

Issue 73 Community Engagement

- The case for creative exchange
- Making a difference
- Creating a power balance
- My Home and Me
- What can we learn from libraries?



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A NTW TEAM event in Haverfordwest.

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Creative collaboration

Reading through this issue of *JAM* you get a real sense of how important collaboration and participation is within community engagement. Or what Melissa Matthews from Suffolk Libraries calls: "creative democracy".

It's only by challenging the status quo and valuing grassroots creativity that an effective bottom-up and collaborative approach can be achieved, argues Imrana Mahmood.

Kenn Taylor discusses how community engagement should impact right across what a cultural organisation does to help influence change.

An arts organisation's approach to working with communities is just as important as the work you do with those communities, considers Devinda De Silva from National Theatre Wales.

Hannah Talbot explains how the Jewish Museum London's exhibition *My Home and Me* was a collaborative project with the British Red Cross Young Refugee Service and six young refugees.

A project driven by participants, Karys Orman writes about Orchestra Live's 'with' not 'for' approach and the impact of its award-winning community engagement project *Classically Yours*.

In 2018 Arts Council England welcomed six library services as NPOs (National Portfolio Status). Melissa Matthews considers what NPO status has meant to Suffolk Libraries and what she's learnt over the past year.

In *Untold Stories*, Charlotte Angharad spoke to *JAM* about MBD's *Empire Soldiers* project, which was created to commemorate

the 100th anniversary of World War I and tells the stories of soldiers from the Caribbean and South Asia who fought for Britain.

In this issue's spotlight Ciara Harris, AMA's Membership and Marketing Officer, shares her 25th year with the AMA. And Bea Udeh, AMA's Programme Producer, spoke to Verity Shallaker about the AMA's upcoming event — *Inclusivity & Audiences Day*. ▶

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spotlight

Turning 25

You know what they say... "Those who can't do, teach." Okay, so it wasn't quite like that but calling my artwork "abstract" wasn't convincing anyone I was the next Picasso. So, I wrote about art instead.

I studied History of Art at Leeds University and stayed on to get my MA in Arts and Heritage Management (I wasn't quite ready to give up being a student).

My MA shifted my focus to think about audiences in a way I never had before and to consider all those people who work behind the scenes to bring arts and culture to these audiences.

I spent many hours awkwardly hovering outside Leeds museums and galleries in the hope that someone would fill in my creative evaluation surveys. I volunteered

with conservation teams and educational arts outreach projects and as I began my job search, I knew whatever was next for me wasn't in the dusty archives of a beautiful collection, but with people; people who like me wanted to do their bit for the sector — even if not quite in the way they'd expected.

I've been at the AMA for two years now and I still feel lucky to be here. Having been on the membership team I've spent my days chatting to members, helping our Member Reps to arrange their regional meetings and generally supporting people to do their bit for audience development in the sector.

From September I take on the role of Strategic Partnerships Manager at the AMA. I'm excited to continue building on the relationships we have with our members, as well as

meeting and forming partnerships with new people.

There's something quite nice about turning 25 in the same year the AMA does (yes I'm still the baby of the team) and as for my inner-Picasso, who knows what the next 25 years holds. Oh, and for the record, teachers are amazing. ▶

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THE CASE FOR CREATIVE EXCHANGE

Imrana Mahmood considers the notion of ‘community engagement’ and argues that it’s only by challenging the status quo and valuing grassroots creativity that an effective bottom-up and collaborative approach can enable the inclusion of new voices.

“Without community there is no liberation” — this affirmation by Audre Lorde is a reminder for me on the freedom enjoyed by those who experience a perpetual sense of belonging. It also, however, sheds light on the reality that there are those who are deprived of the privilege of representation solely due to their positionality in the current socio-political climate. It is for this reason that the notion of ‘community engagement’ is one that I am consistently interrogating within both my professional and artistic practice.

The arts sector has been guilty in the past of labelling certain communities as ‘hard to reach’ without acknowledging its own inaccessibility. It is no surprise therefore why some people still feel the arts are not for them. If the default is that only those with power get to decide what art is, then inevitably anything that fails to meet that set criteria falls by the wayside.

As a visibly Muslim woman of Pakistani heritage, creativity has been an intrinsic part of my life growing up yet my presence now in traditionally white, middle-class spaces seems at times a tick-box exercise, whilst also defying certain sensibilities associated with the arts sector. Due to the myriad of assumptions made

about ‘community arts’, I therefore make time to reflect on my intentions for a project. I like to have clarity on why I want to do the work and what benefit it will bring to the people I work with; will it provide a platform for their voices to be heard and more importantly, am I challenging voyeurism so that I am not doing something to a community but actually working with them.

An example of this is my recent Arts Council England supported project, ‘Echoes of the Diaspora’, where I worked with a group of British Muslim women to share their stories as a theatrical montage — thus the need for place-based, participatory arts projects that have co-creation and a sense of ownership at the heart of them cannot be emphasised enough.

Community Activism

The Power of Community² is a symposium event I co-produced with Creative People and Places (CPP) — an action-research programme funded by Arts Council England — as part of a series of national strategic events. The symposium was aimed at creatives across the UK to explore how they might embed new engagement approaches into their work. →

→ I held feedback salons with CPP artists and participants to gauge what they would find most beneficial from the event and then programmed accordingly. Active listening was paramount to creating work that was resonant and it was also an effective mechanism in building long-term relationships across the CPP network.

Too often institutions emphasise the need for community engagement without exploring the ways this should transpire.

As the Community Activist for Revoluton Arts³ (Luton's CPP programme), my intention is always to explore ways in which I can provide meaningful opportunities for artists, participants and audiences to meet in a shared space. Too often institutions emphasise the need for community engagement without exploring the ways this should transpire.

