

Family Friendly Case Study: Birmingham Contemporary Music Group

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All audiences and participants are important to Birmingham Contemporary Music Group (BCMG) and we want everyone who comes into contact with our work to have the best possible experience. Young people have always attended our concerts but a few years ago we felt we needed to address the specific needs of families. As a result we created a Family-Friendly Policy which was agreed with our board.

Our Family-Friendly activity includes creative participatory out-of-school hours' workshops, making changes to our regular concerts and creating new performances especially for families.

BCMG has an extensive programme of out-of-school creative participatory workshops for young people aged 8-18. All workshops finish with a sharing for parents and friends. Though the workshops stand alone, many of them are based on music from BCMG's regular concerts. Free tickets are offered to all young people taking part and a concessionary one for an accompanying adult. At BCMG regular evening concerts families are offered front row seats, a specially designed concert programme and a free interval reception. This makes the young audience feel valued and offers us a wonderful informal opportunity to talk to families – conversations which influence what we do. Even with these changes there are still challenges, such as time and format of concert, which we have started to address through new projects.

For the last two years we have run series of Family Concerts. Currently there is one of these per year which is repeated twice on the same day. In these concerts the Group performs exactly the same music that it would in its regular concerts but with significant differences.

- shorter daytime performances
- a carefully chosen programme to appeal to young listeners
- elements of theatre, film and digital media illuminating the music
- fully raked seating
- activities before and after the performance
- specially commissioned new music
- stewards are briefed on relating directly to the young people
- family-friendly refreshments
- a concert programme with activities to do before and after the concert
- meaningful audience participation
- signposting to other Birmingham family-friendly events
- a flexible group ticket

We invited Playtrain, specialists in consulting young people to evaluate the concerts. This gave us extremely helpful feedback which led to us making significant changes from year one to two - especially the concert flyer which now gives more targeted information.

The concerts have generated an entirely new audience for BCMG's work which has been retained and extended. Now we have this new audience we have realised we need to do more for it and have created Families@4. This new series of concerts, starting in April 2009, will take place in the daytime of BCMG's regular concert days and will present, in an informal way, one or two pieces of music from the evening concert.

Very important to the success of this work was the engagement of the entire BCMG team in the process of drawing up our Family-Friendly policy. For us it has been a mixture of small adjustments to what we were already doing as well as creating whole new programmes. Even small touches are much appreciated.

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