

How to develop a great iPad app



Photo credit: Sara Fanelli, Placelt

An interview with **Kevin Gosling**
Director of Communications at Britten-Pears
Foundation, by **Katie Moffat**



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*Benjamin Britten is one of the best known composers of the 20th Century and as part of celebrations to mark the centenary of his birth, the Britten-Pears Foundation produced an [online interactive resource](#) and [an iPad app](#) based around one of his best known orchestral works, **The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra**. The piece was originally written for a documentary in 1946 entitled [The Instruments of the Orchestra](#), in which Sir Malcolm Sargeant described the roles and characteristics of each orchestral instrument with the aid of Britten's variations on a theme by Henry Purcell.*

Why did you decide to produce the interactive resource and iPad app?

The original film was produced as a way to explain to children who had no experience of classical music all about the different instruments of the orchestra. At the time, television was the best way to reach those children. Thinking about the centenary we asked ourselves, if you were to update it, what form would it take? The obvious answer was to make something for today's technology.

Explain a little bit about the functionality of the iPad app

There are games, quizzes, an interactive score and a 'meet the players and instruments' section. It's designed to be fun but informative and to help children learn what different instruments sound like and the part they individually play in the orchestra. The idea of the 'meet the player' videos is that if you're considering taking up an instrument, this can help you to think about which would suit you best.

How did you go about developing it?

We were clear from the outset that we wanted to have a complete performance of the piece and for that we teamed up with the Royal Northern College of Music; they were our key partners throughout the development process. The students' performance, conducted by Sir Mark Elder, features as a video and is also sampled throughout the games and quizzes.

First of all the team ran some workshops with schools in the Manchester area to test out initial ideas and see how children in the target age range responded. Following this, when the team had a clearer idea of what would work, they drew up a technical brief and found a developer who had significant experience in producing similar projects.

For the illustrations we commissioned the well-known artist [Sara Fanelli](#). Due to the fact that the app was primarily aimed at children aged 7-11, it was important that the illustrations were appealing without being too childish for anyone a bit older and perhaps more culturally aware, who would recognise her work.

In all the development process, including the original workshop, took around 12 months. It was led by freelance consultant Rebecca Meitlis, with the technical development undertaken by Daniel Jackson of AVCO Productions.

What was the biggest challenge?

One part of the app is an interactive score where you can listen to the complete performance while watching the score and associated instruments; I know that lining this up accurately proved to be a huge technical challenge.

How did you encourage downloads of the app?

We promoted it via the Britten 100 website and generally as part of the overall Britten 100 campaign. The press release about the app was picked up fairly widely and it was chosen, by the Guardian, as one of their 'Top 10 apps' of the week.

In addition, because during the next few months the piece is being performed in so many different places, due to the centenary celebrations, we will be contacting all the relevant orchestras and venues and reminding them about the app and online resource, so that they can make their audiences aware that it exists.

The app was generously supported by a Grants for the Arts award from Arts Council England, which means that we are able to make it available completely free.

What advice would you have for any organisations thinking of developing an app?

The key is to start with your objective and ask yourself, what's the overall aim of the project? Are you trying to reach as many people as possible or is your app more about an exclusive audience?

It's also important to consider the benefits and appropriateness of the technology you're using. In our case, for example, we knew that it wasn't something that would work well on a small screen and as we didn't need any features of mobile, there is nothing in the app that requires your physical location for example, we decided not to develop a mobile version. And of course technology changes so fast that you have to accept that whatever you're creating will have a shelf-life. For our next project we're considering using HTML 5 and possibly producing something purely for the web, rather than developing a separate app. It's important to keep an eye on the latest technological developments.

For more information:

<http://www.britten100.org/new-to-britten/learning/digital-guide-to-the-orchestra>

Or download the iPad app here:

<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/young-persons-guide-to-orchestra/id665019589?mt=8>