To implement tangible and positive social change, arts organisations such as Revoluton Arts acknowledge and utilise the creativity which exists at the grassroots level, exemplified by our recent film which I facilitated, called *Creative Bury Park*⁴, and it is only through valuing these people and places that we can then initiate an effective bottom-up approach. Though this can only be possible if we follow non-hierarchical strategies and likewise transform language to ensure the inclusion of new voices.

Redefining the arts scene

The current socio-political climate does not allow for critical thinking and so it is vital to have a sustainable commitment to challenge the status quo and intervene in spaces that fail to amplify the voices that matter. Many people view community engagement as a linear process however this is not always the case and the most effective way of inhibiting such assumptions is through a deeper understanding of collaboration.

Community members should be active in the planning and delivery of creative content. For those in positions of influence, it is essential to identify the creative spectrum in different communities and recognise the potential fusion of artistic practices and methods thus weaving these various elements together. The aim should also be to enable and empower those from diverse backgrounds to take on leadership roles. All the aforementioned actions can happen in tandem and the transfer of knowledge and skills is what lays a strong foundation for a creative exchange to take place.

It is then vital to embed an arts programme which is inclusive and resonant in order to redefine the arts scene.

Creative legacy

The question which then remains is how institutions can build long-term relationships with the communities they serve and is it enough to provide an 'arts' offer solely for the sake of engagement? Perhaps the answer lies in recognising that communities have much greater cultural currency than they are given credit for. Too often we place community arts on the bottom rung and fail to see the damage this does to artistic ambition.

...it is vital to have a sustainable commitment to challenge the status quo and intervene in spaces that fail to amplify the voices that matter.

Lyn Gardner suggests an interesting call to action in her recent article for *The Stage*: "just imagine the transformations if we stopped building theatres and started investing in the creativity of communities". I completely echo this sentiment: we need to emphasise investing in people and place; and give more value to grassroots 'artivism', which is steadily providing a platform for under-represented voices beyond the current cultural landscape.

The success of any programme is dependent on the legacy it leaves behind and the legacy is dependent on how a moment of pure joy remains at the heart of a person's conscience. No matter how much we invest in bricks and mortar, tangible creative exchange requires a shift in expectations whilst also transforming the narrative around the value of creative communities — eloquently summarised by the Persian poet Hafez: "true art makes the divine silence in the soul break into applause" — let's work together to make this a reality. ♣

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INCLUSIVITY & AUDIENCES DAY

Verity Shallaker, AMA's Head of Marketing — Events, sat down with **Bea Udeh**, AMA's Programme Producer, to find out more about the **Inclusivity & Audiences Day**, which is taking place on **7 November** in **Birmingham**.

What can delegates expect from the day?

To be challenged and supported. To hear things they've heard before but in a different way. To learn about themselves, in a space, in their space.

The theme of the day revolves around the systems and structures inherent within the arts and cultural sector. So, we'll be talking about the interaction between everyone — the challenges, the discrimination, empathy.

"Actually making time for those awkward conversations and inviting new directions. New actions."

We want to create a safe space for all delegates to contribute to this discussion and we'll provide plenty of tools, tips and conversations for delegates to take back and explore within their own workplaces.

What will the atmosphere be like?

Flippin' challenging! Friendly, organised — there'll be a sense of respect and coming together.

What will delegates get out of attending?

This day will challenge the way of thinking for a lot of people. I want people to feel part of the conversation and to understand how big it is. And to know that their journey is a big journey.

Delegates will gain an understanding of the context in which they sit, i.e. the systems. We'll ask things like: how can we be fairer, more curious and challenge those systems? What is your own place in these systems? Delegates will hopefully start to determine their own answers, whilst gaining knowledge that these systems are in place and how they got put together.

What three things will delegates take back to their organisations?

1. Power and confidence as changed or challenged people who feel they can vocalise or implement changes, for example programming, policies, recruitment.
2. Tips on how other organisations challenge systems and are already working on their own terms.
3. Knowledge and understanding on how to reframe their thinking. Delegates will be able to take the information and rework it to suit their organisation or respond in a different way.

Why is this event important?

If we don't have a space to challenge ourselves and the systems, things will stay the same. However, I believe that organisations can change and we don't want to create more dinosaurs.

Everyone has a voice but lots of voices need to be at the party. Within the arts and cultural eco system we all (including audiences) have voices that need to be represented. The Inclusivity and Audiences Day will ensure more people are aware of this and have the knowledge to do something about it. ♣

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Inclusivity & Audiences Day
7 November 2019, Birmingham Hippodrome
am-a.co.uk/inclusivity

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MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Kenn Taylor is Creative Director of Artlink Hull and a writer with an interest in culture, community and the urban environment. In this article Kenn argues that community engagement should impact right across what a cultural organisation does and considers the importance of having clear objectives that underpin this work to help create influence and change.

I've been working on arts and heritage projects with communities for nearly 15 years. In that time, I have seen community engagement shift from being, in an early role, down the corridor from everything else, to something that even the largest and most prestigious cultural institutions are trying to adapt their practices to include.

My interest in this field comes from having a working class background and getting tentatively involved in the arts sector; feeling that, as much as it was stimulating and great, how much of a disconnect there was between where I had come from and the world I was now entering. Working in community engagement seemed like an interesting way of bridging that gap.

It was clear that much of the wider cultural sector regarded us as 'nice to have' or, 'necessary for funding'. Something that should not have the same recognition, space or budget as 'real culture'. This was immensely frustrating when, at the coalface, it was easy to see how important and

powerful such work could be at all levels.

