

0-3

Opera, music and dance for the early years



Spring 2015
Best practice guide

Developed in the framework of RESEO Conference in Lisbon, Portugal (14-16 May 2015)





RESEO AND THE EARLY YEARS

RESEO has been active for over 15 years in the field of opera and dance education, bringing together professionals from all over the world to share, collaborate and experiment new ways to widen access and inspire curiosity in the performing arts, especially opera and dance. The network defines itself as a platform for initiation and exchange of artistic collaboration and a resource for educational research, constantly aiming to develop its structure and actions while raising the public profile of arts education. RESEO's activities include organising biannual conferences, advocacy, coordinating projects and spreading good practice along with regular newsletters and publications.

RESEO conferences are an essential aspect of the network's actions and follow a tried-and-tested format that combines presentations, practical workshops, round tables and informal moments. Given the diversity of member profiles – ranging from large opera houses to small independent companies and individual members – and the wide array of their skills and competences, much importance is given to enabling the exchange of ideas and methodologies between European counterparts, with several hours of conference time usually dedicated to case studies and member contributions.

Opera, music and dance for children under 3 years old

Whether to promote interest in culture at an early age, or to develop an organisation's audience development strategy for families: activities for very young audiences are gaining in importance throughout Europe. This conference thus aims at exploring, exchanging and enabling quality offers which have an impact on the young participants, their families, artists and cultural organisations.

Breaking barriers between art forms, these activities often bring together voice, music and movement. This diversity is also reflected by the conference hosts, three very different organisations in Lisbon: RESEO member Miso Music Portugal, an organisation focusing on experimental contemporary music creation, the Centro Cultural de Belém, a cultural centre hosting a multitude of artistic exhibitions and events, and the prestigious and time honoured opera house Teatro Nacional de São Carlos.

A range of questions shall be addressed during this meeting:

WHY Firstly, why and when are artistic offers for babies and toddlers of interest: What impact do artistic activities have on individual development and the interaction between the children and accompanying adults? What role do productions and activities for very young audiences play for artistic innovation? How can they be integrated in a general audience development strategy?



HOW At an age when the boundaries between reality and make-believe are still open, when music and movement are experienced with unrivalled immediacy, a performance can be a magical experience. Thus, secondly, how should such an offer cater to the specificity of this age group and their families, taking into account developmental variables, the triangle relationship between child - accompanying adult - performer and elements linked to the performance (space/staging, length, music, content...).

WHAT Thirdly, innovative examples shall be showcased, experienced and discussed. A kaleidoscope of European examples and practical workshops will demonstrate and provide training in new approaches. This meeting will also bring together offer and demand, promoting European exchange and touring.

HOW TO MAKE USE OF THIS GUIDE

This guide was compiled on the occasion of the Spring RESEO conference “0-3: Opera, music and dance for the early years” in order to provide attendees with a written trace of the case studies discussed during the sessions and include those of members unable to be present. Members were asked to select projects that they considered well defined, reliable and effective, with demonstrated results and measurable impact on target groups, organisation and the wider public. The projects were then selected for inclusion in the conference according to these criteria as well as their adaptability to different geographical areas, organisations, artistic forms and cultural backgrounds.

Best practices can be useful to education departments from several different points of view. Foremost a source of inspiration, they also provide a framework upon which to base new projects, facilitate the sharing of new methods and positive results and promote cooperation between organisations. Grounding a scheme in proven methods tends to boost effectiveness and credibility and can also have the non-negligible effect of reassuring funding bodies and institutions.

Making use of best practices does not however simply consist in simply copying another organisation's project. Education departments need to ask themselves several questions before deciding on a best practice, or indeed whether to use one at all: what is the goal we intend to achieve and in what context? Who are the target groups and the wider beneficiaries? What are our resources? Having identified a potential practice, it is then important to ensure that it makes sense in the given context and is adaptable to local realities, suits the specific goals of the project rather than just the general issues at stake, and fits the philosophy and general structure of the department. It is also essential to ensure that the method is cost-effective.

The best practices described in this guide can be roughly divided into two types of activities: performances and workshops, although the types clearly overlap.



