SoundUp With Opera North

Project Report

'Pure gorgeousness. I wish you could come every week!'
Angela Luckett (Activities Coordinator) at Belong

Overview:

SoundUp with Opera North was a four week participatory arts and music workshop series, run by the dementia-focused community interest company SoundUp Arts. *SoundUp with Opera North* was delivered to two local dementia-care venues across four weeks. These workshops form part of our Access All Arts work, this area of work aims to bring arts and cultural activities into communities. We work alongside arts organisations and venues to bring their programmes out to the community, making cultural engagement accessible, interactive and joyful for all access levels.

SoundUp with Opera North is the second year of our successful Access All Arts programme. This year extended upon the scale of our pilot workshop in 2019 which brought the Royal Norther College of Music's production of *Gianni Schicchi* to people living with dementia in a local care home in Manchester. In our second year we were able to double the beneficiaries that we reached, and increase the number of cultural partners in the programme by partnering with Opera North and the Lowry.

All our work at SoundUp Arts connects to our ethos that music and the arts can enrich everyone's quality of life. We aim to use arts and music to create opportunities for self

expression, engagement, learning, agency, personhood and joy for all participants that we work with.

“It was really enjoyable and fulfilling to work with the participants and help brighten their day.”

RNCM Student Musician who performed in the project.

We designed these workshops to give participants with dementia, their families and carers a taste and experience of each opera in Opera North's Autumnal season (*Giulio Cesare, La Boheme* and *The Greek Passion)*. We use a variety of activities, performances and sensory experiences to allow people of all abilities to connect and interact with the sessions.

The workshop series combined high-quality performances from Royal Norther College of Music (RNCM) vocal students with participatory music, movement and arts activities. Across the four workshops participants had the opportunity to explore the story, characters, music, costumes and set design of each of the three Opera North productions. The workshops focused on audience participation, sensory exploration, individualised creative expression and group engagement; elements which have been proven to improve the wellbeing of people living with dementia, as evidenced by arts and health government research reports from The All Party Parliamentary Group (2018), The Utley Foundation (2018) and the World Health Organisation (2019).

“I though it was fantastic. It’s an absolute tonic and we always look forward to seeing you.”

J- a participant living with dementia.

The sessions were facilitated and led by dementia arts specialist and classically trained singer Lucy Temby, who is an alumni of the RNCM and a junior fellow in Learning and Participation. Lucy trained seventeen RNCM students in dementia awareness, music for health and participatory arts facilitation skills. Sixteen of these students went on to perform in the workshops across the four weeks with eight of the students attending more than one workshop.

“I learned that it's not as scary as you may anticipate it to be. This was a beautiful and rewarding project.”

RNCM Student Musician who performed in the project.

Partners:

These workshops were designed and presented by SoundUp Arts in partnership with Opera North and the Royal Northern College of Music. They were sponsored by Belong Morris Feinmann and Limelight Community Centre and supported by Together Dementia Support and The Lowry.

Opera North was a partner in the workshops, as the sessions were themed around their Autumn season. We worked with Opera North’s education department who provided us with accessible information about the productions, as well as images and information about the design, music and performers. Opera North and **The Lowry** gave us greatly discounted tickets to all three productions when they toured to Manchester, allowing our group to have 15 pound tickets with carers attending performances for free. In the final workshop we also had a very special guest performance from Samantha Clarke, an RNCM alumni and a current soloist with Opera North, performing the role of Musetta in the production *La Boheme.*

Seventeen **Royal Northern College of Music** students volunteered to be involved in the workshops as performers and facilitators. These students received specialised music for dementia training from SoundUp as well as dementia awareness training through the Alzheimer’s Society Dementia Friends programme. The RNCM supported the project by sponsoring the transport of these students to, between and from the workshop venues. The RNCM also supported the musician volunteers by providing them bursary hours for their time commitment to the project. The RNCM’s props and wardrobe department loaned

objects and costumes for the workshop series, transforming the care venues into theatrical spaces. The RNCM also funded the videographer Hallam Fulcher to make a film about the project. The videographer came to two workshop days, taking footage from the workshops. Hallam also conducted interviews with participants and the student volunteers after the sessions. The RNCM supported the entire cost of this video production and all associated marketing that went along side this film.

