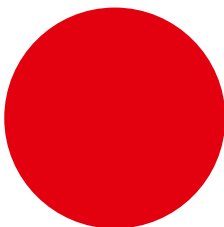
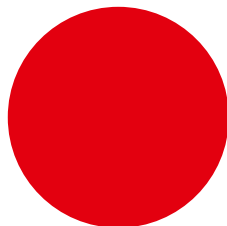
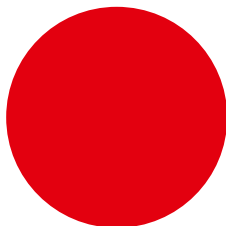
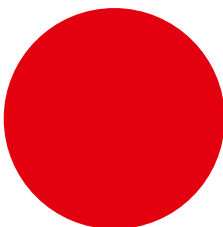
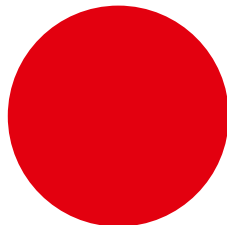


# WHAT'S SPECIAL?

**Opera, dance and music education**  
for and with people with special needs  
across Europe



reseo

European Network for Opera  
and Dance Education



# WHAT'S SPECIAL?

- opera
- dance
- music education

for and with people  
with special needs  
across Europe



European Network for Opera  
and Dance Education



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# OPERA AND DANCE FOR AND WITH ALL – A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

**Katherine Heid and Isabel Joly,  
Network Managers, RESEO**

RESEO, the European Network for Opera and Dance Education, believes that access to the arts is a basic human right, fundamental to our democratic societies. In the words of the European Declaration on Arts, Culture, Media, and Disability:

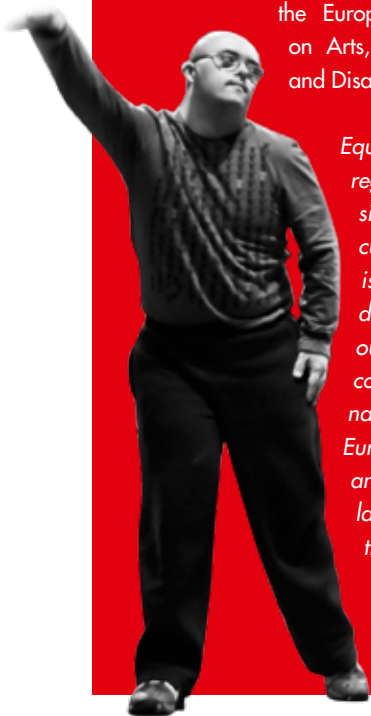
*Equal opportunity regarding accessibility to the arts, culture and media is part of the fundamental rights outlined in various conventions, international resolutions, European treaties and national legislations. We assert that it is one of the fundamental values of European identity,*

*according to the European social model of solidarity.*

In reality, however, access for all too often is given lip-service rather than full commitment.

The arts are themselves nourished by diversity of audiences, performers, and creators. Audacious new approaches, innovation and creative masterpieces are only possible if different ways of thinking and creating are explored and celebrated. Only then can the arts mirror society, explore current issues, and remain an integral, valuable part of our lives.

The creative process allows for no “wrong” way of thinking, and no one “correct solution”. Some of the best creative results are achieved by inviting diversity and difference. Apart from intrinsic artistic merit, arts education also fosters individual development, enhances creativity, builds self-esteem and social skills, and encourages the exchange of ideas between participating individuals. These values guide RESEO and its member opera and dance organisations throughout Europe.





In April 2010 RESEO organised a European conference on Opera, Dance and Disability, hosted by Casa da Música, Porto, in conjunction with their festival *Ao Alcance de Todos* for and with people with disabilities.

The conference reflected the enormous variety of approaches present in the field of opera, dance and music education. The work presented focussed on diverse participant groups, working methods and approaches. Cultural differences between the multiple European cultural contexts were also striking.

No publication existed to showcase the innovative projects taking place across Europe. *What's Special? Opera, dance and music education for and with people with special needs across Europe* attempts to fill this gap. Although this is by no means an exhaustive overview, we have attempted to gather an inspiring kaleidoscope of what is happening in the field, drawing upon the expertise of our members as well as external artists.

RESEO encourages artists and organisations to explore further work in this area, and to add to the emerging body of knowledge in this field. The examples throughout this publication demonstrate successful outcomes, but more importantly they illuminate fascinating and stimulating artistic journeys, celebrating the creative spirit in us all.



**A NOTE ON LANGUAGE:** *The language used to describe disability includes many cultural variations. Lacking a clear consensus on this issue, we have attempted as much as possible to use the language preferred by the participants in each project, rather than aiming for consistency throughout the publication.*

# DIVERSITY AND ARTS FOR EUROPE

**Jan Truszczyński,  
Director-General for Education,  
Training, Culture and Youth,  
European Commission**

Europeans have worked hard to make Europe what it is today; we can be proud of how we have come together to achieve common purposes such as peace, economic growth and social cohesion.

We continue to work together towards these common goals, even as the economic crisis has led us into tough and testing times, with globalisation and our fast-changing society posing new challenges. Our over-arching Europe 2020 strategy will help us meet these challenges by building societies founded on smart, green and inclusive growth.

Our vision must be all-inclusive, to enable all people across Europe to use their full potential to take an active part in society, so that we gain the maximum benefits from our living cultural diversity. This calls for a change in mindset, and a commitment

to changing our habits, so that people with whatever form of disabilities can be involved in the community and in cultural life. It means a commitment to removing the barriers to such simple things as access to the Internet or libraries; to planning or adapting buildings so that they are accessible to all; and to understanding and doing away with the intangible as well as tangible obstacles that make it hard for people to have a cultural life. So I am very pleased that the European Network for Opera and Dance Education, with the support of the EU Culture Programme, has held a conference on 'Opera, Dance and Disability' and that it is now bringing important insights together in this publication. I am sure these will provide inspiration for future projects and for involving people with disabilities in these projects and in policy developments.

The European Union promotes active inclusion and full participation of disabled people in society, in line with the EU human rights approach to disability issues, and recently held a public consultation to help

prepare its EU Disability Strategy 2010-2020. Access to public services and an accessible physical environment is a rights issue, not a matter of discretion. Access to culture is an essential right for all citizens, even more so for those facing economic and social challenges, such as young people and the elderly, people with disabilities and minority groups. This approach is also at the core of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, to which the European Community is a signatory. The Convention recognises the crucial importance of promoting positive perceptions and greater social awareness toward disabled people in order to foster respect for their rights and dignity.

Having an active cultural life encompasses both creation and participation. Both dimensions open up opportunities for self-expression and communication, and can be crucial in overcoming the isolation that too often constitutes the heaviest burden of a disability. Artistic expression fosters independence and allows all to experience the joy of discovery and exploration; it deserves

a central role in policies and measures aimed at fighting exclusion.

Public authorities can do a lot, but they cannot do it alone. They require people's involvement to change mindsets, to allay fears and misconceptions and to fill gaps in knowledge. This publication is one of the many examples that change is taking place. The pace of change may still be slow, but I am convinced that the momentum building up is strong enough to bring down the existing barriers.

And I am pleased that the European Network for Opera and Dance Education is sharing with us these fine examples of what can be achieved by joining forces.



## DEDICATING MY HOUSE TO A COMPELLING NECESSITY: ARTS FOR SPECIAL NEEDS

**Antonio Jorge Pacheco,  
Artistic Director,  
Casa da Música, Portugal**

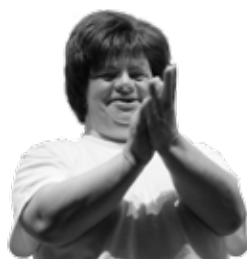
*Casa da Música in Porto, Portugal, is an organisation and a building conceived from the ground up around art work made with and for a variety of traditionally underserved and marginalised groups. Here Antonio Jorge Pacheco, Artistic Director of Casa da Música, talks about the opportunity to build an arts organisation with education and diversity at its core, and to construct a space for arts performance and education that is truly accessible, and flexible to a variety of needs.*

In 1998 Porto was named European Capital For Culture for 2001. I was lucky enough to be part of the team which, under the leadership of Pedro Burmester, was responsible for deciding the priorities for music events associated with 2001 and conceiving the actual programme. It was obvious to us that Porto needed much more than a concert hall for the existing orchestra; rather it needed a music centre that made possible the maximum contact with the local and regional population

and which celebrated many musical genres and styles. It was also clear to us that the building project had to be driven and led by an artistic vision, rather than the other way round, and that a strategic investment had to be made from the outset in an Education Service, attentive to the wide variety of musical genres and the needs of different communities. This investment was made 5 years before the building was opened.

Because the artistic vision preceded the building project we had opportunities for discussion with the architect Rem Koolhaas, and the chance to brief him and his team on the artistic plans and the building's basic physical requirements. The special nature of the plan's artistic and education components, and our vision for their future development, were in many ways the most important factors in defining what Casa da Música should be (and what it should not be).

Casa da Música already has a reputation for innovation, risk, and creativity, combined with a respect for historical heritage, and social awareness. The city and region are



proud of the institution, and it is regarded as a successful music centre.

Music has a value that cannot be measured; it is a powerful tool for change in peoples' lives and for including those who are socially excluded for various reasons. The work that Casa da Música has developed since the early days of its existence is very much part of the organisation's global vision and mission.

Casa da Música works with a variety of different communities (including the disability community, but also with prisons, hospitals, homeless populations, and others). Some of the projects are intense in terms of emotional involvement and challenges, and consequently change the ways in which we approach our work. Following their experiences with the disability community, some of the musicians who regularly collaborate with us have changed their musical career paths, and have begun to develop techniques for work with disabled people. We are proud that the number of people involved with this specific approach to music is growing.

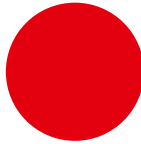
The *Ao Alcance de Todos Festival (Within Everyone's Reach)* is one of the most important education events of Casa da Música's year. During the year we prepare the next year's festival, evaluating proposals, discussing projects, and contacting other organisations. Every year we develop new concerts, workshops, seminars, conferences and exhibitions. Over the years there has been an increasing amount of public and interest in this special week. In 2010 we had sold-out concerts, and many organisations involved.

We have witnessed many small stories and moving moments over the years throughout our various projects. Perhaps most surprising is the story repeated in every project – the will, strength, enormous courage and ultimate satisfaction expressed by all the participants in our productions. It is difficult to put into words the ways in which these men and women get involved in our work, and their intense engagement with the artistic process. The result has been some incredible concerts and presentations.



# **INTEGRATION OF PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS –**

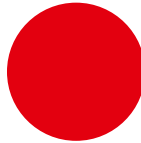
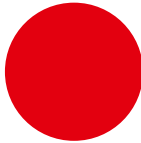
**a key issue  
for our societies,  
and an inspiring  
challenge for opera  
and dance!**



## CARMEN: BIRD OF PREY



Finnish National Opera,  
Finland



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Perhaps no aspect of an education project is more important than the planning, especially if project involves collaboration with other organisations. DuvTeatern produces professional theatre, but as this article demonstrates, their working process has some differences. Most notably, as with several of the art works described in this document, the importance of allowing adequate time for the creative process is critical to success.

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*Carmen: Bird of Prey* is a collaboration between three groups: The Finnish National Opera's education department; DuvTeatern – a theatre group consisting of adult disabled and non-disabled actors and theatre professionals; and Blue Flamenco – a dance studio providing high-quality training to a diverse range of students including young dancers with disabilities. Since this collaboration is ongoing at the time of going to press, this article focuses on the development of the collaboration and the artistic concept, and on planning.

The world of opera is highly disciplined and opera is an art form based on virtuosity, perfection, control and beauty. It may therefore be perceived by some as at a great distance



from the world of the members of DuvTeatern and Blue Flamenco. The existence of such assumptions was the inspiration for an exploration of the meeting of, and possible collisions between, these two worlds.

DuvTeatern, founded in 1999, is a professional theatre company that has previously staged versions of western classics, including interpretations of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Three Sisters* and Grimm's fairytales. Audiences often have strong relationships to the stories of the classics and may bring pre-conceived expectations of how they should be performed. Sometimes these expectations are fulfilled; however more than often they are not – even in cases when the artists have

a strong desire to remain true to the original story. DuvTeatern places a priority on allowing its actors to find personal relevance in each production and each story line, challenging norms either consciously or unconsciously.

*Carmen* provides thrilling music and a dramatic story. Although the story has many themes, the questions that the creative team returned to repeatedly centre around the theme of freedom. The plot revolves around questions of how freedom is defined, and who is free. During the work's development the concept of freedom was defined in many ways – differing a great deal from person to person. For some, freedom is total independence carried by the strong wings of a bird of



In this version of the opera, Carmen does not submit to the traditional role of a woman, nor to a traditional interpretation of the role of Carmen.



prey, while for others freedom means love, marriage and children. In this version of the opera, Carmen does not submit to the traditional role of a woman, nor to a traditional interpretation of the role of Carmen.

*Carmen: Bird of Prey*, is being created using a process that values all participants; focusing on their talents and possibilities rather than on their limitations. The working method is based on the idea of seeing disability as a personal and artistic resource. This idea is emphasised in every rehearsal session by giving time and space to the actors and their special creativity. The original text is approached through the use of improvisation and a variety of stimuli from the actors, using words, body language and singing. Every scene is built on the personal qualities, abilities and skills of the actors.

The opportunity for disabled and non-disabled artists to meet, and for different art forms to be explored together is also important. For *Carmen: Bird of Prey*, initial meetings have



allowed actors, singers and dancers to learn about one another's skills.