Community engagement can mean many different things, so first of all it's important to step back and ask, why do you want to do it? Being clear in this is key in deciding what approach to take. Do you want to diversify or perhaps increase audiences? Are you trying to understand audiences better? Do you want to work with people in the development of a new project? Make your programming more representative of your local area or wider society? Are you involving people in a more radical rethinking about what your organisation is and does? These things can intersect and crossover, but also all have distinctions.

If you want to engage a community of whatever form, you have to ask, what's in it for them? Community engagement purely because you feel you have to for political or financial reasons or because it's currently fashionable may work for a while. However, if there's nothing

underpinning such engagement, if it doesn't, to a greater or lesser extent, influence and change how you do things, it's a route to failure in the long term.

Doing community engagement well can be hard work. So, why do it? Simply, the publicly funded cultural sector can no longer have any complacency about the broad communities it is intended to serve and still exist. This doesn't mean every bit of culture will be co-produced in future, but it does mean more change. That many people, often the most disadvantaged, still feel alienated from the sector remains a huge issue. Furthermore, in a multimedia world, people are far less willing to be passive consumers of culture and want to 'participate' in many different ways. Many do still just want to see that exhibition/play/performance. However considering the many ways people might want to otherwise interact with the art and culture that is being made and those involved in making it, is vital for the future of organisations.

When I began to realise in the last few years, that participation, community engagement, the various other intersecting types of work and terminologies we use, had become *à la mode*, initially it felt positive. That this sort of work was finally being recognised. However, as people and organisations who'd never given it a passing thought started diving into it and shouting from the rooftops about how good they were at it, concerns emerged. For example, of the risks of organisations doing it with little experience and alienating the very people they're trying to engage. Or of heavily funded traditional institutions adopting the ideas of smaller focused organisations and crowding them out from funding, rather than trying to work in partnership.

That more organisations are doing this kind of work though, does acknowledge the power of community engagement. However more still needs to be done. Community engagement on the side is on the way out. This does not mean that specific and targeted

programmes led by experienced practitioners can all be replaced by vague statements about how: "community is considered in all things". It does mean that such engagement should impact right across what a cultural organisation does, from the toilets to the marketing. Crucially, the sector also has to make sure that the artists and other workers it employs are more representative of the diversity of British society: they will know best how to engage and indeed challenge communities that they themselves come from.

When I started in this field, I wanted to learn how to do community engagement as best as possible and perfect it. What I found out instead was that, as soon as you think you've answered it, you find another question to ask, another parameter to consider, another level of depth to go to. Critical theory is, quite rightly, catching up and taking the world of participation and engagement ever more seriously, but there still is, I think, no perfect model. Just different ways of doing

things well in the context that you do them in. Though there is a world of good practice to take inspiration from. But tread carefully and slowly as this so often leads to better results. The more successful you do something in engagement, the main thing you're likely to learn is how to do it better again next time. And for me really, that's where the joy in it is. Working with people and trying to do it well around art and culture to make a difference in a very imperfect world. ♣

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Portraits Untold project by Tanya Raabe Webber. Image courtesy of Artlink Hull © Jerome Whittingham.

CREATING A POWER BALANCE

Devinda De Silva, Head of Collaboration at National Theatre Wales (NTW), explains how NTW TEAM plays a pivotal role in developing the relationship between NTW and the communities it works with.

National Theatre Wales (NTW) has been making English-language productions in locations all over Wales, the UK, internationally and online since March 2010.

Since our inception we have established a firm reputation as a radical and pioneering national company. We have presented over 60 powerful productions, ranging from the intimate to the epic. Our work has surprised, delighted and acted as a catalyst for debate and for action. And NTW TEAM, our model of engagement, has played a vital role in this success.

To us it's about how you approach things as much as what you do.

The starting point for TEAM has always been about our ethos. To us it's about how you approach things as much as what you do. At the centre of this is trust and an understanding that NTW aren't the 'experts' — there is and has always been a range of arts and cultural activity across Wales and we want to contribute and build on this. It also means stepping back when the time isn't right.

Connected to our ethos has been a focus on developing the relationship between NTW and the communities we work with. We wanted to create something different. A model where they could shape the organisation and be able to influence it at every level. This addresses something at the very heart of what TEAM is about; the power balance between an organisation and communities.

TEAM is many different things and has developed over time. Over the years we've supported hundreds of projects covering training, creative experiences and social events. →

→ Our approach loosely falls into three categories:

- **Developing and supporting creative leaders and a range of approaches to training**
TEAM works with people and groups to influence all of NTW's planning, productions and projects, and to take the lead in developing activities in their own localities. We've supported a host of projects and events that have been developed and led by TEAM members including open mic nights, working with Pupil Referral Units, developing a radio play, creating a choir, curating an exhibition, developing an App and much more. Alongside this we provide ongoing advice and mentoring.
- **Developing and supporting the network**
We've always believed in the power of the network. TEAM are encouraged to support each other, share skills and knowledge and develop new partnerships. The TEAM network now has over 1,000 members globally. Its membership is cross art form and incredibly varied.
- **Developing a new model of engagement**
Input from the community makes all our work stronger (not just engagement). We've developed mechanisms where TEAM can feed into our decision making, and that all our staff, regardless of department, are required to contribute and be involved with TEAM ensuring mutual benefit and personal development.

This was the basis of our thinking up until around four years ago.

Around this time, we felt that there was real urgency to build on the work that NTW did with communities in Wales. The starting point was looking at what the role of a theatre is in the current world we live in, and within this looking at how we could remain relevant and support change.

