

**Bellissima Opera Outreach's Powerful Day**

**at Senn High School in Chicago**

Tenor Franco Martorana and I performed opera excerpts for five classes on October 24 at Nicholas Senn High School in Chicago – one of the city's most racial diverse schools. We also invited two poets, Maureen Kwiat Meshenberg and Reginald "RJ" Eldridge to share their poetry with the class. Afterwards, students were told about *The Transcendence Triptych* project. In addition to them hearing singing and poetry, our other purpose that day was to lead each class in writing exercises that dealt with words like "diversity" "interconnectedness" "transcendence" as well as what the impact of being labeled *feels* like and what would a perfect future world would *look* like.

Their writings, we explained to the students, would help us to construct the libretto (the opera's text that the music is set to) for the third opera in our triptych: *Future Perfect*. To their teacher, Diane Piette's surprise, about 23 students came up to share their work with all of us. Apparently, some of them hadn't said a word all year and yet they found themselves sharing their deepest pain and most intimate thoughts with their classmates. When asked how it made their classmates feel to hear these stories, the listeners often cited feelings of greater compassion towards those that spoke as well as relief to know that they weren't the only ones that struggled along the turbulent road of high school life.

That's the powerful of telling our stories!

Christine Steyer  
Artistic Director, Bellissima Opera