Performances

In spite of the universality of the musical experience, touching people of all ages and wakes of life, babies and toddlers are not a common audience for opera and dance performances. Special care must be given to the proposed format, allowing for interaction and capturing the young child's attention. An additional challenge also lies in the necessity to produce a work of high artistic quality, corresponding to the organisation's artistic standards, all the while ensuring that it is accessible to both very young children and their parents/accompanying adults. This guide shall present a variety of successful performances for very young audiences, which allow for a first encounter with the world of music and movement.

Workshops

Another possibility chosen by organisations and artists to initiate very young children to music and the performing arts are participatory workshops. Via regular meetings with the artists, the children and also their parents and other accompanying adults discover music, singing, and dance by actively taking part in the creative process. Many questions must be asked beforehand concerning the children's capacities, the type of suitable activities for this age group, the number of participants, but also the follow-up between meetings and the link between artists and participants. This guide shall present a variety of projects developed for children, their parents and other accompanying adults.

PERFORMANCES FOR THE EARLY YEARS





Morfar Persson får ett paket, GöteborgsOperan (Sweden)

Type of performance: Short chamber opera

Running time: 16 min

Age group: 2 year olds

Audience size: 40 children and their parents and/or accompanying adults

Stage/ setting: small stage

Date: Spring and autumn 2014

Contact: Mia Ringblom Hjertner - maria.c.hjertner@opera.se

Morfar Persson lives alone. Today is his birthday. On this day, he usually receives a birthday letter signed either by the post lady Signe or by the carrier pigeon Sune. But today, nobody seems to be coming... to make waiting easier, Morfar Persson sings about his books and waters his plants. Then suddenly, he receives a present. Inside is a letter from his granddaughter An-Kathrin. And a ticket to go and see her. She wants him to stay with her forever... This story touches upon questions of loneliness, old age, longing and regret, but also the necessity to keep your imagination alive even if you are a grandfather.

This short chamber opera is based on an original and personal idea by Mia Ringblom Hjertner, who wrote the texts. It is performed in the context of the Fairy Tale Foyer programme, which was initiated at GöteborgsOperan 5 years ago. On four or five Sundays per half-season, children are at the centre of the organisation, with performances offered that have been created especially for them. At the beginning of this project, these performances were mainly short versions of adult operas being programmed on the main stage. Over the course of the years, the education team in Gothenburg developed towards the creation of performances especially for very young audiences. The aim of Fairy Tale Foyer is to encourage children to come to the opera with their family and to transform this outing into a regular family activity. It is the children that are in charge of this outing: they hold their own ticket in their hand, are given the best seats, and the parents are asked to follow their children, so that they can acquire a sense of ownership of the place.

After 5 years of existence, Fairy Tale Foyer has become a great success, the 40 tickets for every performance are distributed free of charge every Wednesday before the performance and the audience snaps them up in no time. With growing experience, the education team has fine-tuned both the welcome given to the children upon arrival as well as the space in which the performance is given, ensuring that the child can easily master this space and interact with the artists after the performance. Thus, the focus truly is upon the children as privileged audience members: everything possible is done to introduce them both to opera as a musical genre as well as to the building.



Opera Baby, Teatro Sociale di Como - AsLiCo (Italy)

Type of performance: Interactive performance

Age group: 0 to 36 months

Audience size: 40 audience members (children and accompanying adults)

Setting: an empty space large enough for 40 to 60 people

Date: Premiere on March 1st, 2015 in Como (IT)

Contact: Michela Mannari - mmannari@aslico.org

Opera Baby is part of the platform *Opera Education*, which proposes activities adapted to different age groups. The keyword for the entire *Opera Education* project is interaction: every production is interactive, the audience takes part in the performance by singing several short arias and by shaking simple objects created at home or in school. For *Opera Baby* and the performance *Miloemaya* (March 2015), the artistic team used extracts from opera productions for young audiences and adapted them to an audience of under 3. The aim is to provide a first contact with music via an interactive performance made of notes, sounds and simple words. The performance is based on a sound space created by two singers/actors, enabling a first emotional link with the young audience. The experience includes both new sounds and repetitive sounds in order to offer elements of surprise while at the same time maintaining a reassuring sonar environment. Additionally, tutorials are prepared for families and teachers, providing ideas on how to play with music with very small children.