Our current phase of TEAM... focuses the collective expertise and experience of TEAM members and NTW on a new programme, which has collaboration and co-creation at its core.

Our current phase of TEAM began in January 2018. It focuses the collective expertise and experience of TEAM members and NTW on a new programme, which has collaboration and co-creation at its core.

Over four years TEAM will work with the people of two counties; Wrexham and Pembrokeshire, to develop a programme of leadership, creative activism, intensive engagement and peer learning. Nothing has been set. NTW will provide a framework of support and advice through our staff and partners, but the communities themselves will curate a range of creative, training and networking events in their area. The finale will be an NTW production, chosen, developed and realised in close collaboration with the residents of Wrexham and Pembrokeshire.

This vision has been built from our conversations with communities over the years, and at its heart is an emphasis on empowerment. Underlying this is also a shift from primarily supporting arts events to supporting people and local community organisations to using creative leadership skills to address local and global issues.

We're currently at the stage where both themes for our shows have been chosen by the people of Pembrokeshire and Wrexham — Climate Change and the Environment and Homelessness respectively — and we are working closely with TEAM Panel (15 TEAM members from around Wales, who will be guiding us through this process) and the wider TEAM network to decide on other key aspects. The shows will be in 2020 in Pembrokeshire, and 2021 in Wrexham.

We were always lucky that we could create something from scratch with TEAM.

Whilst there were, and still are, great examples of engagement out there nothing at the time quite fitted what we needed, so we created something entirely our own, drawing on a range of influences and shaped by everyone who was part of it. ♡

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NTW TEAM has been funded by The Paul Hamlyn Foundation since its inception in 2010.

Key takeaways

- Think about the power balance between your organisation and the communities that you work with.
- Help develop creative leadership skills so that local communities can address the issues that affect them.
- Create your own engagement model if nothing else fits your organisation.
- Collaborate and co-create — your approach is just as important as what you do.

COLLABORATION IS KEY

Arts and culture are at the heart of communities. As public funding becomes more challenging and the competition for audiences increases, collaboration will become more important.

Tessitura Network was born out of a collaboration of seven organisations over 18 years ago. They knew that a unified system, with a collaborative community at its heart, would enable them to succeed. Today all 650+ of our member organisations are involved in that community; a forum to learn, share and collaborate.

Many of our members collaborate daily across venue types and genres; working together to increase efficiencies, realise additional revenue and ultimately further their customer relationships through data insights. Our unique system enables secure, successful collaboration among organisations

that want to share a single database. Consortiums successfully exist in London, Manchester, Nottingham, Northampton, Wales and globally.

“By being part of the consortium, but also the wider network, there's a real culture of collaboration, shared knowledge and understanding... It's a really unique community and it means that you can... develop ideas and system models quicker than you might do otherwise.”

Ticketing Network East Midlands

Tessitura Network is committed to advancing the business of arts

and culture, through delivering technology, providing expertise and fostering a community where collaboration thrives.

To learn more about being a part of our community, get in touch with Tessitura Europe today:
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We'd love to hear from you!



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RADA BUSINESS

Royal Academy of Dramatic Art

MY HOME AND ME

In late 2018 the Jewish Museum London collaborated with the British Red Cross Young Refugee Service to work on an exhibition project with a group of young refugees. AMA member **Hannah Talbot** shares the background, process and key learnings from this project, which culminated in a photography exhibition *My Home and Me* that explored the journey of young refugees arriving in Britain today.

The Jewish Museum London is the only museum in London dedicated to a minority community. An important element of our strategic plan is to diversify our audiences; building deeper connections with local communities in Camden Town as well as with other minority communities.

Our museum holds many stories of refugee history but rarely of interpretation by the refugees themselves — something we are working hard to address. At the end of 2018 we held an exhibition marking the 80th anniversary of the Kindertransport; the 1938-9 rescue operation when the British Government allowed 10,000 mostly Jewish children from occupied Europe to come to Britain. Now in their 80s and 90s the exhibition gave the Kinder (child refugees) the opportunity to give their testimony through filmed interviews.

We also wanted to work with a group of young refugees to explore the contemporary refugee experience. We decided this could only work by offering them active participation in the museum; producing a final exhibition inspired by the theme of 'home'. We wanted to give these young refugees the opportunity to broaden their skillset and a platform to tell their stories and ideas. We aimed for long-term engagement; offering future opportunities to engage with the museum, as for many, this was their first time visiting any museum at all.

A fundamental reason for the success of this project was collaborating with the right organisation. We partnered with the British Red Cross Young Refugee Service who engage with unaccompanied refugees and asylum-seeking young people aged 14 to 21. We really wanted to work with someone with local connections to the Camden Town area so that we could build long-term relationships with the group. British Red Cross were the ideal partner, as they had a local office in Islington and as part of their service they run weekly Refugee and Befriending meetings. These sessions provide opportunities to form friendships and widen social networks, to learn a variety of practical skills, and to nurture talents and interests. The exhibition project we were proposing fitted really well with their aims.

Our learning team worked closely with the British Red Cross throughout the project. Several planning meetings took place in advance of the first session with the young people. We then met and worked with a group of young refugees from countries including Albania, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Sudan. Learning officers brought objects from the handling collection to these groups and used them as springboards to share discussions on stories about home. Our team carried on with relationship-building by taking part in the rest of the 'befriending' session, which included playing games, sharing stories and eating a meal together.

We ran skills-building workshops that included photography, label writing, and introducing them to Kindertransport refugees. This was a unique opportunity for the young refugees to speak to an older person about

their refugee story. The group met with Elsa Shamash and the most powerful element of this session was looking at photos she had brought in; this helped to create connections and understanding despite the language barriers.