Together Dementia Support (TDS) supported the project by transporting eight members living with dementia in the community to the Limelight workshop sessions, who otherwise would not have been able to access the workshops. TDS also contributed to the cost of paying the accompanist in the Limelight sessions, loaned instruments and workshop resources and provided community volunteers in the Limelight sessions. TDS contributed to the monitoring of the project by collecting feedback from an independent surveyor in the fourth workshop. TDS also supported the advocacy of the project by promoting the workshops and SoundUp Arts on their social media platforms.

Belong Morris Feinmann and **Limelight Community Centre** each sponsored the workshop series by contributing 400 pounds towards the workshops. This sponsorship was spent on workshop resources and paying the musicians and workshop leaders.

Reach to beneficiaries:

"I really enjoyed it. I was so happy. I was so happy with the singing, everything. Thank you so much."
B- a participant living with dementia.

The series in numbers- an overview:

Week 1:
Number of participants: 63
Number of RNCM volunteer singers: 7
Number of community volunteers: 6
Number of care staff: 4

Number of family carers: 5
Venues: 2

Week 2:
Number of participants: 63
Number of RNCM volunteer singers: 7
Number of volunteer visual artists: 1
Number of community volunteers: 5
Videographer: 1
Number of care staff: 3
Number of family carers: 11
Venues: 2

Week 3:
Number of participants: 53
Number of RNCM volunteer singers: 5
Number of community volunteers: 5
Number of care staff: 3
Number of family carers: 5
Venues: 2

Week 4:
Number of participants: 49
Number of RNCM volunteer singers: 10
Number of volunteer Opera North artists: 1
Number of community volunteers: 5
Videographer: 1
Number of care staff: 4
Number of family carers: 6
Venues: 2

Total participant experiences across 4 weeks: 228

"The atmosphere lifts me up."
C- Participant living with dementia.

RNCM student training and development:

Seventeen RNCM students were involved in the project. All students completed 'facilitating music for people living with dementia' training course run by SoundUp Arts in advance of the workshop series. They also all became dementia friends, receiving dementia awareness training.

The student musicians were asked to give feedback on their experience of the project.

Below are five singer's responses following the final workshop:

100% of respondents marked that they would 'definitely' want to volunteer/perform in a future workshop.

7/8 respondents scored 10/10 in answer to 'How effective did you feel the session was in promoting wellbeing amongst participants.'

1. How would you describe your experience as a performer in the session?

- Singer 1: Very enjoyable and a fulfilling experience.
- Singer 2: Fulfilling and extremely rewarding. You can tell it makes most of them extremely happy and they appreciate it.
- Singer 3: Really enjoyable and fulfilling to work with the participants and help brighten their day.
- Singer 4: Positive and welcoming.
- Singer 5: Heart warming!

2. Was there a particular highlight in your session?

- Singer 1: Seeing people's faces come to life and enjoying the music making, and generally interacting with the audience and having fun.
- Singer 2: Dressing the audience up!
- Singer 3: Talking to the participants, interacting.
- Singer 4: People responses and individual engagements.
- Singer 5: When the participants sang the chorus in my aria.

3. What did you feel worked well in your session?

- Singer 1: Having music that allows the audience to be part of the song, eg: giving flowers to the audience, rather than just as props, so they are part of the action.
- Singer 2: The general structure was really well planned out.
- Singer 3: The opportunities for interaction, like getting the audience involved through singing and putting on the costumes.
- Singer 4: Communication between participants and the audience, as well as people's emotional engagement.
- Singer 5: Getting participants to sing along in the warmups

4. Was there any aspect of the session that you would do differently?

- Singer 1: Have more ensembles pieces to have more of a scene. They are up close to the action then.
- Singer 2: No, not at all. There isn't anything.
- Singer 3: No.
- Singer 4: No.
- Singer 5: No.

5. Did you learn anything new or gain something from volunteering?

- Singer 1: Seeing how different pieces can be used in a workshop environment- costumes, chorus numbers etc.
- Singer 2: I learned that it's not as scary as you may anticipate it to be. This was a beautiful and rewarding project.
- Singer 3: I learnt to interact with dementia patients and this helped me gain a lot of confidence. It was a really enjoyable experience.
- Singer 4: Confidence and communication skills.
- Singer 5: How to connect with people living with dementia.

Project monitoring and feedback:

In the final week of the series an independent evaluator from the board of Together Dementia Support interviewed 7 participants about their enjoyment of the workshop. 100% of respondents reported enjoying the workshop at a score of 10 out of 10.

SoundUp Arts collected qualitative and quantitative feedback from participants and the RNCM musicians across the project. Below is a summary of feedback across the four weeks:

49 participants gave feedback.