The original story has to be stretched so that it will fit to the mostly non-verbal means of expression used by the actors. This way of working takes a lot of time; rehearsals for a DuvTeatern production can take up to two years. At the beginning of the rehearsal period meetings are held once a month, but as the date of the premiere gets closer, rehearsals become more frequent. All members of DuvTeatern also have permanent jobs, which has to be taken into account when planning the rehearsals.

Pre-performance workshops are planned for young people aged 13-16 from schools in and around Helsinki. The purpose of the workshops is to give the participants tools to further reflect on the performance and its context. A webpage has been created to provide a platform for deeper encounters between the artists and the audience and for discussions concerning artistic, educational and social questions.

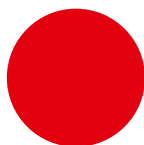
An exhibition by photographer Stefan Bremer, mounted in the Opera foyer, will accompany the performance. Bremer has been following the work of DuvTeatern for some years, creating a visual story alongside the theatrical work. The photographs reflect themes and aesthetics found in the performance, but also form an independent work of art, offering a perspective of its own.

The *Carmen: Bird of Prey* project was begun in the autumn of 2009 and the premiere of the finished opera will take place on the 22nd of January 2011 on the studio stage of the Finnish National Opera. The languages used in the performance are Finnish, Swedish and French.

**FINNISH  
NATIONAL OPERA**

**[www.operafin.fi](http://www.operafin.fi)  
[education@operafin.fi](mailto:education@operafin.fi)**

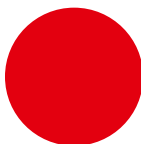
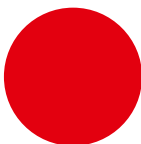
 **OOPERA**  
FINNISH NATIONAL OPERA



## **AUTISM, ASPERGER SYNDROME, AND THE ARTS: TURTLE OPERA**



Royal Opera House,  
United Kingdom



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This long-running collaboration between Royal Opera House Education and Turtle Key Arts demonstrates the value of being able to return to a project through multiple cycles. Both the organisations and the creative teams delivering the work grew through the process, and were able to apply their knowledge to subsequent *Turtle Opera* groups.

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Individuals with autism and Asperger syndrome typically have difficulties with verbal and non-verbal communication, physical co-ordination, social interaction and leisure or play activities. Studies have shown that these individuals respond well to structured, specialised education programmes that aim to stimulate social skills, involve physical activity and creativity, and facilitate communication and collaboration. When *Turtle Opera* was devised in 2000, high-quality creative provision for those with autism and Asperger syndrome was extremely limited. Turtle Key Arts approached Royal Opera House (ROH) Education and a partnership was forged in order to address this imbalance of opportunity. The result was *Turtle Opera*, which has run seven times since 2001.

The Royal Opera House is home to The Royal Ballet, The Royal Opera and The Orchestra of the Royal Opera House. ROH Education plays a leading role in creating opportunities for people of all ages, backgrounds, needs and abilities to engage with, and participate in, the lyric arts.

Turtle Key Arts specialises in disability arts provision and actively promotes arts education and training opportunities for children and young people on the disability spectrum. These innovative disability education initiatives introduce important creative opportunities for children and young people who are otherwise frequently marginalised from such provision.

On each occasion *Turtle Opera* is run for fourteen young people aged 10-14 with autism or Asperger syndrome. Over a series of 10 weekend sessions, experienced leaders and ROH artists work with the participants to explore the development of new work combining the elements of music, design, dance and drama. The participants work towards the creation of an original performance piece. This piece, devised by the young people themselves, is performed by them and the Royal Opera House artists they have worked with in The Royal Opera House's Clore Studio Upstairs, to an audience of friends, families and supporters.

**The skills, expertise and resources of each organisation combined have allowed the creation of a dynamic collaboration on a unique and progressive project, which was created with very clearly defined aims:**

- To provide life-enhancing creative opportunities for children and young people on the disability spectrum
- To increase the confidence and self-esteem of those who attend
- To develop participants' social and communication skills and physical co-ordination
- To enhance participants' understanding and enjoyment of the arts
- To increase access to The Royal Opera House and enable the participants to work alongside its artists
- To further develop disability community links in London and the Home Counties, and those of The Royal Opera House and Turtle Key Arts
- To expand Royal Opera House staff and artists' knowledge of working with disability.

The particular needs of the participants, and the nature of the activities undertaken during the project necessitate a large creative and support team. Each project is led by a director, composer and designer, with additional support from Royal Opera House artists – in most cases three members of The Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, two members of The Royal Opera House Chorus, and on occasion members of The Royal Ballet. In addition two support workers deal with pastoral issues. The costs involved in providing this number of staff, and supporting the staff-to-participant ratio are large, but ROH Education and Turtle Key Arts have always believed that this level of staffing is essential to the project's success.

As the project developed, there was a real change in the way training was offered to artists. In 2000, as this work was very new, training for artists was focussed on autism and Asperger syndrome, from a fairly academic viewpoint. Once the project had been run and repeated, it was possible to offer training on a much more practical level, using real-life situations as case studies.



***Turtle Opera is always advertised through the National Autistic Society, online and through health professionals. The selection process consists of two stages. Firstly parents make an application, which is reviewed alongside a set of criteria:***

- Having a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome or high-functioning autism.
- Aged between 10 and 14 years.
- No additional clinical diagnosis (e.g. attention deficit disorder/ hyperactivity disorder)

***A shortlist is made by the project managers, with support from pastoral specialists, and the parents/guardians of children are contacted by telephone to establish:***

- Family interest in and enthusiasm for the various creative disciplines (music, art, drama and dance).
- Each child's current access to creative and social opportunities. (Those with less access were chosen.)
- Level of parental commitment; i.e. a willingness to attend the Royal Opera House with their child every Saturday for 10 weeks.

It has always been felt that children must show an initial level of desire to work in the arts in order for them to gain most benefit from the project. As over 100 applications are received each year, many are not successful. For those whose applications are unsuccessful, Turtle Key Arts and ROH Education suggest alternative projects and opportunities.

Although the project is delivered to the young people, on each occasion the parents and families have benefitted from the opportunity to meet others who have similar family situations. While not a stated aim of the project, it is not uncommon for the families to share experiences and to forge strong friendships during and after the project.

One reason for the positive effects of *Turtle Opera* may be the fact that all of the children contribute to the workshops and final performance. By the end of the project participants are generally much more communicative within the group, and display a greater level of interaction with their peers and others. As the project is delivered over 10 weeks, process is clearly very important. But it is also important that the young people have an opportunity to perform, and to celebrate their achievements in front of family and friends.

Over the ten years of the project's life, the feedback from the artists who have taken part has overwhelmingly focussed on the personal and professional benefits that they have taken from the project. Some have also commented that

their view of performing, and of their role as an artist has changed.

*Turtle Opera* has had a very positive impact on the provision of arts for young people with autism and Asperger syndrome, and has served as a model for several other projects now available for young people with these conditions. In addition both ROH Education and Turtle Key Arts have used their learning from *Turtle Opera* in other areas of their work.

“

*He is more confident and he is now able to say that he has Asperger syndrome. He could not do this before. And it's made him feel okay about being on stage.*  
Parent of project participant, 2003.

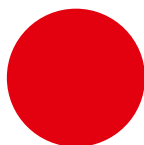
*I've met normal people who are on the autistic spectrum. It was nice to have people who were accepting of my strengths. And it was nice that the leaders created something from my ideas in a way that I never dreamt would be possible.* Project participant, 2003.

”

ROYAL OPERA HOUSE

[www.roh.org.uk](http://www.roh.org.uk)  
[education@roh.org.uk](mailto:education@roh.org.uk)

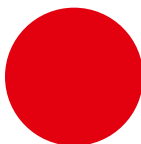
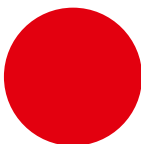




## OPÉRA CÔTÉ COURS



Opéra de Lyon,  
France



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The Opéra Côté Cours project introduces the notion of a toolbox piece – a work from the repertoire that serves as a foundation and spring board for the development of creative responses.

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Opéra de Lyon has been working on the *Opéra Côté Cours* project in partnership with EOLO, a multidisciplinary arts organisation that leads art and creative projects that encourage inclusion, since 2003. The project aims to give disabled children the same access to the Opera House as their non-disabled peers, enabling them to discover it as a place for dance and opera production and creation. Côté cours / côté jardin can be translated as stage left / stage right; the project aims to provide ways discover the “backstage” of the Opera House as a professional would.

The *Opéra Côté Cours* team is committed to diversity and to fostering interaction between artists and young people. The project aims to



challenge perceptions of disability and difference, on the part of both disabled and non-disabled participants and audience members. Taking part in such a project changes the way children (both disabled and non-disabled) see themselves and others.

Project participants are drawn from four primary schools: two schools from an inner-city district in close proximity to the Opera House; and two schools that include children with disabilities and behavioral challenges.

Over the course of each academic year, the EOLO artistic team leads workshops with children and their teachers during class time. The workshops focus on the creation of a performance piece, and are connected to a work programmed during the annual season at the Opera.

The children visit the Opera several times during the year. They attend a rehearsal and meet with artists, tour the Opera House and its workrooms, and attend a performance. Teachers from the participating schools include the project as an art and culture unit within their curriculum. The artistic approach focuses on voice (singing and speech), and movement (both acting and dancing).

The children perform their piece in the Amphi at the end of the year<sup>1</sup>.

## A TOOLBOX PIECE

Each year, the artistic team chooses a piece from the Opera season to serve as a toolbox for *Opéra Côté Cours*. This piece provides a creative starting point for the artists and the teachers who then lead in-depth education work that incorporates all aspects of artistic production.

In 2009/2010, *Hansel and Gretel* by Engelbert Humperdinck was chosen as the toolbox piece, and in 2010/2011 the project will focus on *Douce et Barbe Bleue* by Isabelle Aboulker. In 2009/2010, 80 school children between 7 and 12 took part in the project, of whom 11 were teenagers with hearing loss, and 12 were teenagers with behavioral challenges and learning disabilities.

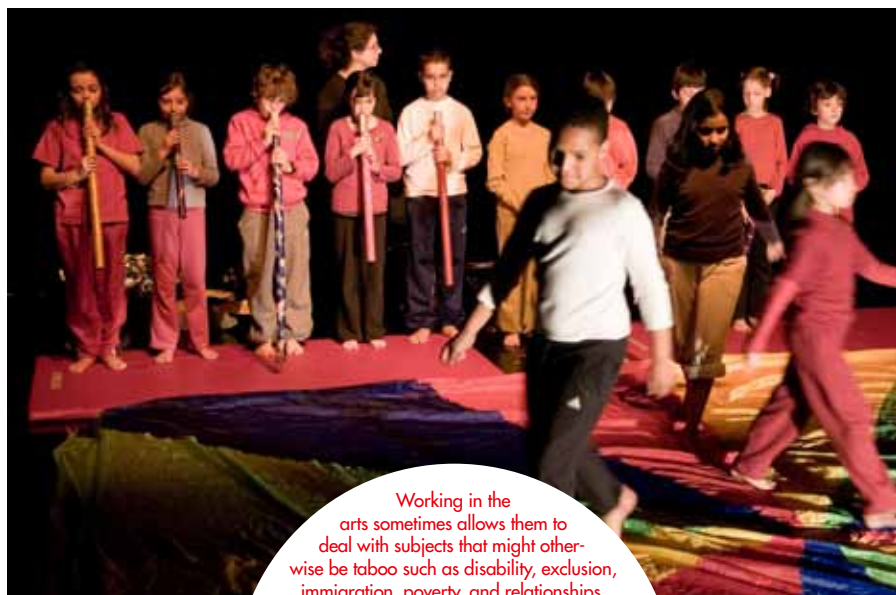
## WORKSHOPS AND PERFORMANCE

The project schedule is decided in collaboration with the classroom teacher and the artists. The schedule includes both class working times and meetings with the other participating classes.

The visiting artists work in multi-disciplinary pairs in the classroom (for example: music/visual arts, music/theater, music/dance). Each pair of artists works with a class for a total of twenty hours over the course of a year, during which they create a collective piece with the

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<sup>1</sup> The Amphi is a space dedicated to jazz, world music and multidisciplinary projects. It is situated in the basement of the opera house and looks like a Roman amphitheatre.



Working in the arts sometimes allows them to deal with subjects that might otherwise be taboo such as disability, exclusion, immigration, poverty, and relationships.

children that incorporates the children's individual ideas. Meetings take place for one hour per week. The four participating classes work separately during the year. They meet mid-year when they attend a rehearsal and a tour of the Opera, which includes visits backstage and to the scenery and costume workshops, as well as a chance to meet with some of the professionals. They are also invited to attend a rehearsal of the *Maîtrise* – singing classes for primary and secondary school children. At the end of the year each class shows their piece to the other children and their relatives. The performance is recorded so that the participants have a record of their work.

The children are very motivated by the opportunity to perform their pieces for other classes and for family and friends. At the end of the show in the Amphi, all the children are invited to talk about their performance, to ask questions of the other classes, to express their feelings, and to discuss what they have just seen. They usually show deep attentiveness, interest and curiosity about the work of their peers, and become engaged in a rich discussion. Performing allows the children to express themselves, and working in the arts sometimes allows them to deal with subjects that might otherwise be taboo, such as disability, exclusion, immigration, poverty, and relationships.

## PARTNERSHIP

The project is based on a strong partnership between Opéra de Lyon and EOLO who work side-by-side to co-lead the project, as well as a collaborative relationship with the schools. This collective approach is essential. Each organisation brings specific skills (educational, artistic and creative, administrative).

