

The RESEO Artists' Development Project 2004 Evaluation Report

Executive Summary

The Artists' Development Project 2004 (ADP) was a programme of professional development for artists working in opera education, developed and managed by RESEO, the European Network of Education Departments in Opera Houses, in collaboration with six member opera houses.

An informal learning programme with broad objectives, the ADP was based on the *action research* model of training – a process of active participation, followed by shared critical reflection. The project was built on a simple model of exchange, using RESEO members' own education programmes as a learning resource. Three opera companies, Scottish Opera in Glasgow, Finnish National Opera in Helsinki, and the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris acted as project hosts, inviting artists and education managers from the RESEO membership across Europe to participate in four different projects.

The four projects highlighted different approaches to opera education. In Glasgow the focus project was Scottish Opera's primary school tour, where artists rehearse and stage an opera with 100 children in a day. At Finnish National Opera, ADP participants took part in the company's Opera Train, a project which aims to open the opera house to young children and families and involve them in creative activity together. The Châtelet hosted two projects. The first was a second family workshop, a new project for the theatre, based on the Finnish Opera Train model, which ADP participants helped to develop. The final project of the ADP was a creative residency in which artists developed two performances in response to the new commission at the Châtelet of Peter Eötvös' *Angels in America*, one by lycée (high school) students and one by the ADP artists themselves. At each stage of the project ADP participants took part in a preparation process, which introduced them to the project; an element of live participation, working directly with the general public in each of the three countries; and a process of reflection and discussion in a formal feedback session.

The four projects also demonstrated different approaches to the involvement of the visiting artists. In Glasgow a small group of visiting artists was able to work as members of the primary school opera team, contributing both to the development of the project and to its delivery in schools. Finnish National Opera successfully accommodated a much larger group of artists in a seminar-like structure of participation and reflection, although some of the artists felt that their creative involvement in the project was too limited. Both projects at the Châtelet, in contrast, involved ADP artists in new projects, giving artists direct responsibility for developing aspects of both projects within a framework established by the theatre. In both cases this process was challenging but artists were proud of the outcomes of each project. The advantages and disadvantages of the different approaches taken by each host company are discussed in detail in the report; in effect, the projects served as four case studies for the sharing of practice between RESEO members.

The different approaches of the host opera houses reflected differences in attitudes to artists' training and in more general terms to artists' roles: their level of involvement in project development, for instance. For some education managers, and artists, the opportunity for artists to explore their own creativity was a key aspect of the ADP. For other managers and artists, the development of a broader understanding of the practice and objectives of opera education was more important.

The Artists' Development Project had broad objectives, aiming to offer a development programme to artists, contributing through that process to the development of opera education across Europe. The project was also an opportunity to explore the role of the opera artist in education, and to focus on the shared values that underpin diverse practice in opera education.

The project had equally broad outcomes. It offered a wide range of learning outcomes to artists, including skill development, the opportunity to explore their own creativity, and a broader understanding of opera education across Europe. For opera education departments and particularly for the host departments, the ADP also had outcomes in terms of artform development, in that the project contributed to the development of both new and existing education projects. For both artists and education managers the ADP provided a valuable opportunity for reflection on the purpose of opera education, and a reminder of the importance of that process.

The ADP has provided RESEO with a number of models for the sharing of practice between artists, education managers and education departments. It offers the network some useful lessons in developing collaborative projects, highlighting the need for a shared planning framework and process, and, in terms of artists' development, a framework of learning objectives. Future projects should also ensure a balance between managing the experience of the artists and achieving the objectives of the project.

While the ADP highlighted the diversity of practice among artists in opera education and education departments across Europe, it also demonstrated a strong shared commitment to the artistic, social and educational goals of opera education, and, in doing so, provides a foundation for the development of future collaborative projects through RESEO. All ADP participants are keen to develop further programmes of exchange between artists, education managers, and education departments. The ADP offers a flexible model on which RESEO can build, perhaps as an on-going aspect of the network's programme of activity. RESEO members now need to address the issues of funding and organisation which would make such a programme sustainable.

RESEO appointed an independent evaluator to assess the effectiveness of the ADP as a programme of professional development. This report contains the outcomes of that evaluation process. It should be emphasised that this is not an evaluation of the projects themselves – this remained the responsibility of the host opera houses – nor of the artists' contributions to the projects. The focus of the evaluation is on the process of learning, skill development and reflection that was facilitated through the four projects; and how well the structure and organisation of each of the four projects, as well as the programme as a whole, contributed to the ADP's broad learning objectives. In addressing these questions, however, the report gives an account of each of the four projects and the different approach to education work that each represents. In doing so it is hoped that the report will contribute to the ADP's aim of disseminating good practice in opera education.

The success of the Artists Development Project is a reflection of the benefits of sharing practice between opera education departments. The project's success can also be attributed, however, to the energy, commitment and seriousness of intent of all the ADP participants – artists, co-organisers, education managers and RESEO staff alike. Those participants also made a vital contribution to the evaluation process. The evaluator would like to express both admiration and gratitude to all those whose observations on the ADP have contributed to this report.

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