Initially limited to an age group of 8- 36 months, the education team decided to open this performance also to even younger babies, as the sounds and atmospheres created can be understood at any age. This production received very positive feedback; the number of performances was doubled to respond to popular demand. Surprisingly, a lot of thought had to be given to how to best accompany the parents- rather than their children. The parents found it challenging to simply share an artistic experience with their children, and remained too focused on their reactions and behaviour. They spent too much time controlling their children, thus strongly influencing their perception. This underlines the need to work with accompanying adults, as their attitude towards the performance has a strong impact on their children.

Lastly, this project had a positive financial and marketing impact on the Teatro Sociale di Como, as it launched a partnership with the company CHICCO, a well-known Italian brand for baby gear and toys. CHICCO has factories in Como, but had never before cooperated with the theatre. Following this project that they sponsored, they also became members of the association AsLiCo, which manages the Teatro Sociale di Como.



Kitchen Concert, The Moscow State Opera and Ballet Theatre for Young Audiences (Russia)

Type of performance: Performance

Age group: 0 to 3 year olds

Audience size: 100 audience members (children and accompanying adults)

Stage/ setting: small auditorium

Date: Premiere on February 20th, 2015

Contact: Georgiy Isaakyan - almazami@gmail.com

Kitchen Concert is an unusual performance in which the musicians, rather than play their usual instruments, produce sounds and music using cooking utensils. The young audience members discover music via familiar objects and see that they themselves can produce music with these everyday objects they can find in the kitchen. They learn that they can make music, at any time, with spoons or plates. This production is based on the idea that music is everywhere and calls upon the children's everyday environment to familiarise them with art.

The mission of the Moscow State Opera and Ballet Theatre for Young Audiences is to bring opera and dance to young, and also very young, audiences. Since its creation in 1965 by Natalia Stats, their entire programming aims to be a hub for high quality artistic creation in opera and dance, but also a place dedicated to children and families. This production, *Kitchen Concert*, is part of the programme Baby-Lab, a new project that creates performances for babies and toddlers. Guiding principle for Baby-Lab is that the performance should be understandable and accessible for very young audiences. It is therefore completely imagined for and dedicated to this age group. Inspired by the Baby-Lab project and based on their experience with two prior operas for very young audiences, *Teremok* and *Koshkin dom (House of the cat)* – two operas of 35 minutes each with a real orchestra, staged in the opera foyer for 50 audience members – the education and artistic team of the Moscow State Opera and Ballet Theatre for Young Audiences created this production to initiate children under 3 years of age to music in a very unconventional manner.

This lack of conformism is what both enchanted and shocked the adult audience, who may not have understood beforehand they were not going to attend a regular opera performance. Some were thus frustrated that the actors in the *Kitchen Concert* did not sing! However, adults who understood that they were going to attend a production for babies were very positive. The babies, even before being able to walk or speak, experience and understand theatrical language and play, which connects with their emotions and imagination. They often react much better than adults...



KidO, Scottish Opera (United Kingdom)

Type of performance: Performance

Age group: 3 to 4 year olds

Audience size: 70 children and accompanying adults

Stage/ setting: The audience is seated within the performance area and can interact with the performers and in particular a special floor cloth. This floor cloth incorporates conductive material and is used to trigger a range of sounds at certain points in the show. The footprint is 6 metres square with the capacity for a maximum of 70 adults and children per performance.

Date: Premiere on March 20th, 2015 and running until mid-April

Contact: Jane Davidson - Jane.Davidson@ScottishOpera.org.uk

KidO is the third piece in a trilogy of work Scottish Opera began in 2009 for children under 5 years of age.

The first, *BabyO*, was created for babies between 6 to 18 months. The guiding principle was to explore the cognitive process an infant undergoes during this period of their life. At this age, children learn to recognise facial expressions and associate them with emotions. Also, at this age hearing is more developed than sight. Based on these observations, the education and artistic team of Scottish Opera created a performance that brought together different voice types and timbres with different actions and facial expressions, stimulating the young audience's understanding of emotions and music.

Following this project, the parents of the children having attended this performance wanted more. This resulted in the creation of *SensoryO* for children between 18 and 24 months. This time, all senses are explored by a staging allowing children, now independently mobile, to explore a range of textures, colours, scents and musical sounds during the performance. Once again, this project focused strongly on research and development with the artists, parents and children to determine the types of visual and auditive stimuli they prefer.