The Opera team coordinates the activities that take place in the Opera such as visits, performances, and rehearsals. EOLO has expertise leading projects that bring disabled and non-disabled participants together, and coordinates the artistic workshops in the school classes. The schools host artists for the workshops and include the project in their educational program and curriculum plan. The teachers play a fundamental part, using the toolbox piece as a cross-curricular educational tool and working to build bridges between the artistic workshops and their curriculum.

## EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK

The Opera organises meetings and training before the project starts, in order to provide insight and education resources for the chosen toolbox piece. The Opera and EOLO organise periodic meetings with the teachers, youth workers and artists during the implementation stage of the project. Having these

meetings as a forum for resolving difficulties and sharing successes has been important.

An evaluation meeting at the conclusion of the project each year gives teachers and artists the opportunity to provide feedback about the way the project was led from both a creative and educational view point, and to prepare for the following year.

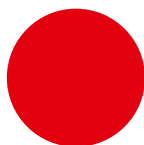
Overall, the feedback for the project has been positive over the past seven years, and the project has proved to be sustainable. The partnerships are strong and durable, and the artistic quality of the children's performances is good.

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*The teachers play a fundamental part, using the toolbox piece as a cross-curricular education tool and working to build bridges between the artistic workshops and their curriculum.* Karine Desombre

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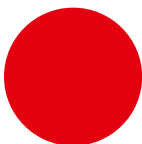
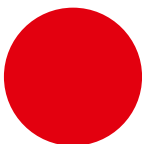




## PROFESSIONAL SIGN-LANGUAGE OPERA:

## THE HUNT OF KING CHARLES

Teatteri Totti, Finland



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Teatteri Totti is a professional Deaf theatre company. Their development of the first Finnish sign language opera offers a fascinating insight into how creative challenges can transform the art form itself.

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►► The use of Deaf versus deaf throughout the text is at Teatteri Totti's suggestion: *"Deaf with a capital 'D' designates a cultural approach to Deafness that includes sign language, global Deaf culture, and visual culture... 'deafness' with a small 'd' is a physical impairment that according to medical opinion can be cured or corrected. Sometimes it's complicated even to us to know which one to use when."* ◀◀

The *Hunt of King Charles* is the first Finnish opera, composed in the 1850's by the famous Finnish composer Fredrik Pacius with a libretto by the writer Zacharias Topelius. In 2008 Teatteri Totti created a new adaptation of the Opera, producing the first Finnish opera

in sign language. The deaf have always sung and told poems in sign language, but no one had created a sign language opera. This new version uses sung sign language, rather than vocal singing. Sign song is beautiful – often softer when compared to normal signing.

The *Hunt of King Charles* is a story about love and power: Sweden's young King Charles XI comes to the Åland islands for hunting. A young fisherman called Jonathan accidentally shoots one of the King's elks – which is a crime punishable by death! Jonathan escapes and his bride Leonora tries to help him. By chance Leonora discovers a conspiracy against the Kingdom of Sweden. The adventure ends with Leonora saving the crown from the conspiracy and with the lovers happily united.

The original libretto is three hours long and performed by dozens of singers. For Teatteri Totti's version it was cut to one hour in length with ten roles. In retrospect it seems that from both the actors' and the audience perspective one hour was a perfect length for this kind of show. The performances were extremely demanding for the actors involved – they worked full out, using body and soul. Coming off to change mid-performance they were dripping wet! For the actors it resembled an hour-long intensive sports game.

Due to budget reasons – Teatteri Totti is a small theatre – the cast was limited to five actors, a director and two musicians. They faced an enormous challenge: how to make a



successful work of art out of practically nothing? No one had ever taken on the challenge of expressing opera without speaking or singing aloud. The results were amazing, and the final performance exceeded expectations.

In choosing the actors, it was necessary to define what kind of signing would match different voice tones such as soprano, baritone, and bass. This was challenging since none of the members of Teatteri Totti had ever heard what a soprano sounds like. Describing the sign equivalent is also difficult, as sign language opera is a new genre. In general, sopranos sign in a light way, their hands fly in the air and their expressions are bright. Leonora, played by Kolbrun Volkúddóttir, is certainly a soprano. A Bass uses signing that is heavier and slower. The tenor is a male signer who signs rather quickly (in this opera he plays King Charles). Curiously, two male roles are performed by female actor Dawn Jani Birley who has very successfully changed her signing style from her normal "mezzosoprano" to "baritone" (Gyllenstjerna) and a dark "bass"



(Reuterkrantz). The idea of different “sign tones” to represent voice parts is new, so these are simply notes based on Teatteri Totti’s limited experience to date.

The actors for the production came from Finland, Iceland and Canada. Finnish sign language was used as the production’s working language. All sign languages are different, however it is usually relatively easy for the Deaf to learn new sign languages. It helped that Icelandic actress Kolbrun was familiar with the director, and that the Canadian, Dawn Jani, has lived in Finland for 10 years. Scripts were written in Finnish, English and Swedish, to ensure that they were accessible to everyone. The performance was subtitled in Finnish and Swedish.

All of the actors had some previous acting experience. However, in Finland professional acting training has not been readily available to Deaf actors; rather they have learned through practical experience. It has traditionally been difficult to study theatre in the university as a Deaf student and the attitudes of university staff have been less than encouraging. Teatteri Totti is currently working to change this attitude and provide theatre education for the Deaf.

The show had two musicians, both students at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, who played violin, drum and tuba. From the outset it was clear that, since all of the actors were profoundly deaf, they could not follow music, rather music had to follow the actors. The actors were

able to sense the vibrations from the drums and tuba, but couldn’t access the sound of the violin at all. The musicians moved among the actors onstage, costumed as ordinary village people, such as a farmer’s daughter and a fisherman.

The audience for the show included Deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing people. Audience reaction was very positive. Those in attendance who understand sign language were particularly moved on seeing the show for the first time. For hearing viewers the experience was unique: opera without spoken sound, presented visually.

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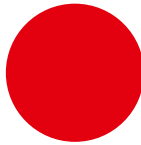
*All the people working for Teatteri Totti are Deaf: most of us have deaf parents as well. At times we do recruit hearing people to do lights, sound, costumes or props/set-up. Not everyone can sign so we usually have a sign language interpreter in regular meetings. Otherwise we communicate with them by pen and paper. We have recently hired a lighting designer who is very interested in learning sign language and she is going to take lessons.* Salla Lähteenmäki

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**TEATTERI TOTTI**

**www.teatteritotti.fi**  
**totti@teatteritotti.fi**

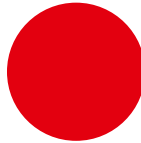
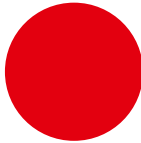




## OPERA AND SPECIAL NEEDS ON TOUR



English Touring Opera,  
United Kingdom



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English Touring Opera articulates some of the challenges of leading education work with a touring company, with no permanent home theatre. Specifically the commitment to forging long-lasting relationships with schools and other organisations must be strong.

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English Touring Opera performs in up to 25 different venues across the UK each year. The company has no permanent theatre as its base, so the challenge for the education department is to deliver meaningful work in as many of our communities as possible. A key part of this has long been a commitment to provision for people with special needs. The education department aims to work with people of every age and ability; to develop strong partnerships with schools and to collaborate with other arts organisations; to create new work with and for the community; and to bring various populations together to create this work.

For English Touring Opera projects with disabled people are no different from the kind of



projects they deliver for non-disabled participants. But paradoxically the creative opportunities offered by a group with special needs are often more stimulating. The imaginative world of the physically-disabled child for instance can be freer and more open than that of his or her non-disabled counterpart. The same can be true of the dementia sufferer, or of the young person on the autistic spectrum. The company is interested in creating material with these groups that is valid and powerful for any audience. What can be particularly moving for an audience is to witness the power of these performances, and to see the disabled participant taking on an opportunity as if their life depended on it, even sometimes alarmingly performing out of a wheelchair, or singing with a voice that is severely compromised by their physical condition. It is the burning intention to dance or to sing that moves, rather than the skill.

In 2009/10 English Touring Opera worked with people of every age and ability, including children with severe learning needs and

autism, older people with Alzheimer's disease and dementia, main-stream schools, children with physical disabilities, prisoners, and multi-age community groups. The factors which govern partnerships are to do partly with English Touring Opera's regional funding, but more significantly with the ability of a group or school to take on a project, and to run with it over the long-term. The company's significant projects are all based on the mutual desire to create meaningful work together that has lasting impact on the lives of the participants involved. The fundraising follows.

For children with severe learning needs and autism English Touring Opera toured a new interactive version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, featuring two singers and two players. *Midnight Moon* was part of a continuing strand of work for these groups, whose complex needs often exclude them from such projects. The approach is multi-sensory, with sound and touch as central components. The stimulation comes also from combinations of input: for instance a



trumpet mouthpiece is attached to a long tube that everyone holds and feels, and the sound and vibration in turn create a magic transformation. Or the music of voices and cello accompany a sensation of wind as it blows through the forest. The children are often transfixed by these elements. Fourteen performances took place in the spring of 2010, and about 280 children plus carers and teachers took part.

Partnerships are key to the afterlife of our work with schools, and there are some schools with which we have very long-term relationships. With Corbets Tey School, we created a new full-length opera in 2009. *Speakout* was performed in the school's local professional theatre venue. The story addressed issues of communication. Every child in the school took part in the creative process and on stage. The needs of these students range from severe autism to learning difficulty. Three years of continuous development with every class led to this project. Film, animation, singing and circus skills contributed to the final show. 110 children performed, together with a cast and band of 10 professionals.

A partnership with Sir Tom Finney Community School in Preston resulted in a trip to the Royal Opera House as part of their *Voices of the Future* evening in March 2009. The group was made up of 20 students with a mixture of needs, including physical disability and learn-

ing needs. Their short new opera was called *You Can Only Dream* and looked at issues of independence for teenagers with special needs. There was an audience of over 2,000 people for this event. In the last year we have also worked with 35 students from this school to create a piece in response to the story of Schubert's *Erl King*. The school is also involved in English Touring Opera's major collaborative project for 2012 called *Out of Your Skin*, involving disabled groups from England and Portugal, as well as opera singers and ballet dancers.

At the other end of the spectrum English Touring Opera has an ongoing project for elderly people suffering from Alzheimer's disease and dementia. This collaboration with the Royal College of Music and Turtle Key Arts involves work over 10 sessions with a group of about 30 people to create new song-cycles which are performed and recorded. In the winter of 2010 *A Seat by the Window* was performed at Cadogan Hall. The effect of the project is to provide aural and creative stimulation, and high levels of social interaction. It's a moving process and one that has real impact on the dementia sufferers and on the carers, partners, and artists involved.

One of the major strands of English Touring Opera's work is the creation of new operas with members of the community. The most recent was *One Day Two Dawns*, developed with over 200 people in Cornwall (and winner of a 2009 Royal Philharmonic Society

Award). Of these about 50 were two groups of young people and adults with special needs – both physical and learning needs. Six months of creative workshops led to the performances, which featured nine groups in all, both adults and children, and a large number of professionals.

Integration is key for English Touring Opera's projects. Two schools in Bath joined in 2010 for a week to make *The Wansdyke Opera*: one is a mainstream secondary school, the other a special school. About 50 students in all combined, and the mix of ability, age range and skills was creatively incredibly productive.

English Touring Opera sees work with disabled people as being no different from other projects, even if the challenges are different. The creativity of people marginalised by society can be fresher, more instinctive, and less bound by convention. There are no preconceptions about what opera is. It is possible to explore the art form fully and freely, in a way that genuinely defines the unique strengths of the genre.

**ENGLISH  
TOURING OPERA**

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[www.englishtouringopera.org.uk](http://www.englishtouringopera.org.uk)  
[tim.yealland@englishtouringopera.org.uk](mailto:tim.yealland@englishtouringopera.org.uk)

**ENGLISH TOURING OPERA**

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*It is the burning intention to dance or sing that moves, rather than the skill...* Tim Yealland

MIDNIGHT MOON

*It was pitched at just the right level – especially for pre-language skills; because the group was composed of those with complex needs, the visual and multi-sensory experience is very important for them and they all engaged very well.* Teachers

*It was relaxing* (Jason)

*It made me happy and I liked the bubbles* (Karimi)

*It made me laugh* (Jon)

*I liked stroking the rabbit* (Jack)

*I liked watching the birds* (Jason)

*I loved the magic tears the man got in his throat* (Azeem).

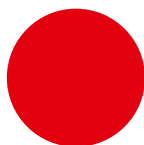
*Pupils*

SPEAKOUT

*All the artists were wonderful and what was best about that was the obvious way in which they wanted to engage with our children and young people. It came across massively. The test for that was the way in which the children and young people responded. They absolutely loved it.*

Colin Arthey, Headteacher, Corbets Tey School

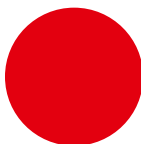
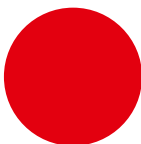
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## THE MERMAN KING: A FILM PROJECT



Welsh National Opera,  
United Kingdom



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Welsh National Opera's *Merman King* project is one of several to identify the need to allow adequate time for both the creative process and for any final performance.

Using film was in some ways a limiting factor for this project, but it also allowed the creative team to stretch time in some interesting ways, and to reflect multiple aspects of the production in the finished product.

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*The Merman King* was the second opera-film made by Welsh National Opera in collaboration with Touch Trust, a Cardiff-based organisation that specialises in touch-based therapy for young people with learning difficulties and multiple disabilities, both in school and also in their workshop space at the Wales Millennium Centre in Cardiff. Touch Trust believes in the power of creativity to help their guests to grow as individuals, and their emphasis on dance and music made them natural collaborators for Welsh National Opera. The first film collaboration, *Through Listening Eyes*, was based on an existing song cycle that was performed and filmed in performance with various groups including Touch Trust participants.