Due to the range of languages in the group it was essential that the young people were given enough time to think about what they wanted to say. They were given two weeks to work on this and to take any additional photographs that they wanted to contribute to the exhibition. Our role was then to print the photographs, mount and frame them, and set up the exhibition.

The result of the project was a moving exhibition curated by the young people of different backgrounds who took part in this project. Six young people produced 14 images of items they felt reflected ideas of home for them. Photographs ranged from drawings, to items of clothing to hand gestures.

We hosted a celebration event where we invited the participants and their families and friends to explore the exhibition and each participant was given a certificate of achievement. All the young people involved with the project have received membership cards as well as two communal membership cards for the Refugee and Befriending group. We hope that this will help create awareness of their project but also enable them to use the museum as a safe and welcoming space.

One young person noted: "I learned when I went to the Jewish Museum that objects tell us a story".



Image featured in the *My Home and Me* exhibition with this label: "This is the Christian cross. It is from Eritrea, I got it when I was young. It represents my religion and makes me think of Jesus. It makes me happy. It is like a prayer," Okubit, 16. Image courtesy of Jewish Museum London ©.

The British Red Cross team were pleased with the outcome: "Our experience at the Jewish Museum was so warm and welcoming ... It was a really special moment when the young people saw their work so beautifully presented on the wall."

We continue to work closely with the British Red Cross, most recently during our events programme marking Holocaust Memorial Day. More generally, our learning team keep in touch with the project coordinators about relevant events and activities taking place at the museum. We have also invited British Red Cross to networking events with other cultural organisations who may be able to support similar skills-based projects.

This piece of work forms part of our commitment to diversifying our audience and we have seen a transformation in our audiences over the past few years. In 2017/18 our audiences from BAME backgrounds doubled — from 7% in 2016/17 to 18% in 2017/18 — and in 2017/18 audiences from lower income backgrounds doubled — Kaleidoscope Creativity segment was 8% in 2016/17 and 16% in 2017/18. ▼

Hannah Talbot

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Key takeaways

- Choose the right partner organisation — it's important to build links with an organisation that has similar ambitions.
- Collaborative working takes time and requires energy to build connections and to maintain them.
- Think long-term about your collaborative working and opportunities beyond the immediate project.
- Successful collaboration requires buy-in from the entire organisation (from curatorial to visitor experience to marketing).
- When working with young people the need for a 'result' and 'outcome' is important. To be able to see their work presented as an exhibition was critical to the project's success.

CLASSICALLY YOURS

A PROJECT DRIVEN BY PARTICIPANTS

Orchestras Live believes orchestras are for everyone and work in partnership to ensure communities across the country have access to world-class orchestral experiences. AMA member **Karys Orman** writes about the impact Orchestras Live's award-winning community engagement project — Classically Yours — has had in the East Riding of Yorkshire.

In 2018, Orchestras Live won the RPS (Royal Philharmonic Society) Music Award for Audiences and Engagement, with our partner East Riding of Yorkshire Council, for our flagship project, Classically Yours.

We believe our RPS win was a watershed moment for community engagement. The RPS Music Awards are the highest recognition for live classical music in this country — the Oscars of the music sector — and our win placed projects truly driven by their participants next to the best of orchestral music in the UK.

Classically Yours set out to engage new audiences by addressing the inequalities of opportunity to access high quality live orchestral music in the East Riding of Yorkshire. It involved four professional orchestras. New audiences were characterised by dispersed communities, limited public transport and minimal cultural infrastructure, with cultural engagement rates in the lowest third nationally (Active Lives Survey 2018); this programme constituted East Riding Council's contribution to Hull UK City of Culture 2017. In its first three years, Classically Yours also engaged over 1,000 project participants across the East Riding.

Orchestras Live brought together two of the orchestras to work collaboratively, including merging the two orchestras for a large-scale concert. Through this, Manchester Camerata and Sinfonia Viva created an environment where orchestras became part of the fabric of the community. Consequently, a critical

mass of audiences for the longer term has been established. The target audience was young people, families, older people, people with disabilities and voluntary music-making groups living in isolated coastal and rural areas; communities where aspirations have been undermined by lack of opportunity and a belief that culture happens elsewhere.

At the heart is a 'with' not 'for' approach — we don't helicopter in with the finished project, we come with an idea that has yet to take shape and act as the creative intermediary between audiences and artists.

We wanted to transform those beliefs. We devised an interconnected programme of participatory and concert activities in consultation with local music organisations whose input shaped the project and was crucial to its success. Participants included older people in care homes, community and school choirs, pre-school children, a learning disability theatre group and the County Youth Orchestra; engagement ranged from regular creative workshops to performance opportunities.

Public concerts took place in small to mid-scale venues, often first-time orchestral music promoters but chosen for their familiarity to local

people. Classically Yours developed their expertise through testing new concert formats, involving audiences in programming and promoting a varied orchestral series.

Process

Success for us at Orchestras Live comes from applying the same principles to every project we co-produce, regardless of geographical location or background of communities. At the heart is a 'with' not 'for' approach — we don't helicopter in with the finished project, we come with an idea that has yet to take shape and act as the creative intermediary between audiences and artists.

- We place 'real' people at the heart of an orchestral project: to act as producers of a live orchestral event with significant role in the project design.
- We create an experience that is relevant to, and informed by participants, so that experience is impactful and brings positive attitudinal change amongst audiences.
- We enable people to gain industry skills, experience and accreditation through working alongside professionals for their long-term musical engagement.
- We inform and influence promoters, sharing ways that live orchestral music is presented for communities.
- We develop a model of work that can help sustain relationships between promoters, orchestras, music education hubs and audiences, so live orchestral music can thrive.