Again, parents were keen to know what plans Scottish Opera was making for a production that would be age appropriate in terms of intellectual, as well as emotional & creative, development for children in the immediate pre-school years of 3 – 4. In 2013, research & development began with a team of artists including two singers, a percussionist, a composer, a director/dramaturge and designers (set & costume as well as Sound). *KidO* provides the opportunity for children to discover opera via a mix of arias which confront them with intense emotions – both positive and negative-characteristic of this art- but also familiar to young children. The aims were to build a more narrative plot line that would be recognisable and familiar to the children; learning to interact in the context of a playful story with others; exploring the beginnings of language structure; better understanding the relationships between different characters and resolving problems through mutual co-operation and sensitivity to others' needs and requirements. These objectives are facilitated by the staging: the children are seated directly on stage, which is covered by a floor cloth into which electronic circuits have been stitched– which, when linked to a specially designed computer programme – emit a wide range of sounds when the circuit is completed by physical contact. Thus every child can participate in the creation of music, and learn to express itself creatively as an individual and as a member of a group or team.



Merry-Go-Round (Karussel), Pantalone (Belgium)

Type of performance: "Musical playlet"

Age group: as of 2 years of age

Audience size: 150 children and accompanying adults

Stage/ setting: variable

Running time: 45 minutes

Date: Premiere 12 June 2007, performed approx. 400 times since

Contact: Filip Bral - filipbral@pantalone.be

Merry-Go-Round needs nothing more than a violin, cello and accordion (oh, yes, and an actor) to take its audience of little people along on a journey of sound and colour. Joyful visual poetry and gentle excitement blend in a performance of curious associations. The Merry-Go-Round slowly turns first one way and then the other. Everything revolves, everything is round – the sun, the moon, the balloon, the balls, the seats, and even the carrot-nosed snowman. The three musicians and their instruments are what fill Merry-Go-Round with emotions, images and situations. In Merry-Go-Round the alert little audience will soon learn how to see notes and listen to colours.

The main principle behind the production is repetition (almost every new element put in is round, so everything turns (or 'rolls'); the music is repetitive. The end of the piece refers to the beginning of the piece (the so-called 'beginning and end of the circle'). We decided to compose new music to emphasize this circular idea. The repetitive music is similar to the 'noises' heard by unborn babies in the womb. The aim is thus to immerse these young children into a state of immediate experience, in which they can dream away and let the emotions touch their soul (through their ears and eyes). In the course of the many performances of this show in very different circumstances and for very different audiences, the education team realised that children- and sometimes even adults- with mild or severe mental disabilities are often very attracted and appeased by the calm of the music and the staging. It seems that the music as well as the visual impulses have a therapeutic effect on those children and adults.





Purcell's Fairy Queen, Spitalfields Music (United Kingdom)

Type of performance: Opera

Age group: 0 to 2,5 year olds

Audience size: 45 children + parents/accompanying adults

Stage/ setting: very flexible (festivals, libraries, cultural centres...)

Running time: 45 minutes

Date: Premiere on May 9th, 2015

Contact: Clare Lovett - clare.lovett@spitalfieldsmusic.org.uk

Purcell's Fairy Queen takes us on a magical journey, accompanied by the music of Henry Purcell, through the enchanted forest of the Fairy Queen and the Green Man, inhabited by magical creatures. By setting this story in a space filled with music, sounds and colours, parents and children are invited to explore and create music together.

Purcell's Fairy Queen is programmed within the Gabrieli Consort's Artistic Associate programme in the framework of Spitalfields Music summer festival. It is the fifth and most recent production in the Musical Rumpus series. Musical Rumpus, initiated five years ago, is an opera series especially designed for babies and toddlers (age 0 – 2.5) to create early experiences of opera and adventure. Taking celebrated baroque operas and re-imagining their stories and music specifically for the youngest of ears, the series gives children the opportunity to explore sounds, instruments and objects throughout the performance including a specially designed free-play session.

This project saw the light through the work of Spitalfields Music with local communities, especially with young mothers and their families at the maternity ward of the Royal London Hospital and the children's libraries of Tower Hamlets. The key artistic choice was based on a fundamental belief that families and very young children have the right to experience the best, world class quality live music and productions. The objectives of this project include the development of dialogue and strong ties with local communities, the work with local partners to provide training for parents, enabling them to deliver regular music storytelling sessions in their own settings, the transfer of the micro-touring model established within the East End of London through national partners, such as Sage Gateshead, Pegasus Theatre, Wiltshire Music Centre, and Spark Festival (Leicester), and professional development for young musicians and the creative team to develop their practice in creating and delivering work for young families.