For this second film the aim was to give the participants more ownership over the opera. The story and the film's musical world were developed with Touch Trust and two special schools: Ysgol Erw'r Delyn, which caters for students with physical disabilities and profound and multiple learning difficulties; and Palmerston Primary in Barry, which is a mainstream primary that caters for pupils with special educational needs. Composer John O'Hara and writer Claire Williamson took themes from one of the Welsh National Opera productions being produced in the season we began the project, Monteverdi's *Ulysses*, and explored them with the pupils. The film-maker Richard Aylwin accompanied them, capturing the workshop and composition process, and creat-

ing artwork with the students in response to the story being explored. The emphasis throughout was on a sensory experience of the story.

The story that emerged from this process was one of personal courage and difference. The main character is a merman boy, who finds himself washed up on the beach without his tail. He is told he is king of the underwater world, but he must find his tail before he can wear his crown. He heads inland into the jungle and meets three animals: a monkey, an elephant and a lion. Each creature tests his resolve, courage and bravery. Eventually he finds his tail and becomes king.

Rather than filming a live performance, the decision was made to shoot the opera in a



The small spaces in the narrative are stolen and forbidden glimpses of something the written 'opera' distances us from.

studio with the soloists, players and participants from Erw'r Delyn, Palmerston, Touch Trust guests and members of the WNO Singing Club (a group of 10 – 14 year olds that meets on Saturdays throughout the year). Rehearsals took place over a period of four weeks and the team worked with each group separately. The groups were then brought together over a week to film the opera. This was a challenge for all of the participants – it was the first time they had met together, and the first time some of them had ever come to the theatre.

The filming was an ambitious logistical balancing act – on the one hand the process needed to be technical and precise – on the other hand there was a desire to preserve the spontaneity of the performances and create a magical space within which participants could experience the opera. The film could not be shot in a conventional way, but needed long takes and time between set ups to settle the cast. The logistics of getting six wheelchair users into the theatre and into costume was a challenge in itself. Many of the cast had not performed before and they were being asked to do very specific things in a space filled with technical equipment. The very nature of bringing a lot of technology to bear on the situation meant that the week had to be tightly scheduled, and it was hard to find the space the participants needed. There was also a balance to be struck between the footage of the process in the schools shot in daylight that Richard wanted to include, and the studio work that had a very different appearance.

The film team working around the participants were extremely patient and generous, and there was a large team of WNO staff members involved in helping the groups feel comfortable. Touch Trust led warm-ups designed to help everyone forget the lights and cameras, and this, combined with narrative director Karen Hayes' inclusive method of direction, helped to make the week very special for everyone involved. On the final day everyone came together to sing the whole piece – something that the filming process had made impossible until then.

Overall, 147 young people took part in the making of the opera and the film. The final product captures some astounding detail. Richard directed and edited the final film and found a way to move seamlessly between the studio images, the workshop images and the artwork.

The final film raises questions about what kind of 'opera' this process requires. The creation of *The Merman King* was initiated by the participants, and this process was empowering. Such was the strength of the narrative that the smaller moments and intimacy of personal reactions could not be focussed on without interrupting its flow. The aim of the film was to celebrate and share the incredible journey the participants had made, so it was important to tell the story of its process even though this happened in the small spaces in the narrative – they are stolen and for-

bidden glimpses of something the written 'opera' distances us from. Maybe it was too much to ask to make a film that combines both process and product? But making the process visible helps the audience to realise that these young people are also artists.

For *The Merman King* there was a desire to capture an authentic experience, however the participants were also being asked to play parts. This was huge fun for them, but involved rehearsal and repetition, and ultimately acting. The instant first reactions to the music and narrative had already happened in the rehearsal room. But the filming week also helped to put a value on the process – for some of the participants coming to the Welsh National Opera rehearsal rooms was the highlight of the project. And, of course, it was their opera – at the premiere screening the children sang along to final chorus – since they wrote it, they will never forget it.

Welsh National Opera's choice to work with film with these groups was a deliberate one. Film can tell multiple stories, open up process, and show the participants contributing in their own way. It can be documentary, poetic and operatic. A film in this context becomes a huge resource for both Touch Trust and Welsh National Opera: it showcases the flexibility and accessibility of opera – an art form that is often seen as elitist and hard to access; it also shows the sensitivity and creativity of young people with special needs, who are often seen as being unable to express such emotions.

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*This has been a project like no other and has affected my working practice and levels of courage to work organically and trust the creative process in all sorts of settings.*

*Claire Williamson, Writer*

*There is no doubt in my mind however that I learned a great deal more from each participant than I could ever hope to teach. Certainly their participation in sessions and particularly at the sing through made me very aware that creative communication through processes of this nature should be encouraged for professionals at all performance levels.*

*Karen Hayes, Studio Director*

*At Touch Trust we aim to give our guests an art experience of excellence. This project really pushed their comfort zones e.g. new people, new space, new sounds and they were absolutely fantastic. This whole project was about art, excellence, inclusion and integration! It definitely met all of our expectations and more!*

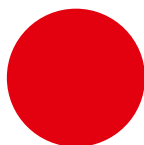
*Charlotte Aubrey, Touch Trust*

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**WELSH NATIONAL OPERA**

**www.wno.org.uk**  
**rhian.hutchings@wno.org.uk**

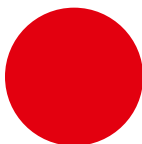
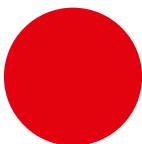




## BEAUTY AND EXPRESSION: MUSIC AND MUSICAL THEATRE PRODUCTIONS



Casa da Música,  
Portugal



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Casa da Música is distinguished by an impressive portfolio of creative projects for a wide range of participants; three of these projects are described in this article. More about the development of the Casa da Música's Education Service and their unique physical site which makes so many of these projects possible is included in an article on page 10.

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The Education Service at Casa da Música has devoted considerable effort to promoting musical activities for people with special needs. Regular activities (such as workshops, concerts or creative projects) as well as an annual festival, *Ao Alcance de Todos (Within Everyone's Reach)*, offer specially prepared events for and with groups of people with special needs. Some of these activities are musical or cross-arts performances that are the result of participatory processes developed over periods of several months. This article briefly describes three of those experiences: *Ícaro*, *Grottox* and *Viagem*. Although they share some characteristics, they differ conceptually and organisationally. They represent just a few examples of the immense diversity and possibility within the field.



## ÍCARO

For *Ícaro* movement, drama and music are used to tell the ancient Greek legend of Ícarus in a performance that involves both professional artists (musicians and dancers) and a group of people with cerebral palsy (including care takers and relatives).

The project began with Casa da Música's involvement in the development of a computer-based composition project, with ten people with cerebral palsy from APPC (Associação de Paralisia Cerebral do Porto) in Porto. This was one of the Education Service's first experiences with people with disabilities. For twelve weeks participants learned how to use the software *Hyperscore* and

by the end each of them composed a two to three minute piece. Throughout the composition project it became obvious that the participants were very engaged: they demonstrated an immense sense of commitment, the will to overcome the difficulties imposed by their often severe lack of fine-motor control, and a great joy in listening to the results that were being produced. The project's conclusion was marked by feelings of achievement as well as by the sense of incompleteness that is so common to many of these participatory projects. It was decided that the end result of this project (a CD with a few compositions) should be the starting point for a performing project. A music theatre director, Tim Yealland, and a choreographer, Ana Rita Barata, accepted the challenge and started to work separately.



The dance/movement work was begun in early 2007, with Ana Rita visiting regularly with a group of people who had participated in the original APPC project. Her work was exploratory and focussed on discovering and constructing a common movement vocabulary for the group. The structure and narrative for the performing piece came much later when Tim started to work with the group. The first performance, titled *Corpo Todo (Whole Body)*, took place as part of *Ao Alcance de Todos 2007*.

The impact of the first performance was huge, both for the performers and the audience, and it became clear that the project demonstrated exactly the type of artistic characteristics that are sought after in any performance – communication, commitment, a sense of risk-taking, and truthfulness. A second edition was immediately planned, this time as part of the regular programme of the Education Service.

The characteristics of this second group of performers, who were also drawn from APPC (with some changes in the professional artistic leadership), led to the shaping of a performance with a strong sense of narrative which anchored the creative ideas that had been developed. The piece was renamed *Ícaro* and many of the theatrical and musical aspects were reformulated. *Ícaro* was presented in December 2008 for schools and general audiences and was received with great enthusiasm, a clear example of the capacity of art to lower barriers and allow for expression and communication.

A documentary by Pedro Sena Nunes has been produced and is available upon request.

## GROTOX

*Grotox* is a performance involving dance, music and video. In contrast to *Ícaro*, the theme and general shape of the project were clear from the early stages of discussion. The project began with an invitation from Casa da Música's Education Service to the group *Dançando Com a Diferença (Dancing With a Difference)* to co-create a piece to be presented in *Ao Alcance de Todos 2009* in Sala Suggia, the main performance venue at Casa da Música. *Dançando Com a Diferença* is an inclusive dance company based in Madeira with a short but remarkable national and international career. Their members include both trained dancers as well as people with a range of physical, mental and social disabilities. It is the performing component of a more extensive community dance programme run by choreographer Henrique Amoedo.

*Dançando Com a Diferença's* role was the creation of a dance piece to music to be developed and performed by Factor E (the Education Service's resident group of musicians/educators) and the rock/punk band 5ª Punkada, a well-known musical group featuring people with cerebral palsy and mental disability from APCC in Coimbra. The video director Paulo Américo was invited to develop

a series of projections that would be a major feature of the performance. General ideas were shared in advance of a first residency that included all the musicians, the choreographer, and the video director.



A series of ideas served as the basis for the creation of some recorded music material that became the sound world upon which the dance improvisation work was later developed. A second residency was held in Madeira, this time including the dance group, and the music and video directors. A final week of preparation took place around the date of the premiere. Despite being conceptually a dance piece, the staging emphasised the presence of music and musicians, and the video projections (onto gauze screens mingling real and virtual images) contributed to a strong feeling of togetherness and a cross-art aesthetic. The performance toured from Sala Suggia to Madeira, in an experience of human companionship difficult to forget.

### VIAGEM (JOURNEY)

*Viagem*, presented in *Ao Alcance de Todos 2010*, was the culmination of a two-year project, *I4E, Instruments for Everyone*. The purpose was to develop tools that would allow a well-defined group of people with physical and mental disabilities to develop their musical expression and to play musical instruments that they might not have been able to access otherwise. Besides reaching a number of people directly, the project aimed to establish models and raise awareness in order to impact future projects.



Ícaro is a clear example of the capacity of art to lower barriers and allow for expression and communication.

The initial stage of the project involved getting to know the participants' individual capabilities, tastes, and ambitions as the starting point for the development of musical solutions that included new instruments and tools developed during the project as well as some already in existence. The project also included the development of a choir at a psychiatric hospital, which has continued to exist and sing following the project.

The composition of a music piece, by Rolf Gehlhaar, using these resources and participants,

and its performance in the main hall of Casa da Música in April 2010 was, more than a proof of concept, a truly engaging, motivating experience and a real artistic challenge. The novel *A viagem do elefante* (*The Elephant's Journey*) by José Saramago served as a structuring narrative and the performance was highlighted by very simple graphical elements and text.

The artistic quality of the performance was an important consideration, however the process was also important, anchored by the belief that



empowering people with disabilities and giving them access to musical activities contributes to their well-being and human development.

Some of the resources created during the project included new software for composing and performing music that allows musicians to interact with a computer by moving their head; and robots that play gamelan instruments and are controlled by ultrasound sensors, allowing musicians to play them by waving their hands or moving their head rather than holding mal-

lets. The project also used instruments such as T-sticks (developed at McGill University in Montreal). Many of the resources developed during the project were subsequently donated to the partnering organisations, and have remained in use by participants.

Musical technology is a wonderful example of how education and education services can lead to innovation and create artistic challenges. The history of music has been a permanent search for new tools of expression

(both instruments and ways of structuring the musical discourse). Working within constraints such as those imposed by disability can lead to new paradigms. The history of inventions demonstrates that ideas developed for disabled people often become essential tools in the everyday life of many people – we can look to the typewriter and the telephone as examples. We are witnessing great advances in the development of new interfaces for musical expression. Work with people with disabilities may serve as a catalyst for the emergence of new ideas for musicians and artists in general.

“

ÍCARO

*There are some experiences whose importance can only be understood by those who have gone through them. Watching the performance of Ícaro was certainly one of them.*

*Pedro Fernandes, Associação do Porto de Paralisia Cerebral (Porto Cerebral Palsy Association)*

VIAGEM

*Casa da Música has become “our House”, and fills us with pride and appreciation. We achieved much in terms of motivation, new materials and perspectives for intervention. These gains are not restricted to the group directly involved, but also extend through time to a much broader group of users and professionals.*

*Anna Petronella, Associação Portuguesa de Pais e Amigos do Cidadão Deficiente Mental de Coimbra (Portuguese Association of Parents and Friends of the Mentally Handicapped of Coimbra)*

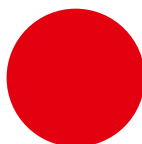
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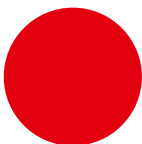
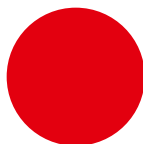
**casa da música**



## MUSICIANS ON CALL



Opéra de Dijon, France



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This description of Opéra de Dijon's initial foray into working with the disability community is a powerful example of how a small beginning can have a ripple effect. One direct result of this project has been the hiring of a new staff member by Opéra de Dijon, whose remit is to work with underserved audiences such as the one described here.

