra of about 30

The final production should take place in the Centre for Performing and Visual Arts to best enhance the area’s reputation as a center for the creative arts.

## Process

If commitment for funding can be secured, the production would occur in three phrases.

### Phase 1

A small team would continue the workshop process, creating the visualization/staging for the entire work. This phase would result in working drawings and designs for the entire production. At the same time, the director and the production manager would begin mapping out the timeline and goalposts of the next two phases.

### Phase 2

Crews would begin building as much of the sets, costumes, puppets, and props as possible. Teams of educators would begin to design lesson plans and book studies for use in the schools. (We might also choose to involve schools in the design/construction process.) Rehearsal materials are developed and sent to our partners in Scotland.

### Phase 3

The actual production phase: auditions, rehearsals, performance.

## Agencies

For this project to succeed so that it meets all its goals, several agencies will need to be a part of it.

### Lacuna Group

This looseknit study group is made up of several experienced, dedicated theatre artists, Dale Lyles and Marc Honea among them. It is their vision and their guidance of the workshop process that has brought the project this far.

### Newnan Theatre Company

Home of live theatre in Newnan, NTC is a fount of creativity and energy. It would important to include them as an agency in order to provide a home and a focus for a lot of the newly minted theatre artists who will emerge from this production.

### Newnan Cultural Arts Commission

This group is charged with supporting the arts in Newnan. The Arts Commission is probably best equipped to handle the managerial aspects of the production, i.e., funding, coordination of personnel and space, etc.

### Global Achievers

Under the leadership of Bette Hickman, this organization started it all when she invited Dale Lyles to audition and rehearse students for the 2003 Scotland trip. Likewise, it is through its contacts with Ayrshire that Newnan and its sister cities have enjoyed a rich tradition of cultural exchange.

### Coweta County School System

Through its elementary music programs, through the use of the Centre for Visual and Performing Arts, through the system's media specialists and reading teachers, the school system will have a lot to offer the project in return for the enrichment of its students.

## Budget

It would be extremely difficult to estimate a budget at this point because of the impossibility of stating exactly what the final product would be. Will we have one performance? Three performances? What level of professionalism do we expect in the design, or in its execution? How many staff will we have to pay, and how many will volunteer? How good do we want it to look, and how big an impact do we want it to make in the media?

A very rough guess, however, suggests that the production by itself will cost from \$40,000 up. This is an estimate of sets, costumes, props, rentals, musicians, royalties, and printing costs.