This project has touched a relatively large audience: over 800 children see each production, this number is growing and families bring siblings. A transfer of audiences between local community spaces and festival venues is beginning. When first introduced, many families had never experienced any arts activity previously and had certainly never experienced opera. Library shows are now completely sold out word of via mouth in less than one week. Also, the audience, initially from the local community, has widened to include also the regular festivalgoers of Spitalfields Music.



While you're sleeping, Opera Ballet Vlaanderen (Belgium)

Type of performance: Performance

Age group: 3 year olds

Audience size: approx. 80

Stage/ setting: very flexible (libraries, cultural centres, schools)

Running time: 40 minutes

Date: Since 2013

Contact: Josephine Schreibers - jschreibers@operaballet.be

With its solid experience in productions for children over six, Opera Ballet Vlaanderen decided to adventure into new grounds: productions for the early years. *While you're sleeping* takes children into the land of dreams and opera. This journey through the history of opera, from Cavalli and Monteverdi to Puccini, leads us via the path less trodden by: the path of lullabies, a musical genre children know well. Gently, they explore the wide range of emotions expressed in lullabies, all the while opening up towards the diversity and richness of opera. This first contact with opera is inspired by the calm of the bedtime ritual; the children come dressed in their pyjamas, with their teddy bears, and let themselves be cradled by the music.

Created in 2013, this production toured throughout Flanders thanks to a partnership with Jeunesses Musicales, and was performed in schools, libraries and local cultural and community centres. It aims at bringing opera to children, so that they discover it in a familiar environment. The education and artistic team of Opera Ballet Vlaanderen, including soloist Chia-Fen Wu, wished to expose children to the multiple facets of opera by selecting lullabies from very different operas, from different times and in different styles. These pieces are assembled to produce a bubble of tenderness and calm, allowing the children to react in whatever way they wish to the emotions and the music. Thus, the soloist tells the story that once, when she was singing “Lascia ch’io pianga” – which means “Let me cry” –, the children started to cry in empathy with the sadness of the song. One of the most striking aspects of work with very young audiences is the impossibility to predict their reactions towards music and acting. They seem like a blank page, with no expectations towards the performance, and are thus more easily touched by the expressed emotions than their adult counterparts. Also, they need no context, no story, to understand and feel the music’s emotions. Thus, the short introduction at the beginning of the performance which explains the context and the characters is often more useful for the accompanying adults than for the children, who could well do without it. They need no buffer zone, no transition phase to switch from reality to make-believe.



Do-re-mi-flea-sol-la-ti-do

(Grat' moi la Puce que j'ai dans l'do), Cie Minute Papillon (France)

Type of performance: Performance

Age group: 18 months - 102 year olds

Audience size: 100 people if the children are very young, 200 if the children are slightly older (+ parents/accompanying adults)

Stage/ setting: very flexible (libraries, cultural centres, schools)

Running time: 40 minutes

Date: Created at the Festival d'Avignon 2011

Contact: Violaine Fournier - cie.minutepapillon@orange.fr

Let's be daring and make an opera for the early years! Accompanied by Vivaldi, Bizet, Brahms, Ravel, Offenbach, Elgar and Mozart, three friends seemingly straight from a Miro painting have fun in everyday situations the children are well familiar with: waking up, dressing, eating, playing, cuddling, taking a bath, going to bed... An adventure full of poetry and humour for everybody in the family.

Do re mi flea sol la ti do was created upon the demand of an agent as a production for children between 18 months and 3 years. The first wish of the team at Cie Minute Papillon was to share their love for operatic repertoire and its particular emotional scope with their very young audience. This strong emotional focus is indeed appropriate for very small children who are very sensitive to feelings. Thus, the guiding principle was to speak to emotions and feelings rather than focus on cognitive aspects. The show highlights what the children recognise, their everyday life, to take them by the hand and let them discover opera and its diversity. Hence the idea of basing it on a day in the life of a child, which allows even the youngest to follow what is happening. It was also important for Cie Minute Papillon that the production serves the transmission of repertoire, so that this music continues to thrive, of course, but also so that the accompanying adults find their marks. A good production for children also means that the adult enjoys the experience and can share this mutual pleasure with the young child.