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*Musicians on Call* was a project initiated in September 2009 at the Opéra de Dijon in collaboration with the London Symphony Orchestra (LSO). The principle of the project is simple: musicians from the orchestra (like doctors who are more usually associated with being 'on call') leave their customary surroundings (the concert hall) and play a private concert for people, who – as a result of illness or disability – are themselves unable to leave their place of residence (hospital, sick-bed, sheltered housing, etc.). The LSO has been successfully running this project in England for some years; *Musicians on Call* in Dijon was a first for the Opéra.

In early September 2009, the Opéra de Dijon involved a media sponsor (the local radio



Above all, *Musicians on Call* was profoundly moving for the audience members at the Accodège, who continue to talk about the project to this day.

station, France Bleu Bourgogne) to help to identify project beneficiaries. France Bleu broadcast a call to listeners for suggestions of people who might benefit from this private concert. Interested listeners called the radio station and the Opéra de Dijon and France Bleu together chose one beneficiary: the residences of the Accodège sheltered housing scheme.

The Accodège group consists of adults with learning disabilities, some with erratic behaviour, and many of whom – despite living and working relatively independently thanks to the Accodège sheltered housing scheme – had never had the chance to hear a live concert

with classical musicians. It was this fact that convinced the Opéra de Dijon and France Bleu to choose Accodège to benefit from *Musicians on Call* in Dijon.

The Opéra de Dijon took advice from the LSO team, who recommended that the visit be organised for a maximum of twenty participants. *Musicians on Call* is an intimate and participatory experience – something that is harder to achieve in a more traditional concert setting.

On 25 September 2009, three soloists from the orchestra – a violinist, a violist, and a cel-



list – performed a private, interactive one-hour concert in the social centre of the Accodège residence in the suburbs of Dijon. The programme was made up of short duos or trios adapted to the short concentration span of the audience. The musicians presented each piece and a discussion built up between the musicians and the audience. The musicians set enjoyable listening tasks with each piece: 'Which season do you think the composer was trying to evoke in this piece?', 'What did the music make you think of?'.

This stimulating exchange was further intensified when the musicians gave the participants the opportunity to try out their instruments. It was refreshing to see musicians from one of the world's most famous orchestras encouraging such a relaxed, hands-on approach to discovering music and using their own instruments for the purpose.

The project was also the subject of a special radio programme by France Bleu and of a photo reportage by the Opéra de Dijon's photographer in residence, Gilles Abegg.

*Musicians on call* was a fantastic opportunity for the Opéra de Dijon to create a partnership with the Accodège with whom further projects are planned. After this first experience of working with people with special needs, the Opera House has since recruited a new member of staff to work specifically with this type of audience. Above all, *Musicians on Call* was pro-



foundly moving for the audience members at the Accodège, who continue to talk about the project to this day.

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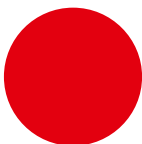
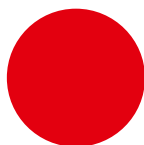
*'Musicians on Call' is an intimate and participatory experience – something that is harder to achieve in a more traditional concert setting.* Julia Dehais

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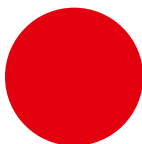
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## WINDOWS ON THE MUSICAL MIND

Professor of music, Adam Ockelford,  
Roehampton University,  
United Kingdom



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Adam Ockelford's musical life has led him to work as a composer, performer, teacher, and researcher. He has a particular interest in music for children with special needs, and in exploring how we all make intuitive sense of music. He is the author of 'In the Key of Genius: The Extraordinary Life of Derek Paravicini' (Hutchinson, 2007), and 'Music for Children and Young People with Complex Needs' (OUP, 2008).

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'Autism' is not one thing, but a spectrum of what are known as 'pervasive developmental disorders' that, from an early age, affect the way that people think, feel, and interact with the environment and others. Some people with autism function independently and engage freely in their choice of musical activities, whether as listeners, performers or composers. Others find the world a very confusing place: they may be unable to express themselves in words and find anything outside a familiar routine problematic. Relationships may be a particular source of anxiety. The capacity of people with autism to participate in musical activities may be unaffected, though, or even enhanced. This article considers some possible explanations for this, and their consequences.

Most young children engage with sound in three different ways: as speech, as music and as a feature of the environment. Some people with autism, though, seem to process many sounds, whatever their function, as music. This is because of the way the 'autistic mind' works, the prevalence of music in the environment, and the way that music is structured.

In terms of cognitive functioning, people with severe autism frequently show advanced auditory discrimination, including, in about 5% of cases, universal absolute pitch (around the same proportion as professional musicians). 'Absolute pitch' – sometimes called 'perfect pitch' – is the ability to recognise or reproduce notes in isolation from others. 'Universal absolute pitch' means that this

ability applies not only in the context of music, but to everyday sounds as well. Hence, to a child with autism, a vacuum cleaner may suck up dirt in F sharp, for example, or a car travelling at 30 miles per hour may be in E flat. If the engine rises to E, then the driver will be breaking the speed limit! Very often, children with autism are captivated by pattern (repetition and regularity), but they find the way that verbal language works – through semantics and symbolism, whereby one thing (a burst of sound that forms a word) is associated with another (an object, a person, an action or a feeling) – very challenging.

*'When playing the piano, Romy's eyes sparkle and she fizzes with musical energy and fun'. Romy's father*



With regard to music, my own research shows that pieces of all styles are around 80% repetitive, and not just in relation to the well-known recurrence of motifs and themes. Every aspect



*'Often, Freddie will just pretend to play the notes on the keyboard. He doesn't need to press them down, since he already knows exactly what each pitch sounds like in his head.'* Adam Ockelford

of music – pitch, duration, dynamic and timbre – is infused with repetition. Unlike verbal language, whose words point beyond themselves to things in the 'real world', musical notes refer only to each other, and they do so time and time again: the meaning of music is in the repetitive, abstract patterns of the relationships that exist between them.

Lastly, the environment. Music-psychological research shows that young children are exposed to music or sounds organised in a musical way about 80% of the time, whose source may be toys, computers, ring-tones, the television, radio or even (from time to time) other human-beings! It should be no surprise, then, that the pattern-loving autistic mind, striving to make sense of the world, attracted to sound, confused by language and surrounded by music, latches on to this irresistible source of order and predictability.

As well as through their enjoyment of music, the musicality of people with autism may be apparent reactively, through the qualities of sounds being more important than their function (for instance, the musical 'ting' of a glass vase that is flicked may be more important than its capacity to hold flowers), or an obsession with listening to certain patterns of sound over and over again (for example, by playing a fragment of recorded noise, speech or music repeatedly – in effect making sounds into musical patterns through repetition, or reinforcing pre-existing musical

structures). Or the musicality of a person with autism may be evident through their proactive reproduction of sounds as though they were music: using everyday objects to make musical notes and perhaps organising them by the sound they make (for instance, lining up a series of wine glasses according to their pitch). Severely autistic people may repeat vocal patterns insistently and even organise words using the principles of musical syntax – by repeating them, through so-called 'echolalia'. They may sing precisely in tune, maybe copying the qualities of other people's voices rather literally, and often repetitively (perhaps on account of 'ear-worms' – tunes that circle round and round in the head). And they may try to reproduce musical (and non-musical) sounds on any instruments that are at hand, sometimes learning to play by ear.

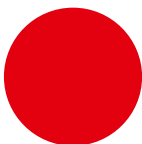
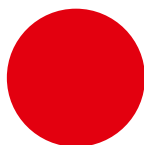
**ADAM OCKELFORD  
PROFESSOR OF MUSIC**

**[www.roehampton.ac.uk](http://www.roehampton.ac.uk)  
[a.ockelford@roehampton.ac.uk](mailto:a.ockelford@roehampton.ac.uk)**

**Roehampton  
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**Although often regarded as the province of music therapy, there is no reason why a wide range of musicians should not work successfully with severely autistic people. Being empathetic and interactive is the key.**

- First, open your ears to the possibility that all sound can be heard as music; listen out for patterns and learn to relish repetition!
- Second, interact through music as though it were language: imitate what the person with autism does, exactly at first, and then make changes; give him or her the sense that they are influencing you; offer fascinating musical fragments to copy; enter into dialogues in sound; improvise simultaneously.
- Third, support people in developing the technique they need to produce whatever they can hear in their heads on instruments or through singing: model the necessary movements for them; encourage them to attend to what you do by looking, listening and feeling; offer physical guidance.



## PRELUDE FOR DAWN: DANCING IN THE DARK

Opéra de Lille, France



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For Saburo Teshigawara, the choreographer of *Prelude for Dawn*, this project with Opéra de Lille offered an opportunity to refine his approach to dance technique and choreography for blind and partially-sighted dancers. The dancers themselves articulated a particular set of fears related to performance – a learning experience for all concerned with bringing the project to fruition on stage.

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In celebration of the designation of Lille as *European Capital of Culture* in 2004 and of the opening season of the renovated Opéra de Lille following several years of work, the Japanese choreographer Saburo Teshigawara was invited to become the artist-in-residence at the Opera. His residency led to the creation of two new works, one of which, *Prelude for Dawn*, was created for and performed by blind and partially-sighted young people. The participants were drawn from the Ecole régionale pour déficients visuels de Loos and the Institut national des jeunes aveugles de Lille, in a first-time collaboration for the two schools.

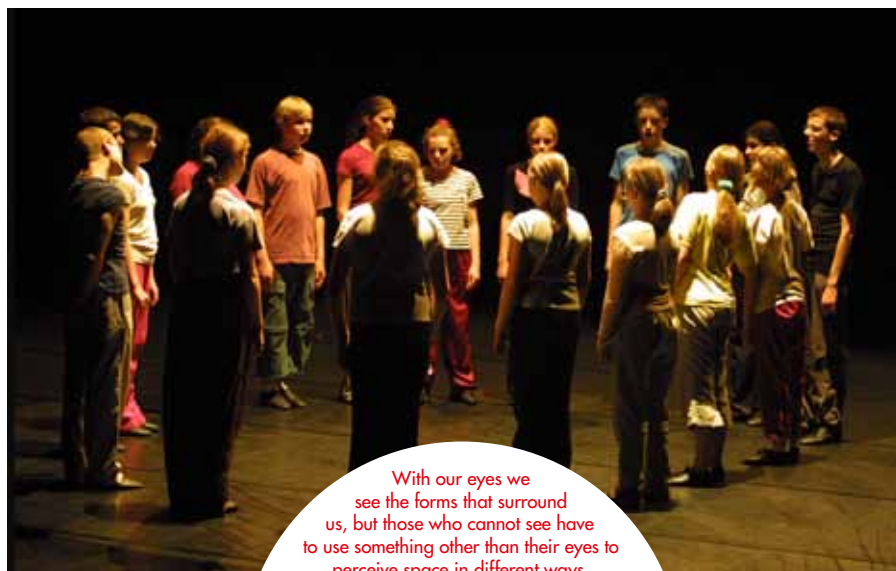
Saburo Teshigawara's decision to put together a performance with blind and partially-sighted

young people was an extension of his previous collaboration with Stuart Jackson, a blind dancer, in his creation *Luminous* in 2001. The choreographer and his team came to Lille regularly in order to prepare this work with the young people, in partnership with their schools. The eighteen young people participating in the project (aged 11 to 14) had almost no experience of dance and even less of the stage.

The school visits included practical workshops, planning sessions, and performance development. Between these visits, the teachers continued the physical and artistic work with the students. The project was integrated into the school programme and the teachers were

active participants in the planning process as well as in the workshops.

For Saburo Teshigawara these students have *"a different approach to dance. With our eyes we see the forms that surround us, but those who cannot see have to use something other than their eyes to perceive space in different ways. I asked them to use their breathing. And this is the principal theme of 'Prelude for Dawn', breathing and thus the air ... Breathing has become the way of counting time, the transcription of space and the centre of their actions... With them I had to develop another way of teaching them dance techniques... Sometimes, those who see are blinded by what they see. They then forget to feel."*



With our eyes we see the forms that surround us, but those who cannot see have to use something other than their eyes to perceive space in different ways.

Teshigawara treated the young participants as he does his own dancers, so that they experienced truly professional conditions. The performance also had professional scenography, lighting and music. The scenic set up was sparse, to allow the performers free access to the stage, and the stage crew worked to be especially attentive and present for the performers.

The resulting 45 minute performance was presented twice in the main auditorium of the Opéra de Lille to full houses, and was warmly received by an audience that was very appreciative of the artistic sensibility of the young performers.

This project was a truly rewarding venture – for the choreographer, the team at the Opera House, and the young people themselves. As dancers they were able to perceive their bodies and the space in which they move in a different manner, showing themselves in a new light to their friends and relatives, living through a creative process of which they were also the interpreters and thus experiencing the stage and the audience.

During the rehearsal process the participants expressed concerns about the difficulty of moving with so many people around them. They were apprehensive about dancing alone in front of an audience and about specific dance movements, and fearful that they would not live up

to the choreographer's expectations. However by the conclusion of the project they seemed to feel more comfortable in their adolescent and non-seeing bodies, proud of having seen the project through to the end despite the intense and exhausting work involved, of having challenged their limits and overcome their fears.

The collaboration of all involved helped the project to run smoothly. The teachers made themselves very available and the schools committed resources and time to ensure that transportation, attendance, and other issues were managed successfully. Staff at the Opera House learnt a great deal about the practicalities of making the building and programming accessible.

