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Sax Score Project, Darlington January 2019

Report by Orchestras Live



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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

SAX SCORE PROJECT, DARLINGTON

OVERVIEW

In January 2019, the Royal Northern Sinfonia (RNS) led a creative composition project in which young musicians from Carmel College, Darlington, composed a new work that they performed alongside RNS musicians and BBC Young Musician 2016 Finalist Jess Gillam, connected with the concert series co-produced by Orchestras Live and Darlington Hippodrome.

A day of workshops was held on Thursday 10 January, led by composer Michael Betteridge, five RNS players and assistant music leader Lizzy Hardy, involving a group of young musicians at Carmel College, selected in consultation with Durham Music Service. Collectively they devised a short piece of music combining the participants as an ensemble together with a notated part for solo saxophone which was sent to Jess Gillam in advance of the performance day.

Following a morning rehearsal, the project culminated with a pre-concert event on stage at Darlington Hippodrome on Thursday 17 January 2019, when Jess Gillam joined the young musicians and RNS players to perform the new piece, directed by the composer. The audience was invited to arrive early to enjoy the 'curtain raiser' performance, followed by the RNS concert. 119 audience members attended the pre-concert event. The young musicians were given free tickets to the RNS concert so they could experience the full orchestra performing with Jess Gillam.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Creative and performance skills gained by around 20 young people through working with world class musicians and a rising star soloist
- Original music work presented by young people in a professional venue
- Greater awareness of the work and talent of young people amongst the Hippodrome audience
- Continued development of emerging music leaders, cultivating the cultural workforce of the region
- Regional and national profile gained through the networks of Orchestras Live, Royal Northern Sinfonia, Durham & Darlington Music Hub, and Creative Darlington



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OUTCOMES

- **Creative and performance skills gained by around 20 young people through working with world class musicians and a rising star soloist**

The students involved in the project worked creatively and collaboratively with professional orchestral musicians and composer Michael Betteridge, and gained performance experience alongside the RNS team and soloist Jess Gillam.

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It was a fun opportunity to work with people involved in professional music and then play the piece live with everyone. I had wanted to see a live orchestral performance for some time but seeing this event has made me sure that I'll go to many more in my lifetime.

Participant feedback

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It was my first time hearing a lot of the orchestral instruments like bassoon, French horn, and oboe so I was pleasantly surprised to hear them playing with such skill in a live performance.

Participant feedback

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I really enjoyed meeting and working with the young people in Darlington and seeing their confidence grow throughout the rehearsal, enjoying music and working together. Music is an integral part of our society and well-being and has an extraordinary power - it can transform lives, force us to ask fundamental questions and provide a sense of hope, joy and worth. Projects that encourage and involve young musicians are essential to ensuring that young people have the opportunity to express creativity and experience music.

Jess Gillam

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It was a very fun experience, where I learned a lot of new ideas about composition and collaboration. I already love orchestral music, but being a part of its creation was incredible and helped me appreciate the art a lot more. I always love seeing live music, and orchestral music is particularly amazing to watch and listen to. I hope to make it a habit to see orchestras perform.

Participant feedback

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- **Original music work presented by young people in a professional venue**

An eight-minute piece entitled *Unity* was premiered by the young musicians, RNS quartet and Jess Gillam in a pre-concert performance on stage at Darlington Hippodrome. Two of the students introduced the performance through a Q&A interview with Michael Betteridge.



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What a great opportunity it was for our students to be involved in a project like this. They have not stopped talking about it since and gained so much from the experience. Michael was a fabulous leader and encouraged the students to be creative. We would love to do more projects like this. It has encouraged students to work on their composition skills and many of them have taken the ideas from the day to make another piece.

Sarah Denley, Music Curriculum Leader at Carmel College

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- **Greater awareness of the work and talent of young people amongst the Hippodrome audience**

119 people (approximately one third of the entire audience for the RNS concert) arrived early to hear the pre-concert performance. For many it will have been their first experience of a collaborative music event. They clearly enjoyed the performance and the students' eloquent and engaging spoken introduction.

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It was a fantastic opportunity for the students to perform alongside such professional musicians and they clearly enjoyed the whole experience! Aside from that, the piece that they created with the Royal Northern Sinfonia was a brilliant showcase of their ideas, musicianship and creativity - it was great to see the piece taken from ideas to the finished performance.

Paul Walker, Teacher at Carmel College

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- **Continued development of emerging music leaders, cultivating the cultural workforce of the region**

The assistant workshop leader, Lizzy Hardy (MA student at Durham University), gained valuable experience and appreciated being involved in this project.

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Having Lizzy supporting me in an assistant capacity was an excellent opportunity for a student composer to experience this sort of devising work in school settings that is often missed from university curricula, and should be encouraged in order to see more composers working in these participatory and community settings.

Michael Betteridge, composer / music leader

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- **Regional and national profile gained through the networks of Orchestras Live, Royal Northern Sinfonia, Durham & Darlington Music Hub, and Creative Darlington**

A press release was distributed to media outlets including BBC Look North, and information was disseminated through the online communications of the project partners. Orchestras Live commissioned local photographer Scott Akoz to cover the pre-concert performance and part of the RNS concert.



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EVALUATION

Michael Betteridge was an excellent workshop leader and put the students at ease right from the start, which gave them confidence to offer their artistic ideas. Gillian Blair (RNS saxophonist for the workshop) was very friendly and encouraging when working in small groups and playing the solo composition lines the students had produced. The RNS musicians worked especially well in small groups and gave ideas as well as listening to student ideas.

- 100% of participants surveyed said that they would be talking about the experience of the project with their family and friends.
- 80% of participants surveyed said that their view of live orchestral music/orchestral concerts had changed positively or very positively as a result of taking part in this project.
- 80% of participants surveyed said that they felt involved in the decision-making process during the project.
- 80% of participants surveyed said that they would like to be involved with another project like this in future.

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The value of projects like these should not be underestimated as it allows young people the time, space and confidence to let their creativity flow. Working with musicians and soloists at the top of their game will no doubt be an unforgettable experience.”

Chrissie Slater, RNS Learning Manager

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Despite being a very able group, with lots of musical experience, this collaborative way of working was very new to most of them and gave them an opportunity to create practically for themselves as performers (creating work bespoke to their instrumental skills) as well as composing for a professional saxophonist and exploring its capabilities. The collaborative nature meant all the young people, regardless of ability, could create something bespoke to them and that felt personally created, contributing to a larger whole. Working with Jess and members of the RNS also gave the young people an opportunity to engage with musicians of the highest calibre hopefully fuelling their aspirations as musicians, if they so choose to follow that path, but also a meaningful connection to repertoire, organisations and performers.

Michael Betteridge, composer / music leader

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The fact that such a variety of instruments and ability levels were involved is wonderful. Michael managed to include every students' idea; if not in the final piece then at least during the workshop.

Marie Schreer, RNS violin

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EXTERNAL LINKS

Orchestras Live website: <http://www.orchestraslive.org.uk>

Royal Northern Sinfonia website: <http://www.sagegateshead.com/about-us/northern-sinfonia/>

View more images from the performance, and find out more about the Darlington Hippodrome orchestral series co-produced by Orchestras Live here:

<http://www.orchestraslive.org.uk/featured-projects/darlington-hippodrome-orchestral-series/>

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