The project was a big success, and was acclaimed by the press. Since its creation in 2011, it was performed more than 400 times in over 60 theatres throughout France, thus for around 20.000 people every year. In parallel, the education and artistic team worked with childcare professionals and offered diverse workshops. Cie Minute Papillon also gives older children the possibility to participate in practical sessions to discover music, while for the younger children, it has developed parent-child workshops and specific activities for the early years, extending this offer also to nurseries and (nursery) schools.

WORKSHOPS FOR BABIES AND TODDLERS





Le Bal des bébés, Cité de la Musique (France)

Type of project: Ball

Age group: 0 - 12 months

Audience size: 12 babies and their parents

Stage/ setting: Floor: dry, smooth and clean. No tiles or concrete. Lighting: daylight or soft, indirect lighting sources. For the parents: comfortable clothing and soft socks. Provide space to change clothes.

Running time: 40 minutes + 20 minutes transition time

Date: Premiere on March 12th, 2015 at the Philharmonie de Paris

Contact: Maryse Franck - mfranck@cite-musique.fr

Le bal des bébés is an encounter between parents and children through music and dance. To dance with ones baby in arms in a special musical atmosphere means letting go and experiencing the beauty of connecting, discovering, hearing music and sharing. A moment of being carried, moved and cradled... it's all very gentle and caring. Just a few parents, babies, two musicians and two dancers are the ingredients of this sensory journey based on trust and the quality of relationships.

Le Bal des Bébés is a co-creation of Compagnie Balabik (France) and Théâtre de la Guimbarde (Belgium). The project was created in the framework of the *Let's Dance* programme (a weekend of dance, from baroque to minimalism, via Stravinski, Christophe Rousset, Steve Reich, Ensemble intercontemporain, Gallotta, Hip hop...). The idea of organising a "Ball for babies" was born out of the interest of both companies to focus on parent-child relationships and to offer artistic workshops allowing both "old" and young to experience special moments together. A baby develops both through his/ her environment as well as the quality of the bonds with other people. The success of this experience, aimed at babies who cannot yet walk accompanied by their parents, promotes the idea that art is a force for creating bonds.

The concept behind *Bal des bébés* is based on intense reflections by the two companies. The participating artists (Fabienne Van Den Driessche - cello, Benjamin Eppe - piano, Noëlle Dehousse – dancer and choreographer and Lieve Hermans – dancer, movement educator) have been focusing on the early years for several years already, have observed art in nursery environments and provide art trainings for nursery professionals and future professionals. Therefore, for the musical element, they have developed a series of rhythmic and melodic frameworks, which are open to all sorts of energy and situation. They can choose from this selection depending on what is happening and use them for a process of improvisation, which will reflect the reality of the moment. In movement, the principle is identical. A maximum of possibilities are prepared: rocking, carrying, more energetic dances, more structured movements... so as to be able to choose the one which best fits the situation. *Bal des Bébés* allows direct, very intimate access to the heart of the families, and thus demands a high level of sensitivity from the artists. What is striking is the parent's pleasure – sometimes almost the necessity – to take a break from time and everyday reality. This is why the participation of at least one of the parents is so vital, inciting them to re-create these special moments in their lives.



Blooming Voices, Welsh National Opera (United-Kingdom)

Type of project: Singing workshop

Age group: for pregnant women of all ages

Audience size: 13 women

Venue: Community Hall of Wrexham

Running time: Eight weekly sessions

Date: From September 25th, to November 13th, 2012

Contact: Emma Flatley and Paula Scott - emma.flatley@wno.org.uk & paula.scott@wno.org.uk

Over eight weekly sessions, one autumn in Wrexham, friendships, family and community were made between 13 women of all ages and experiences, previously unknown to each other. So strong was the experience, that children, partners and even parents joined the journey at times as well. The sessions aimed to engage pregnant women with the benefits of singing for both them and their unborn children. Breathing exercises, singing and music sessions aimed to relax pregnant mothers and increase their skills and confidence for labour, whilst further developing an attachment to their baby before and after birth. As part of the session the women, and some of their partners, wrote lullabies to their children still in utero – beautiful words filled with hope, fears, dreams and emotion. Supported by a WNO creative team (two of whom were pregnant themselves) their words became songs, and their songs become art.