Following the success of *Prelude for Dawn*, the Opera House has made a commitment to an audio description system for selected performances (see page 84) and to offering guided tours adapted for patrons with disabilities.

While it has been difficult to imagine an equally engaging sequel to this project, the Opera House maintains ongoing contact with the participating schools, and has offered follow-up and support. Teachers at the schools are more open to culture and the arts in general. Students have come to other performances, including those that are audio-described.



“

*I learned that I could do things that I had been told were impossible for me. Marie Charlotte*

*I am learning to be more supple and to relax when I'm dancing. It's a great opportunity to perform before all these people. We are working on breathing and that calms me down. I am making people feel that I am capable. Mehdy*

*Dance is sculpture, a sculpture of the air, a sculpture of space, a sculpture of time... For me, to dance is to play with air. It is to feel the body*

*is like the air and the air is like the body. Dance cannot be reduced to bodily movements; it also encompasses the movements of the mind and of the senses. Saburo Teshigawara*

”

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## RHYTHM OF SILENCE: THE BRUCKHOF PROJECT

Opéra national du Rhin, France

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The Bruckhof Project demonstrates the many layers that make up a successful project – from preparation and planning to project activities. Opéra national du Rhin built trust and mutual understanding by learning as much as possible about their partnering organization for this project, and by adapting their working process to the access needs of the project participants – beginning with an understanding of how learning could best take place.

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The Bruckhof is a centre for hard of hearing and deaf students at both the primary and secondary school level. The centre uses an oral approach which aims to enable students to express themselves through spoken language and through lipreading, and to externalise emotions and feelings. The degree of deafness varies widely amongst the students at the Bruckhof, from mild loss to profound deafness. Some of the children also have motor or behavioural challenges, and learning disabilities such as dyslexia.

Opéra national du Rhin actively manages a multitude of education and cultural projects. All are adapted to a specific audience – from kindergarten to university level, often in partnership with other organisations.

The Opéra aims to educate tomorrow's public; develop new and younger audiences; include young people in education projects; create educational tools; and provide professional development to teachers.

Both Opéra national du Rhin and the Bruckhof are committed to providing access to arts activities for young people. The Bruckhof made the initial contact with Opéra national du Rhin, and the project was developed jointly. The concept presented an ambitious challenge, however good communication between the two organisations allowed for a productive collaboration. Opéra national du Rhin contributed artistic expertise while taking into account the particular target audience for this work.

The approach chosen in the first year of the project (2006) was ballet, as it seemed more easily accessible than opera.

The project had several very clear stages. At the outset of the project, the Bruckhof teachers worked with staff from Opéra national du Rhin to help develop a shared understanding of the ways in which their students would learn best. The project was designed around concrete experiential learning since it was felt that the students would benefit from being able to express their feelings and emotions through hands-on learning.

A central component of the project was a practical workshop led by company dancers

from the Ballet de l'Opéra national du Rhin. The challenge they set themselves was to help the children feel and respond to the pulse of percussion accompaniment and to vibrations created by moving and by using their bodies as percussion instruments. The workshop used sounds produced by the movement of the students in the room, as well as recorded music composed exclusively for percussion instruments. This approach allowed the students to discover that it is possible to create one's own music simply by using the body.

Opéra staff and the dancers met with the teaching staff at the Bruckhof in advance of the project, and the dancers proposed general workshop ideas. However the workshop was really built in collaboration with the children, and the dancers approached the workshops with the philosophy of challenge as possibility. They were very pleasantly surprised by the results, and by the receptiveness of the children. Everybody participated without holding back, and deafness was not an obstacle to the artistic process.

Additional project activities included a tour of the theatre building; a visit to the set building, wig, and special effects workshops; attendance at an Opéra national du Rhin company ballet class; and a trip to a student matinee performance.

Both partners were motivated by the first year's success to take on the challenge of shifting

the focus to opera for the second season of this partnership. In the second season the project also had multiple components including a visit to an Opéra national du Rhin chorus rehearsal; attendance at a matinee opera performance for young audiences; the opportunity to observe a rehearsal of young singers from the Maîtrise de l'Opéra national du Rhin; and a classroom encounter with two of the soloists who had sung in the performance seen by the children.

Following the two initial project seasons, the Bruckhof has expressed a desire for continued growth and involvement with opera and dance. The two initial seasons have served to allay any concerns about accomplishing this work. Bruckhof students attend opera and dance performances each season, visit the theatre and scenic workshops, and organise their own monthly singing workshops. The teaching staff at the Bruckhof have absorbed the skills necessary for preparing their students to visit the opera, and to introduce a variety of pre and post-performance activities based around selected shows. The staff at the Opéra national du Rhin works to implement these at the Bruckhof's request.



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*Two moments stand out: a young deaf child fascinated by the piano vibrations which he could feel when touching the instrument with his hand who immediately started imitating the conductor's gestures; and a child thanking the singers for making his "body vibrate".*

*The workshop was really built in collaboration with the children, and the dancers approached the workshops with the philosophy of challenge as possibility.*

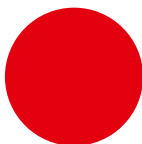
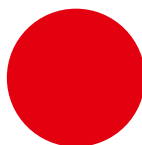
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## THE LITTLE STONE GIRL: AN INTERACTIVE DANCE PERFORMANCE

Foco Musical, Portugal

Foco Musical is an arts-education organisation which produces work specifically for young people. These works are performed by the Orquestra Didática (Teaching Orchestra). The focus is on interactive audience participation, which Foco Musical defines as *live participatory music listening*. Children in the audience complete the orchestral score which allows for their participation with vocals, recorders, small percussion, or body percussion. For *The Little Stone Girl*, Foco Musical expanded their repertoire to include dance.

Foco Musical enjoys close working relationships with the Portuguese Association of Parents and Friends of Mentally Disabled Citizens in Porto and Trofa, and the Gondomar

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As so often happens, Foco Musical began with a desire to make their work more inclusive. They tapped into their existing networks, drawing on a variety of resources, and developing their knowledge through the process of creating a new work designed to raise awareness about social exclusion.

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Disabilities Association. The project's impetus was a growing awareness on the part of Foco Musical of a need for work with children with cerebral palsy.

Foco Musical's research into cerebral palsy and the arts coincided with the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion in 2010. Recognizing that social exclusion can take many forms, Foco Musical decided to develop an interactive musical and dance piece, *The Little Stone Girl*, with an underlying message of inclusion, and a specific focus on the integration of young people with cerebral palsy.

Since cerebral palsy often results in a decrease in mobility it was decided, in conjunction with the creative team, to undertake a movement-based project. Working with dance in performance provided opportunities to include movement activities in the classroom. The project drew on research into existing movement-based therapy for cerebral palsy.

Developing a dance performance also gave Foco Musical and the Orquestra Didática the opportunity to enlarge and complement the orchestra's repertoire, which has mostly been centred on opera and symphonic works.

Foco Musical has always had an interest in developing narrative themes around social issues including solidarity, xenophobia, environmental awareness, and Portuguese historical events. The aim is to use artistic performance as



a teaching tool to convey a particular message. Although Foco Musical doesn't currently include any disabled musicians, the organisation works with a music therapist who has been instrumental in developing projects in collaboration with disability organisations.

The libretto was commissioned from the Portuguese writer João Aguiar. Daniel Cardoso, an emerging choreographer who is rapidly developing an excellent reputation in the contemporary dance field, was asked to create the choreography. The work was performed by the Orquestra Didática and the Quorum Ballet. There were nine initial performances of the work, attended by over 12,000 young people and their teachers.

The libretto for *The Little Stone Girl* centres around a girl who has been frozen by a witch's spell. The girl, who wanted to be a ballerina, can no longer move and turns into a statue. As a group of friends become aware of her situation and her love of dancing, they decide to motivate her to dance with the hope that she will respond positively to the movement.

It is *The Little Stone Girl's* social interaction with her friends that is at the heart of the performance's message of inclusion. The audience, including children with disabilities, were prepared for the performance through classroom workshops, and learnt some of the choreography. Relationships developed in the classroom serve to foster a close connection between audience and performers.

Although this work touches on a particular disability, Foco Musical's work is never conceived for one specific audience. Concerts welcome many groups, and organisations that serve disabled young people are frequently in attendance as part of the audience.

Financial support from the Ministry of Culture, will allow Foco Musical to record *The Little Stone Girl*, and to publish the story in a comic book format with an accompanying audio CD. Foco Musical will partner with Lisbon's City Hall Music Library who will act as co-publishers.

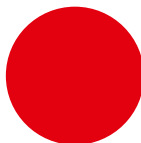
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**[www.focomusical.org](http://www.focomusical.org)  
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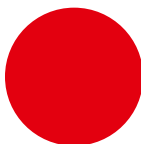
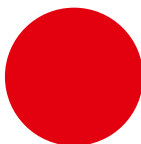




## DANCE AGENT FOR CHANGE



Caroline Bowditch,  
Scottish Dance Theatre,  
United Kingdom



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Caroline Bowditch is a disabled dance/performance artist whose career includes 15 years in mixed-ability companies.

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▶▶ Caroline participated in The Dancers Project 2005 (The Place) and underwent training on the Cultural Shift project 2005 (East London Dance). She has choreographed and performed work as girl jonah with Fiona Wright and is a founder member of Weave Movement Theatre (Melbourne) and The FATHoM Project (Newcastle). Caroline toured with Scottish Dance Theatre in the spring of 2007 where she helped create and performed in Adam Benjamin's Angels of Incidence. ◀◀

Here Caroline talks about her work as Scottish Dance Theatre's Dance Agent for Change:

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*I am employed as Scottish Dance Theatre's Dance Agent for Change.*

### My role has six quite clear aims:

- To challenge the idea: 'What is a dancer and who can dance?'
- To increase the number of disabled people involved in dance in Scotland.
- To increase confidence of people delivering dance in Scotland to everyone, making dance more accessible.
- To explore the possibility of breaking new artistic ground in dance with integration at the forefront.
- To offer an integrated creative learning programme which educates, inspires, informs and expands horizons.
- To map out a path for the future of integrated dance in Scotland.

*My whole role at Scottish Dance Theatre is all about artistic and organisational change. I very much see myself as a catalyst in this role, but what I'm finding is that often the 'chemical reactions' take longer than first hoped for or expected. Bit by bit though I feel a shift is occurring.*

*In my role I perform with the company, teach as part of the creative learning team and manage a variety of projects. I work with all sorts of groups from professional dancers to those that have never had a chance to dance before.*

*As an artist I am interested in working in non-traditional dance locations with bodies that don't generally fit the dance mould. I also frequently use a 'site' as a stimulus for the movement that is created.*

What is  
a dancer and  
who can dance?



It was a joy  
and a privilege  
to be part of!





*I am committed to working with interesting individuals and performers of varying ages, with and without disabilities, and different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. I am less interested in their formal training and am always looking for artists that have a strong performance quality that draws an audience in and makes me want to watch them. By using a greater variety of performers I not only have a wider, more colourful palette to draw on when creating the work but it also gives an audience more opportunity to see themselves represented in the work and therefore feel more connected to it. I want to make work that is visually exciting, enticing as well as beautiful with elements of risk and theatricality.*

*With professional dancers, including those in training, the focus is mostly exposing them to my artistic practices and the tools that I use when creating work. With dance teachers, it is usually about increasing their confidence in their own practice and supporting them to find ways to make what they already do more accessible and inclusive. And for those that have never had the chance to dance before it is about creating an environment where they feel safe to try new things and have a good time, but learn about the basics involved in dance along the way.*

*Regardless of which group I am working with, I try to go in with a really clear, achievable aim for myself in the session, whether this is to create one minute of choreography or get the group to cross the room. This aim is what*



*I then create tasks around in order to achieve – it sounds simple but it seems to work for me.*

**Caroline identifies the distinction between “disability” and “access requirements” as an important one when meeting a new group of dancers:**

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*I believe the most important thing in inclusive*

*practice is communication. It's about having the bravery to ask 'need to know' questions. During any registration process I always ask people about their 'access requirements' not their disability, as a disability label gives me no information that is particularly useful. Access requirements are much more likely to tell me what an individual is going to need in order to get the most out of a session.*

*At the beginning of a session I always ask: 'Is there anything we need to know before we start working together?' Again, this doesn't ask people for their disability label but gives people an opportunity to share relevant information, e.g. 'I don't hear on my right side' or 'If you run at me I will be terrified' or 'I can take weight in a seated position but not standing'.*

**Caroline employs a variety of strategies to make sure that her work is accessible to all. She cites "attitude, openness, observation and communication" as "some of the most essential elements in inclusive teaching practice." Other strategies include conveying the same information in multiple ways, giving the process time, being aware of language, and looking for common denominators throughout. Making the creative process non-threatening and accessible to all members of a group sometimes involves shifting the focus of participants away from the fact that they are making art.**

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*For me, it is about creating a space where people feel like they can be creative and about getting them 'doing it' almost before they realise it's happening! I had a fantastic experience recently when I was working with a group of young disabled people. One of the participants at one point let out a squeal of joy and on asking what was happening she told me, with her face beaming 'I just found a new movement that I didn't know I could do and I made it up all on my own!'. This was a*

*real launching moment for her and she really started to let her creativity shine – it was a joy and a privilege to be part of.*

*My overall aim is to create high quality work that makes people think and feel. I really love watching people make new discoveries of what is possible. My creative process is constantly influenced by who is in the room and what they have to offer. It excites me to think that I could take the same task to 10 groups and what we would end up with would always be different depending on what the individuals in that group took from it and/or gave to it.*

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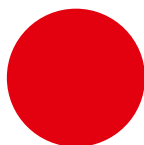
*I believe the most important thing in inclusive practice is communication. It's about having the bravery to ask 'need to know' questions.*

*Caroline Bowditch*

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[www.scottishdancetheatre.com](http://www.scottishdancetheatre.com)  
[cbowditch@dundeereptheatre.co.uk](mailto:cbowditch@dundeereptheatre.co.uk)

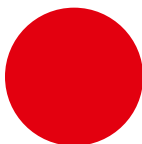
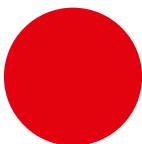
scottish  
dance theatre



## SEEING THE MUSIC



Chisato Minamimura,  
Independent Dance Artist,  
United Kingdom



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Chisato Minamimura is a deaf dance artist born in Japan and now based in London. She trained at the Laban Centre in London before completing an M.A. at Yokohama National University. She danced with CandoCo Dance Company from 2003-2006, and has been involved in creating and presenting dance performances and workshops in many countries around the world.