Outcomes

At the end of our first two-year phase, our partnerships have:

- Developed and sustained new audiences in the East Riding, where new audiences rose from a previous 4% to 25% in Year 1 and in Year 2 repeat mailing list bookers rose from 7% to 17%.
- Supported wider audience development for events outside the Classically Yours programme with evidence of an increase in new bookers.
- Stimulated music audiences in Withernsea, a small 6,000-strong community with no previous track record of concert-going, sustained into Year 3 with 22% new bookers for concerts.
- Discovered large latent demand for orchestral music with families with younger children.
- Increased the number of concerts and orchestras programmed in East Riding each year, and transformed the music played.
- Established an audience base for Pocklington Arts Centre's concerts.
- Attracted 50 first-time family attenders to Bridlington Spa's New Year concert.
- Seen positive impact on community cohesion and artistic ambition.

Our role as an agent for change in the orchestral sector means we are driven to dispel misconceptions and bring enthusiasm for live orchestral music, and what orchestras can and should be.

We're passionate about sharing the amazing world of orchestral music with as many people as possible and want to help keep the sector alive and vibrant. ♣

Karys Orman

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Participants in *Orchestral Extravaganza* concert with Sinfonia Viva and Manchester Camerata, part of Classically Yours. Image courtesy of Orchestras Live © Andy McNaughton.

"Keep doing [Classically Yours concerts]! I don't want to have to travel to Hull City Hall to see an orchestra."

Audience member
Bridlington Spa

"Thank you for letting my music makers be part of this amazing project. It has rekindled my desire to get music out to communities and made me realise that what I do in my corner of the county is valuable and essential in bringing people together."

Project participant

"That was brilliant. Would like more of this local to Withernsea. Inclusion of the primary school class was a lovely touch."

Audience member
At Home Concert, Withernsea

Classically Yours partners, performers and venues include:

- Orchestras Live
- East Riding of Yorkshire Council (Arts, Community and Public Health)
- East Riding Music Education Hub
- ReMarkable Arts
- Manchester Camerata
- Sinfonia Viva
- Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
- Britten Sinfonia
- James Redwood
- Richard Taylor
- Tim Steiner
- Bridlington Spa
- Toll Gavel Church Beverley
- Meridian Centre Withernsea
- Pocklington Arts Centre
- Arts Council England
- Foyle Foundation

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM LIBRARIES?

2018 marked the first-year of Suffolk Libraries having National Portfolio Status (NPO) with six library services in the UK being welcomed into the portfolio by Arts Council England. AMA member **Melissa Matthews** considers the impact NPO status has had on Suffolk Libraries and shares what she's learnt over the past year.

In this first year of NPO status we've been trying to work out what it means for libraries to be part of the portfolio. What is the essence that makes libraries culturally great — is it the loaning of books or is it the communities that use them, and do we need to do more art?

We've had to be brave and bold whilst trying to work out how we want to change perceptions of libraries and ultimately work out why we need to change perceptions in the first place.

I had never worked in libraries before I began working on the BLOC — Building Libraries on Creativity programme. I had worked for years at an established NPO and then at a museum, then back to an established NPO. This first year has been a steep learning curve and this is what I've learnt from Suffolk Libraries.

Cut the jargon (the acronyms too)

This is painful for anyone who works in the arts. Knowing each acronym is like a Brownie-Guide badge of honour for all the years working in the arts. The CATs, CPD, NEETs and LEPs creep into my vocabulary more often than I would want to admit — but very quickly it was pointed out nobody really knew what I was talking about.

Cutting jargon helps communicate what you are doing to a wider audience of people a lot more effectively. The balance of jargon vs 'no-nonsense speech' is a tightrope though, as ultimately cutting all the jargon then can distort the meaning of what you are wanting to say. BLOC is still finding our way with this and the perfect balance is still a hot topic with our teams. This is because sometimes the jargon encapsulates perfectly and completely what you want to say.

Our all-time top three most discussed 'unwieldy' phrases, still up for debate, include:

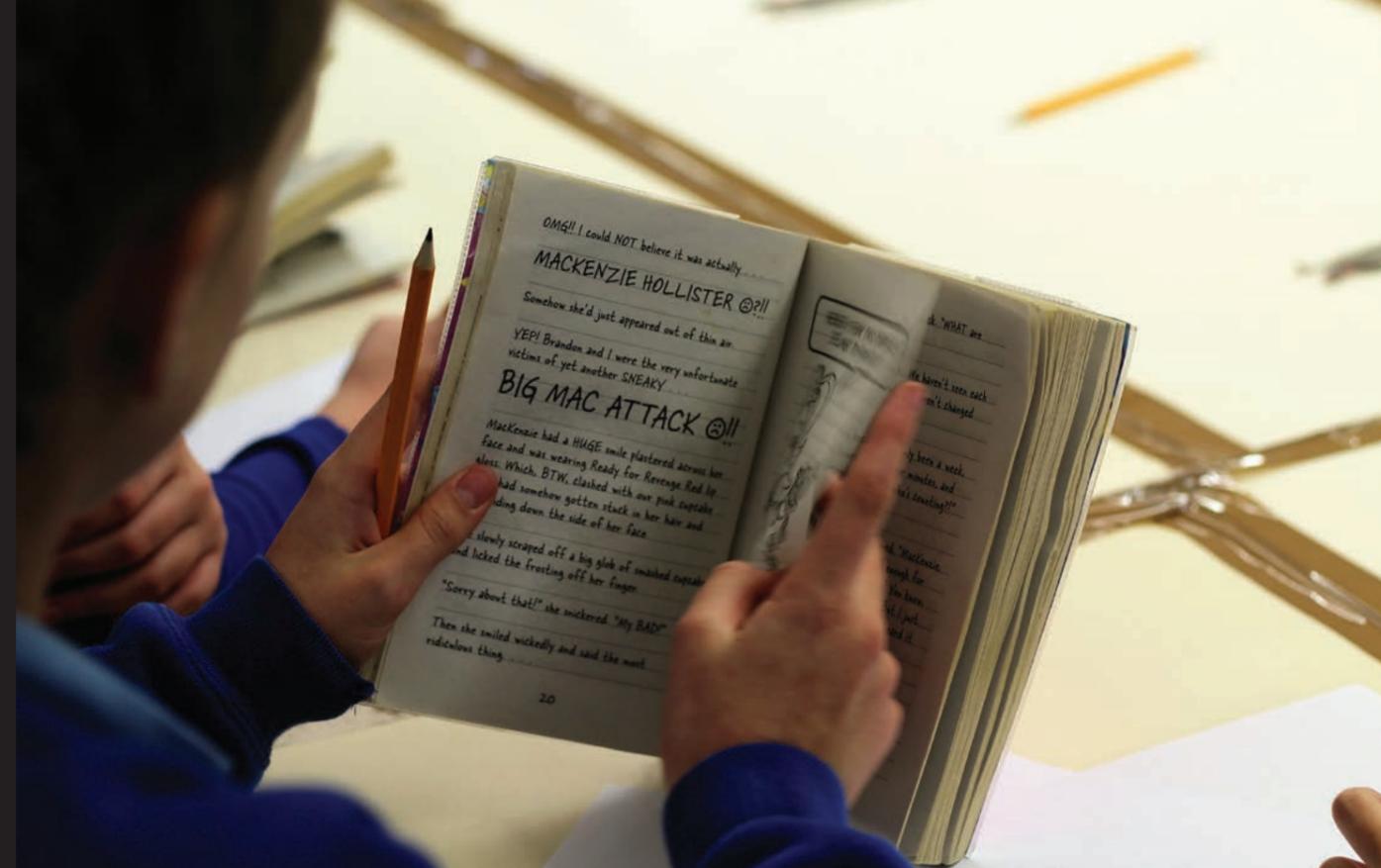
1. Artist — Person A: "Are they a painter?" Me: "No, they explore the role of semiotics in anthropomorphic iconography."
2. CPD — Me: "It's not staff training they're: on a secondment/attending a conference/ networking, etc."
3. Practice/Practitioner — Person A: "Are they a medical professional?" Me: "No, they explore the role of semiotics in anthropomorphic iconography."

Creative democracy and community engagement

Suffolk Libraries is made up of 44 libraries and over 400 staff and over 1,000 volunteers. Every one of those people; not forgetting our customers as well, has a strong opinion and lots of ideas about what their libraries should be offering their community. This can feel a little overwhelming.

My previous experiences at an established arts organisation, projects were dreamt up typically between the same three to four people and the outcome set from the beginning. There is nothing wrong with this, as clarity of vision can lead to something spectacular. However, libraries at their heart are owned by their communities and those communities should have ideas — it's their library after all.

Those voices needed to be heard. So I quickly learnt to embrace a democratic approach and align the aims of the programme with the vision of those individuals.



In February 2019, 30 students worked with Thurston Library to create sculptures inspired by characters from their favourite book. Their sculptures were cast in bronze and exhibited at Thurston Library. As part of exploring how libraries can be used as exhibition space and inspiration for creativity. Image courtesy of Suffolk Libraries ©

Using their feedback as a guide for the direction of the work. It felt a bit backwards at first and all meetings began with an apology: "So, the brief is pretty broad I'm afraid". Planning wasn't smooth and never went to plan. However, this flexibility enabled the programme to be reactive, rather than going through the motions of an idea because that was what had been discussed six months ago. We adapted, reviewed and embraced change; where change was needed, and it has led to some truly incredible projects in our first year.

Role of libraries — "just because you can doesn't mean you should"

The phrase "just because you can doesn't mean you should" came from the first staff training day we attended in partnership with Metal Culture. Libraries have a bit of a reputation for being 'culturally cute'. It is astounding the number of organisations who don't quite understand what libraries do; and following my listing of every service under the sun, then wished they had never asked.

Worldwide stereotyping of libraries has given them a bit of a reputation for being passive venues when it comes to creativity. However, libraries input needs to be in the creative process not just the outcome. We have fought to be around the table with neighbouring arts organisations, championing libraries as creative collaborators. We have a voice, something to offer.

Everything we do as libraries is questioned: "why does it make sense for the libraries to deliver this?" It has been a really great way of focusing our messages to our audiences. For example, we recently collaborated with Snape Maltings on a community beach opera for the

First Light Festival in Lowestoft. Snape led on the music and in parallel Suffolk Libraries led on the visual side of the opera. We went through our 'why' list and decided we should be involved because:

- It would change the town's perceptions of what their library offers.
- Libraries are community hubs and this was a community opera with people from the town.
- Opera is a form of storytelling.
- And if that wasn't enough, it was inspired by Ernest Hemingway's novel *The Old Man and the Sea*.

So, what can we learn from libraries?

Cut the jargon (but not too much); let others be involved in the planning; try out creative democracy and then be flexible with what the end result of a project is. Finally, question why your organisation is doing that thing, because if you don't question it — your audience certainly will. ✓

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EMPIRE SOLDIERS

In 2018 MBD created a series of works to commemorate the 100th anniversary of World War I (WWI). Using virtual reality (VR), MBD told the stories of soldiers who came from the Caribbean and South Asia to fight for Britain in the Great War. AMA member **Charlotte Angharad** spoke to Jacqueline Haxton about the Caribbean story.