Quantitative Responses

We collected scalic-ratings across the four weeks in answer to the following question:

Can you mark your enjoyment of the session from 1 to 10

Of 49 responses the results were as follows:
*35 participants marked 10 (with 3 marked higher than 10)
*6 participants marked 9
*2 participants marked 8
*1 participants marked 7
*5 participants did not respond

100% wanted to come to another session

Qualitative Responses

This is a summary of some of the qualitative feedback collected across the four weeks. Each is a direct quote from a participant living with dementia.

How did you feel during and after the session?

*Peaceful

*Relaxed

*I had a great time

*Great

*Elated

*Emotional in a good way

*Very peaceful voices

*Excited and very good

*Happy and joyful

*Transported into another world

*Brilliant

*I feel very good I enjoyed it
*Pleasant

*Elated, better at the end

*On a high!

*Quite emotional, peaceful and excited

*Very moved, something very moving about young girls singing

*Joyous

*GREAT

*Great fun, it lifted my mood

*Gets you out of the flat and mixing with people, it felt good!

*When I come here, before I'm down, as soon as I am here I'm so happy

*Very happy and impressed with the music

What was your favourite part of the session?

*All of it

*I feel like I can get up and perform with you

*It was absolutely perfect

*Remembering the good old songs from childhood

*Everything especially the love duet

*The Messiah piece, made me think of the people I sang it with long ago

*The costumes and singing

*All the singing by the group

*Wonderful quality of singing

*Listening to singers

*When I got up in the scene, and the horn

*When I acted out the guard

*Getting involved, the scarves and the instruments

* The plate game

*They like helping people

*Getting involved

What would you say to people thinking of coming to a session?

*DO IT

*I'd tell them to come.

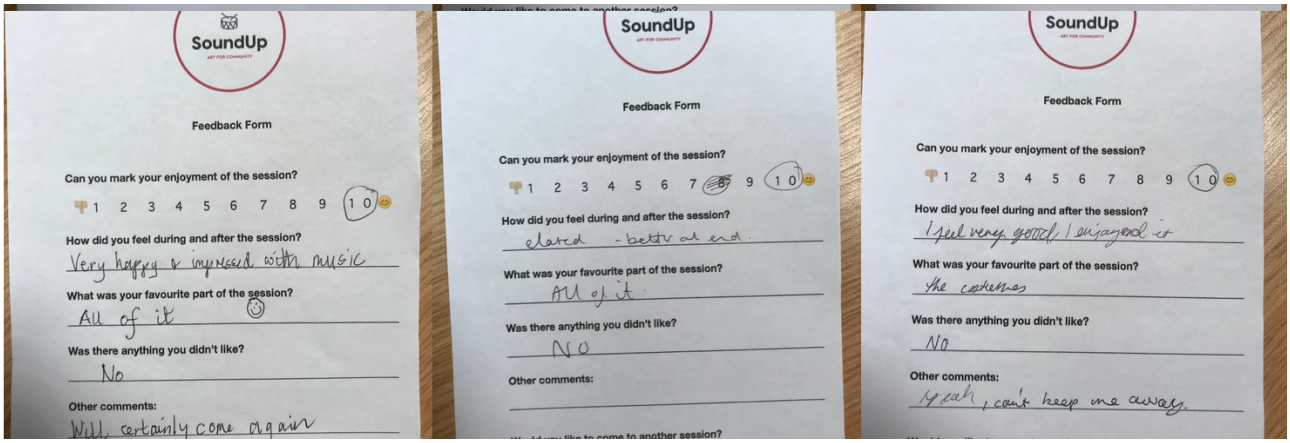
*Go along! Definitely!

*I would really recommend it, I think this is an experience everyone should have.

*Come! You will leave feeling uplifted!

*It's a good thing, if you are living on your own it helps.

*Please come! It's very interesting!



Thank you

SoundUp would like to say a huge thank you to the singers, musicians, volunteers, care staff, venues, and participants who all made the workshop so special. This project relies on so many people's contributions, and it's success is certainly due to the generosity, kindness and openness of all the people and partners involved in this project. We would like to extend another huge thank you to the staff, family members, volunteers and participants at Belong Morris Feinmann and Limelight Community Centre, it has been an absolute joy to bring music to such wonderful communities of people. SoundUp would also like to wish a very sincere thanks to Opera North, The Royal Northern College of Music, The Lowry and Together Dementia Support whose partnerships have made this workshop series possible.