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▶▶Here Chisato talks about how she became interested in dance, and her community dance practice. ◀◀

*Before I was 20 I had no interest in dance because I thought it impossible for a deaf person to interpret music. I had a degree in art – I had always been interested in visual art, but that is a two dimensional form. I was invited to participate in an integrated workshop for disabled and non-disabled people. This was the first time this had happened in Japan. I went to the workshop, and it was like doing 3-D art. It was fantastic; it was like communicating without having to verbalise anything at all. I've been dancing ever since.*



*In 1998 I was involved with a Japanese company that offered funding for Deaf and disabled people who wanted to learn or train abroad – I wanted to focus on community dance and so I went to Laban in London and did a course in community dance. I thought how I was taught to teach dance in the community was fantastic. Being deaf I could share with many people through dance.*

*When I meet people for the first time (in a workshop situation) I keep it very simple. I only explain my name and how I communicate. For example I say “hello I’m deaf, there is an interpreter, but please focus on me rather than her.” Many (participants) have never met a deaf person before. I just plant those few things with the group – and in the break time people are free to come and talk to me if they choose to. My approach with a group of disabled people is exactly the same. Quite often disabled people have never met a deaf person either. I’m not going to know what their disability is on first sight. I have to modify and change my workshop to match their needs. I make those modifications as I go along.*

*Sometimes in the community workshops that I teach I experience that the disabled people find it easier than the non-disabled people. In addition to dance workshops I also teach communication workshops. When I’m teaching non-disabled people in communication workshops they can feel very closed; they need a lot more time to gain confidence and to be*



*open enough to learn to communicate non-verbally. Once they overcome that barrier their work is beautiful – really beautiful. For example if you put people in pairs and ask them to sit where they are comfortable deaf people tend to sit face to face, but slightly to one side. But hearing people automatically sit side by side. They don’t need to have eye contact.*

*Verbal communication is quite detailed. With physical communication you convey emotion and connect with people on a different level. Maybe what I can give to people is the ability to express themselves in an emotional way. I compare it to music – like two musical instruments being able to synchronize or communicate with one another.*

*When I’m teaching I get a lot of ideas and people also have opinions about what I do. For example when I am dancing with a group someone might ask whether I can*

hear the music because it may appear that my movements are following music that is being played. This started me thinking about music. I wondered why people felt that they had to hear music as opposed to seeing it – seeing the rhythm. I started to explore sound and how music can be translated in a visual way by dancers. That in turn influenced my choreography.

I notice that organisations sometimes have very low expectations of me as a deaf practitioner. However, after a workshop is delivered people will come up to me with smiles on their faces, their attitude has changed. Then people understand that we have a right to be in the professional domain. Deaf people can teach too, and importantly they can also choreograph for public performances. What I do is to put on a facade of acceptance when I arrive. I believe that I will transform the attitudes towards me and my ability to choreograph. Sometimes I feel little valued in the choreographic field. However, when I am teaching my choreography gives me validity.

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*Quite often disabled people have never met a deaf person either.*

*Before I was 20 I had no interest in dance because I thought it impossible for a deaf person to interpret music.*

Chisato Minamimura

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<http://chisato.h-and-c.jp>  
angel-c@h-and-c.jp

I wondered why people felt  
that they had to hear music  
as opposed to seeing it.



## LISTEN UP! AN IDEA DEVELOPS

Den Jyske Opera, Denmark

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In this article discussing the planning for a long-term education project, Den Jyske Opera identifies the elements needed for success.

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►► The Opera looked to the work of Professor Beth Juncker, who has said that “we must provide the “subjects, materials, and tools” that “create exciting ways of being together” and that “make it possible for us to party, play, dance, laugh, sing”<sup>1</sup>. This is the fundamental impetus behind *Listen Up!* ◀◀

*Listen Up!* was born on a dreary day in January with a phone call from Naja Kilden, Head of Centerafdelingen, a special unit for the deaf

and hard of hearing at a mainstream primary school in Århus called Moellevangsskolen.

*“I have this crazy dream of deaf children performing an opera. Is it possible that Den Jyske Opera could lend us a helping hand?”*

For Den Jyske Opera the timing was excellent. At a recent meeting with the Centre for Special Education in Århus the Centre’s consultants had indicated that they saw a great need and very few arts-education activities for children with special needs. The Opera House had already begun to develop ideas for projects designed to make its work accessible to children with special needs.

The idea of staging an opera performance with deaf and hard of hearing children seemed at the same time enticing and awe-inspiring. However, even in the initial meeting, several factors suggested that a more process-oriented and cross-arts approach would be the right choice.

The purpose of Centerafdelingen is to support the special needs of deaf and hard of



<sup>1</sup> RESEO Conference: “Curtains up! Productions for young audiences”, Oslo, October 2009

hearing children in order to enhance the quality of their school education. Currently 33 children are enrolled. The majority have cognitive, linguistic or physical challenges in addition to their hearing loss, and some have academic and social challenges. The group ranges in age from 6-15, and for this reason requires a variety of age-appropriate approaches.

Many of the children at Centerafdelingen use cochlear implants. The therapy that they receive in order to help them make the best use of this technology is time consuming. As a result the children meet with many professionals who are focused on their hearing loss or on their additional learning challenges, including teachers, speech therapists, audiologists, and others.

Centerafdelingen's main motivation for contacting Den Jyske Opera was a hope that working with professional artists would offer the children an opportunity to see themselves in a new light. Opera might seem the least conducive art form for deaf and hard of hearing individuals, but Kilden felt that it offered great potential for an interesting challenge. The project's title (roughly

translated as *Listen Up!*) was chosen for its provocative quality, and the desire to raise awareness by getting everyone involved to *Listen Up!*

The children and the school were keen to incorporate some kind of performance as the culmination of a three-month working process. However the focus remained on the artistic process and reflection, and on the potential for introducing art as an extra dimension in the lives of the children and the teachers. Some teachers voiced concern that the children would be compromised by being put on stage, and this concern was treated with respect and seriousness.

Since opera is by nature a multiple-art form, combining music, drama, movement, visual arts, and text, it was decided that the project should involve several art forms, led by external professional writers, dancers, and musicians. In addition Den Jyske Opera will be providing a singer from the company to join in the project. The singer who has been chosen has experience in teaching and performing for children. Logistical factors were



also at work here – since the male chorus will be on tour this provided an opportunity to involve one of the female singers in an education project.

A professional development workshop will be offered for all the artists involved with the project, and initial planning meetings between members of the artistic team are already taking place. The composer and writer will visit the school to give a short presentation to the children, and to lead a workshop for the teachers before the practical work begins with the children. The school has a visual arts teacher on staff, so with planning it will be possible to include a visual arts component. This teacher also exhibits her own work, and so adds her professional artist's perspective.

Workshops will take place between January and March 2011. The children and artists will work on developing a variety of different texts, music and dance under the title *Listen Up!* Each art form is intended to stand on the base developed in previous sessions: the process beginning with a writer's workshop,

followed by dance/movement developed from the texts, and finally music and drama developed from the texts and choreography. Consequently, rather than being a more traditional staging of a narrative with music, the final show will probably be more of a collage of poetry, story-telling, dance and music.

This project is still in its early stages; we look forward with great anticipation to the months ahead of us, with the knowledge that we may face challenges both in communication, and in the development of cultural competencies. We are keen to provide opportunities for the children to become absorbed in the artistic and creative process, and to experience moments of transformation.

For Den Jyske Opera *Listen Up!* is an opportunity to create a new branch of the Opera's education and outreach work, and the chance to offer an interesting challenge to a member of the artistic staff. Such a project offers the opportunity for new experiences and the acquisition of new skills for the company – enriching us artistically as well as educationally.



Our aim is to create an artistic performance that is just as valid to audience and participants as one performed by the full company on large stages all over the country. In order to achieve this goal we intend to work closely with children, teachers, parents and all other partners throughout the process. We hope that when we all finally open the doors, and invite people to *Listen Up!*, our cast and audience will be equally gratified.

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*What piqued my interest was the idea of working with children with sensory disabilities. This will be a new challenge for me – having taught hundreds if not thousands of hearing children and young people. I especially focus on using all senses in the writing process, so I am curious to know whether this approach will be the same with this particular group of children or if they will express their sensory experience of the world differently in their writing. I expect that this challenge will inspire and inform my future work.* Cecilie Eken, writer

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**DEN JYSKE OPERA**

**[www.jyske-opera.dk](http://www.jyske-opera.dk)  
[bhn@jyske-opera.dk](mailto:bhn@jyske-opera.dk)**



## INTENTION UNITES: ABILITY DIVIDES

Clare West, Performing Arts and  
Health Consultant, Switzerland

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Trained as a dancer and a musician, Clare West has a career that includes work as a choreographer, opera director and holistic well-being practitioner. Here she advocates viewing all participants as being somewhere along a spectrum of ability:

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We frequently polarise individuals into “able” or “not-able” in many fields. However, as a facilitator this is not a creative starting point. The movement spectrum represents a range of ability from professional athletes and dancers to those with severe limitations of motor expression or paralysis. An average person somewhere in the middle can appear disabled placed next to the dexterity of the extreme.

When creating a project with a mixed group it is key to maintain a clear intention, and to allow everyone to contribute, whether the

physical illustration of their intention is possible or not. This unites “non-disabled” and “disabled” participants alike. We often start by seeing creative limitations, but come to appreciate a group’s skill and inventiveness, discovering highly-developed skills in another spectrum such as sensing, seeing, or hearing. It is important to focus on more developed skills, permitting those who are labeled as “disabled” to be seen as “able” in another spectrum.

Plenty of those who would identify as “non-disabled” might consider themselves challenged in the artistic arena, and believe that they are not capable of engaging in the creative process. Clare’s work with diverse groups has provided her with insight into ways to make the creative process more accessible for all, including those who don’t consider themselves artistic:

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When taking any group out of their comfort zone, there can be anxiety about the pressure to be creative and the pressure of being judged. For me one of the keys is my choice of

language and the way I choose to present the tasks. We need to be conscious of the tremendous power of words to enable or disable. The second key is to work only in small building blocks and in small tasks, so that there is an immediate sense of success and tasks seem manageable.

Working with the Lyric Opera of Chicago chorus (generally regarded as a non-disabled group) on a challenging Philip Glass work, my objective was to achieve an almost constant cinematic choreography with the 150 strong opera chorus throughout the evening. On the movement spectrum the average chorus member is not comfortable at the “dance” end, and so all were somehow “disabled” and out of their comfort zone. In the first rehearsal with the “choreographer” the chorus was literally petrified – “paralysed” – and it was clear that my first major task was to overcome this anxiety. One chorus member came very nervously up to me and said “we don’t have to “dance”, do we?” so to diffuse the expectation I replied “no, no don’t worry we won’t be doing any “dancing” at all –





*we are just going to put a few movements together this afternoon".*

*Building block by building block we put together a "series of movements." What ensued was the most exquisitely authentic and committed three-hour work of choreography for which the chorus received nightly standing ovations. I believe this approach is valid for any group to take the anxiety out of achieving the end result.*

*Paradigm shifts most often occur when several conditions are present: total trust, united, unfaltering intention and one hundred percent "presence". When these elements come together then the whole is greater than the sum of the individual parts and a shift occurs in our understanding, at a cellular level, beyond words.*

**How a project begins is often crucial to its success. Clare talks about some of the questions that interest her when she starts working with a new group:**

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*The first questions I ask are not the creative questions. It is important to understand everyone's expectations of the work and to try to align everyone's intentions including those of the partnering organisations, the group itself, the carers, any professional artists involved and any other interested parties.*

*Establishing a unified intention will to a large*

*extent dictate the structure and the artistic scope of the project. Although our inclination is to want to reduce the pressure of the end result for the group – the focus, the discipline, the recognition and the magic of a live performance can in itself be a transformative experience, and should not be abandoned lightly just to mitigate stress.*

*It's obviously important during the planning stages to spend time observing the group, their dynamics and their abilities, so that you have a good idea of the level of where to start. I always begin with energy visualisation and energy body work to create a common vocabulary and common experience.*

**Throughout this publication artists and facilitators return to how their work with various groups, both disabled and non-disabled, has influenced their own creative process:**

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*My approach to a work and even to my own choreography has evolved enormously thanks to the exposure to many different groups and many different fields and focuses. One of the most important approaches for me is the "Act as if ..." principal: Meaning that you act as if you could/can do something even if you have limited physical ability and can perhaps not actually execute it outwardly. This is a powerful enabling approach for working with those with physical limitations. In any aspect of work, from a pirouette to a project, it permits us to grow into our potential.*