Background

MBD was formed in 1997 as a touring theatre company and was called Metro-Boulot-Dodo. It has always used 'new' technology in its work; blending strong narrative and storytelling with arts and technology to create amazing experiences.

In the early 2000s MBD worked on a project called 'Watch this Space' — an interpretation of heritage spaces that aren't usually opened to the public. Working in collaboration with a music label, the project used a combination of soundtrack and live performance elements to tell the stories of these hidden and unusual spaces. 'Watch This Space' created work for places such as the roof space of Lincoln Cathedral and the basement of New Walk Museum in Leicester. This project helped to kick-start MBD's innovative heritage interpretation work.

Since then the work of MBD has evolved and we now specialise in Creative Digital Storytelling. Specialising in technologies such as VR (virtual reality), we take historical stories — mostly untold stories — and create immersive experiences so that audiences truly 'feel' the story and have an emotive experience.

Empire Soldiers: A Caribbean Story

Empire Soldiers: A Caribbean Story developed from our relationship with reggae artist Madu Messenger. Madu had undertaken a lot of research into the stories of the British West Indies regiment. He'd written a paper on the struggles and treatment of these soldiers, and, also, written two tracks on an album called *Empire Soldiers*. We were really interested in these stories and teamed up with Madu to share these stories with a wider audience.

When making projects, we've always been driven by the story-first and we were waiting for the right story to further explore the use of VR film that felt fitting and authentic. So, when we talked to Madu about the *Empire Soldiers* stories it seemed like a perfect fit for us to take it to the next level. We applied for Arts Council England funding to create the piece and Madu worked with us on the project as a consultant and writer.

Launched in Black History month in October 2017, the film was experiential. Audiences would sit opposite the 'virtual' soldier, who would talk about his experiences of WWI. You could look him in the eye →



Image taken from MBD's VR film *Empire Soldiers: A Caribbean Story*.
Image courtesy of MBD ©

→as he described his treatment on the front line. It gave you that visceral, emotive experience that the story needed in order to be authentic.

The physical set coupled with the VR headset work together to create an immersive experience.

Empire Soldiers: A Caribbean Story was shown at 11 different venues in the UK — a mixture of festivals, museums, art centres and cinemas — including Kidderminster Town Hall; Newarke Houses Museum; The Old Market in Brighton; The Core at Corby Cube; Wiltshire Museum in Devizes; Birmingham Hippodrome; Birmingham Great Central; the Phoenix art centre and cinema in Leicester; the MAC in Birmingham; Frequency Festival and Cambridge Film Festival. It was also shown at film festivals in Kenya and Madrid.

The piece had three different levels — the Bronze, Silver and Gold package, which created three different levels of engagement. The Bronze package was sent to places such as film festivals where they had their own equipment to show the virtual reality film as part of their festival.

The Silver package was aimed more at museums and galleries and had a physical installation so that audiences could sit in and experience the film. The installation provided seating for the audience representing the environments included within the film. Mixing the physical world with the virtual is a really good way of drawing audiences into the story.

Audiences can be intimidated by VR but by placing the experience within an installation or a set they can make sense of the virtual reality film before they've put on the headset. The physical set coupled with the VR headset work together to create an immersive experience.

The Gold festival package was a much more experiential piece and included a dance performance. We would start with a five-minute contemporary dance with the

dancers representing the soldiers. This dance demonstrated how the soldiers were excited about being called up to fight for King and country — it was an enthusiastic and fun performance. The audience would then watch the VR film. This was followed by a second dance performance, which was darker capturing the frustrations of soldiers as a result of their poor treatment. At the end of the film the audience were given a letter — which could've been written in 1918 or 2018 — it talks about racism and about the struggles of everyday life because of the colour of your skin — some of the issues experienced in 1918 are still pertinent today.

I think this project has demonstrated how this type of technology can actually take audiences back to basics in terms of storytelling.

Empire Soldiers has been a really moving experience for MBD. Every few years we work on a project that is magical and feels like a defining moment, and *Empire Soldiers* was one of those projects. We were really pushing the boundaries further than we had before — it was our first full VR piece and it worked really well. We didn't know the challenges until we started the project and we very much experienced a learning curve.

Audiences have been genuinely touched by the emotion of this piece. It's really opened audiences to a part of history that hasn't been told. And it's provoked audiences to think about what's happening today.

To get the recognition and feedback from both audiences and the industry has been incredible. It has really opened our eyes to how we can use this technology. VR can sometimes be viewed as being in competition with the arts but I think this project has demonstrated how this type of technology can be used to enhance an audience's emotional connection with a story. ♣

Charlotte Angharad
Business Manager
MBD



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@MBDtweet

Audience feedback

"You have told a story and a truth that needed to be told and never forgotten!! Thank You!!!"

"I am really glad I saw this exhibition — a real eye opener. I had no idea."

"A very relevant piece of work teaching us about lost history in an exciting and new novel way."

Empire Soldiers: A Caribbean Story

- By the outbreak of WWI the people of the West Indies had been under British rule for nearly 300 years.
- When hostilities began in 1914 the war was greeted with patriotic fervour in the Caribbean.
- Almost 16,000 troops were recruited from the Caribbean to fight for Britain.
- Segregation and poor working conditions were rife: separate toilet facilities were mandatory.
- Caribbean soldiers received lower pay awards than their white counterparts and wounded soldiers were treated at inferior local hospitals rather than army infirmaries.

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