**Clare has used this principal to powerful effect on more than one occasion:**

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*I was giving a movement session for a group of very mixed physical abilities and was working to be consciously aware of the power of my words to enable. Some of the group used wheelchairs and had partial paralysis, and I was using the “act as if you can” principal so as not to block possibilities. I asked people to follow along with the group and imagine the movement internally as if they were doing it with us. The objective of this movement session was not to heal physical disability. However, after the session was over one man sat quietly in his wheelchair – staring at his hand and opening and closing his fingers repeatedly. I went over to ask him if he was okay and he simply said “I have not moved my hand for twenty years.” The simple hand movement represented autonomy for him as he would be able to grip a cup and drink. His total openness and willingness to trust and his belief in the intention to move had re-activated the connections and allowed a paradigm shift to happen, enabling him to grow into that potential.*

**Clare identifies several strategies that she uses to ensure that her work is inclusive to all:**

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*Thanks to working with others with different challenges than my own I appreciate different perceptions and sensations, and try not to work from the obvious ones. Working with others I have observed that challenges and hur-*

*dles are frequently the greatest keys to creativity so I try to curb my instinct to want to solve everything for everyone and “protect” them. I have learned to value everyone’s contribution and to do my best to stand back and treat everyone as equal and equally “able”.*

*I think it’s very helpful with a group of mixed abilities to start with exercises using sensory capacities that everyone can access – primarily imagination, voice, listening, and seeing, to allow everyone to feel they are contributing. I use visualisations of energy and other sensory visualisations within the body and within the surrounding space as a starting point, and consciously explain movement and actions as sensations rather than as motor instructions.*

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*I have observed that challenges and hurdles are frequently the greatest keys to creativity so I try to curb my instinct to want to solve everything for everyone and protect them. Clare West*

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**CLARE WEST**

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**[www.sussed-solutions.com](http://www.sussed-solutions.com)  
[clare@sussed-solutions.com](mailto:clare@sussed-solutions.com)**

# MUSIC WITHOUT LIMITS

Hanne Deneire  
Independent Music Artist, Belgium



Hanne Deneire's professional accomplishments range from "composer in residence" for HERMES-ensemble, commissions

that include work for the The National Orchestra of Belgium, and a practice as an arts therapist, music educator, and researcher. She teaches at the Royal Conservatory of Antwerp, and is working on her doctorate on community opera. Hanne runs House of Music, a music education resource for all, including those with special needs.

Through House of Music, Hanne works with all ages from four upwards. Her aim is to teach music from a broad perspective:

*Some of the students at House of Music have learning disorders, so they attend a special school during the day, and then come to us to*

*learn music. Some are highly gifted, but also have socio-economic challenges.*

*I try to teach the language of music. As a composer I think it is very important that my students also learn the notes. I combine a creative approach with more technical, traditional music learning. At House of Music this is achieved through the use of puppets in different colours, which correspond to different notes. They help students to learn the music and are also used to develop confidence and self-esteem.*

*The children enjoy the support of the puppets, and as the teacher I use them to convey ideas. If a child has fears about doing something they can also use a puppet to express themselves. The students at House of Music learn to play the classics, but they also compose and improvise, using the puppets to help them notate and remember their work. But they also eventually learn to write traditional music notation.*

**The children and adults who study with Hanne at the House of Music usually come to her via word of mouth. However she is keen to stress that:**

*It is not therapy or just for people with special needs. However everyone knows that all are welcome with whatever abilities they bring. So we have a mixed group. I see what I do not only as a method of teaching but also a particular approach. It is really about listening. Many adults and artists forget to listen when working*

on projects. Listening is the most important part of the process with individuals and with groups. You have to be a good artist yourself but also a good listener. It's a combination of experience and *métier* or craftsmanship.

**Hanne's approach to individual work draws on her previous work with organisations and larger groups of participants and a concept-based method. She emphasises concepts as the way to technique, and draws on games to teach specific technical skills:**

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*With groups I have used a conceptual approach to music. This involves introducing rhythm, melody, structure, texture etc., as the concepts or building stones with which to construct music. Each time I meet with a group I introduce one or two of these concepts. After meeting three times they know what music is about and have some understanding of how to make a piece. They understand that creating music is not only about the first idea you think of, but what you do with that idea. If you have a little bit of craftsmanship then you have the knowledge to make something out an idea.*

**Hanne stresses not only music skill, but also the attendant social and communication skills:**

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*I always use games, both with individuals and groups – this came in part from my studies at the Guildhall School in London. As part of a game you also teach or provide some skills. These may be social skills, which are critical for*

*a group project. I focus on developing communication and decision-making skills, self-esteem, assertiveness, concentration, and on giving participants responsibility. All these skills are also a part of the creative process. I see it as being close to a 50/50 balance between social skills and creative skills, and this combination makes for a very interesting process.*

**Hanne discussed the need to put oneself into a creative mindset that considers all members of a group as creative contributors:**

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*Many people who take music classes, or want to learn an instrument think that they are not creative or may say "Oh I'm not an artist". Firstly you have to give them confidence and then be patient. I believe that everybody is creative. If you don't believe that then it's impossible I think.*

*For the project **Sticky Weed** or **Goose Grass** (the literal English translation), we wanted to have a word as first inspiration.... we thought about what sticky weed does, what it looks like, and how it might sound. The music score was composed for a professional ensemble. Two choreographers worked with six wheelchair users and six non-disabled amateur dancers. The musicians were incorporated into the dance piece. My job was to make a piece that combined the music and dance on stage. It was challenging. For example it is hard for a professional violist to be very close to a dancer, and play music, especially if that dancer is using a wheelchair.*

*The tempo and dynamics were also determined in communication with the dancers.*

*The groups bridged many social and artistic levels – between the musicians and the dancers, even between the choreographers and the musicians. We had disabled, non-disabled, professionals, amateurs, different arts disciplines. It changed me as a composer. You have to be open minded. If you say “I am the composer, I write and that’s it,” then it’s impossible. You have to work at being flexible, change your score, listen to the dancers, and listen also to the tempo of the people themselves.*

*It took us more than a year to make the piece – that was also interesting. If an orchestra gives me a commission, they usually say “Hanne please write a piece, for a small orchestra, 10 minutes in length, and with this deadline”. Two weeks prior to the performance they have the score, they rehearse, I work with them for the final rehearsal, and then voilà it is on stage. That is the regular way.*

**When the subject of limitations came up, Hanne was quick to point out that the creative act always happens within limits:**

*Freedom is always restricted – every commission is restricted in some way. If an organisation says “Hanne, please write a piece for flute, viola, and piano” then I have the concept, I have these particular instruments and they have limits. If I am working with disabled people there may be different restrictions. I may know that there*

*is a singer who cannot read notes, there is a singer who can read notes, there is maybe a dancer who can do the craziest things, and there is a dancer who can only go from left to right. So those become my limitations.*

**It is always the same: find your freedom within the limitations – that is the job of an artist.** *Even Mozart or Haydn had limitations. Haydn had a full orchestra but even with a full orchestra there are limitations. These might be the technique of the players, the ranges of the instruments...*

*For a standard commission, I do my work as a composer at my desk, give it to the musicians, and they perform. But if it is to be a project working with disabled people then there is another stage to this process. First I write and then I interact. At the first rehearsal we have to meet each other – you cannot simply provide the score. You have to listen, and to ask who the performers are, what they want, and what they want to make. It’s an alternating process with some trial and error. **You may know what you want, and then you search together to find the highest artistic result.***

**HANNE DENEIRE**

**[www.hannedeneire.be](http://www.hannedeneire.be)  
[hanne@house-of-music.be](mailto:hanne@house-of-music.be)**

# BREAKING TECHNICAL BARRIERS: AUDIO- DESCRIPTION

Opéras de Lille, Rouen,  
and Bordeaux, France

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This collaboration between the Opéras de Lille, Rouen, and Bordeaux focussed on audience access to work through the development of an audio-description service. As described here, this is a flexible model that combines pre-recorded descriptions and the services of a live technician who cues the descriptions at the right moments, and can also speak to the users of the service live if needed.

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Over the past few years several French opera houses have employed audio-description, a system that enables blind and partially-sighted visitors to more fully enjoy performances. Since 2006 the Opéras de Lille, Rouen and Bordeaux have offered audio-description for several major operas each season.

Audio-description provides enhanced access to the action on stage through commentary on the staging, the scenery, and the costumes. The listeners wear a wireless headset in order to receive this information. They are also provided with the programme notes, which are read before the show, in between the arias, and during the interval.

These three opera houses have been able to offer this system thanks to the support of the Fondation Orange and local public institutions. To set up the system, they collaborated with Accès Culture, an organisation based in Paris, which is an acknowledged leader in this specialised field, with extensive experience and expertise.

The commentary is written, recorded and broadcast by the Accès Culture team, who also provide programmes in large print and in Braille. Accès Culture attends several rehearsals for each show, and collaborates closely with the production team.

All three opera houses make every effort to keep ticket prices affordable for blind and partially-sighted audience members who are able to attend a performance for a very reduced price (from 5 to 62 Euros at the Opéra de Lille, depending on where they want to sit). Audio-description is provided as a free service.

The Opéra de Lille has developed information and communication targeted to this



These workshops enable participants to discover the opera piece in a very concrete way and to share convivial moments with other audience members.



## OPÉRA DE LILLE

[www.opera-lille.fr](http://www.opera-lille.fr)  
[communication@opera-lille.fr](mailto:communication@opera-lille.fr)

OPERA DE LILLE

## OPÉRA DE ROUEN

[info@operaderouen.com](mailto:info@operaderouen.com)



## OPÉRA DE BORDEAUX

[info@onb.fr](mailto:info@onb.fr)



Opéra  
National de Bordeaux

specific audience. This includes direct personal contact via e-mail or phone with blind and partially-sighted individuals and with associations for the blind; adaptation of the Opera's website to make it accessible; and an Opera House presence in meetings and in specific online venues such as the cécitweb service in Lille's Library.

Many of those who use the audio-description service are also able to access a pre-performance presentation. This might include: a presentation by the Opera at the blind association's headquarters and public areas attended by blind people, or at the Opera itself; a touch-tour of the scenery, costumes and props; a visit to the Opera House and auditorium; or a meeting with the singers. At the Opéra de Bordeaux there are opportunities to attend vocal practical workshops based on breathing, vibrations of the body, etc. These workshops enable participants to discover the opera piece in a very concrete way and to share convivial moments with other audience members. Finally, they also get a personal welcome on the night of the per-



formance, with a specifically dedicated usher who leads them to their seat, tries the equipment with them and explains its use to them and to their seating companion.

In total, during each season, about 400 people, including 70 children and teenagers, access this system at the Opéras de Lille, Rouen, and Bordeaux. Audience feedback has been excellent. The comments, both accurate and discreet (never broadcast during an aria), are very much appreciated, as are the other services provided by Opera House staff.

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*The opera was a wonderful success; the setting and orchestration majestic, audio-description precise – and fit admirably between orchestral parts and arias – which made us understand nearly everything that was happening on stage without missing out on the magic of voices and instruments.*

Jean-Louis,  
attending *Les Noces de Figaro*,  
Opéra de Lille

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**ACCESS**

to

**CULTURE**

a daily challenge for us all

For 20 years now, **ACCÈS CULTURE** has been offering **access to the performing arts to people with sensory disabilities**. Thanks to technology installed by **ACCÈS CULTURE** in partnership with more than 50 french cultural organisations, audience members are able to **attend theatre, opera and dance performances independently**.

Audio-description of opera for blind or partially sighted people was invented ten years ago. It offers a description of the set, props, costumes and singers' actions during the performance. This information is broadcast via a headset during the more musical elements of the piece. The libretto is also conveyed via audio-subtitles preceding the arias. **This enables the partially-sighted audience to have a full understanding of the piece, an idea of the staging and to enjoy the emotions conveyed by the opera.**

**ACCÈS CULTURE's** mission also consists in **helping the collaborating operas encourage this specific**

**audience to enter their performance halls.**

**ACCÈS CULTURE's** expertise in the fields of communication, public relations, fundraising and accessibility helps them work efficiently with each of their partners.

**ACCÈS CULTURE** collaborates with most of the major venues in France, including the Opéras de Angers, Bordeaux, Clermont-Ferrand, Dijon, Lille, Limoges, Montpellier, Nancy, Nantes, Paris, Reims, Rennes, Rouen, Saint Etienne, Toulouse, the Opéra comique, the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and the Théâtre du Châtelet, as well as the Théâtre de La Monnaie in Brussels.

 Working as a network, **ACCÈS CULTURE** **shares the cost of technical installations between all the participating organisations.**



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**ACCÈS CULTURE** at Théâtre National de Chaillot, 1 place du Trocadéro, 75116 Paris  
+33 (0)1 53 65 30 73 • [accessculture@magic.fr](mailto:accessculture@magic.fr) • [www.accessculture.org](http://www.accessculture.org)

## ABOUT RESEO

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Founded in 1996, RESEO is the European umbrella organisation for those working in opera and dance education.

RESEO's strength lies in the number and diversity of its members, which currently comprise over seventy opera and dance companies of all sizes from twenty countries in Europe and beyond. The network acts as a forum for the exchange and development of the practice of opera and dance education. RESEO also supports the sector through research, lobbying and projects.

Network Managers: Isabel Joly and Katherine Heid

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## ABOUT THE EDITOR: MARTHA MING WHITFIELD

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Martha Ming Whitfield is an independent arts consultant and writer with experience in dance, music, education, programmatic accessibility, innovative cross-arts collaborations, and grant writing. She is currently Executive Director for the Lake Champlain Chamber

Music Festival (USA) and has held positions with The Royal Ballet / Royal Opera House Education (UK), Flynn Center for the Performing Arts, Vermont Arts Council, and American Repertory Ballet / Princeton Ballet School (USA).

marthamwhitfield@gmail.com

## CREDITS PHOTOS

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