Blooming Voices is part of Welsh National Opera's "Wrexham Street Songs", a three-year programme aiming at creating creative and professional opportunities for the community of Wrexham, initiating them to opera and WNO in order to strengthen community ties and to create new audiences at WNO. Each of these three years aimed at exploring one of opera's three main elements: the story/libretto, the voice/singing and the music/score. *Blooming Voices*, the first project of the second year, focusing on singing, was created in partnership with Flying Start and the Community Midwifery Team. The thirteen women participating in the workshops – pregnant women of all ages and from disadvantaged social backgrounds- were recruited via care centres, hospitals and maternity centres.

Inspired by *Womb Song*, a similar project developed by Chelsea Hospital Arts and Westminster NHS Foundation Trust, *Blooming Voices* aims at using the professional singing expertise of WNO opera singers as a tool for relaxation, communication and creating emotional links between the expectant mothers and their child before and after birth. In an informal environment, with tea and biscuits, thirteen women bonded and forged links between each other and with the artistic team, taking time to think and prepare for the arrival of a new human being. They experienced and participated in vocal exercises, relaxation and breathing techniques and had access to a lullaby database to support them in writing their own personal lullaby.

A composer, 2 professional singers/animators, and a violist helped participants to compose their own lullabies, which were recorded onto a CD. An illustrator also worked with the group and created pictures with participants to accompany their compositions in a keepsake memory book for after the project came to an end.



BabyMusic, House of Music (Belgium)

Type of project: Music initiation workshops

Age group: 0 to 3 years old

Audience size: Small groups (from 4 to 10 children + their parents/ accompanying adults)

Venue: House of Music

Running time: monthly sessions of 45 minutes

Date: Since 2012

Contact: Hanne Deneire - hanne@house-of-music.be

Initiating children to music starting at a very early age and teaching them the joy of playing music are Hanne Deneire and the House of Music's aims with *BabyMusic*.

After 10 years of experience teaching music to children as of 4 years old, in 2012 House of Music started offering monthly workshops for very young children, from birth onwards, to awaken them, in their own rhythm, to the creation of sounds and melodies. The children are divided into three or four age groups, and every group has less than 10 participants: one group for the under 1 year olds who cannot yet walk, one for 1-2,5 year olds who are already autonomous walkers, one for those starting school (in Belgium at 2,5-3 year olds) and one last for children from 3 to 5 years approximately who have not yet started learning a musical instrument on a weekly basis.

During this active experience, they are confronted with sounds they would not usually hear, different rhythms, melodies, voices and instruments. The voice is considered the most important instrument and the children always sing together, sometimes accompanied by a tambourine or maracas to dance to. Beyond the pure discovery of sounds, they are also introduced to the theoretical basics of music via the ManiMelo method. Developed by House of Music and Hanne Deneire, this method is based on parametrical thinking of music in combination with composition and creativity for learning music. The children understand notions of musical intervals with the help of images such as the sun, moon, stars or with colourful strings. During 45 minutes sessions led by a professional musician and a ManiMelo teacher, the children have great fun and enjoy playing with music. Also, they learn to express themselves without words- no other way of communication other than music is allowed during the workshop, whether the children know how to speak or not- and discover new manners of communicating with their parents or other accompanying adults. These adults also integrate this musical way of "speaking" and can continue with their child at home.

This method of musical initiation for children under 4 is very successful; the children gain in self-esteem and later on continue to learn a musical instrument with greater ease. This programme is now fully integrated into the House of Music's on-going activities, and the little ones contribute to the end of year performance alongside all other children and students.



Little Voices, Opera North (United Kingdom)

Type of project: Artistic workshop

Age group: 0 - 5 year olds and their parents

Venue: Opera North's Howard Assembly Room (for *Little Voices*) and 6 Children's Centres in the east and south of Leeds (for *Little Voices Outreach*)

Running time: weekly sessions

Date: Since 2011 for *Little Voices* and since 2012 for *Little Voices Outreach*

Contact Jo Bedford - jo.bedford@operanorth.co.uk

Working with under 5 year olds from communities in Leeds since 2007, the education department of Opera North launched the programme *Little Voice* in 2011. It is an artistically rigorous and immersive weekly programme of singing and music, offering a very broad spectrum of families access to music creation activities in a stimulating and inspiring environment. In 2012, this programme was extended to children's centres in significantly disadvantaged areas in the east and south of Leeds (*Little Voices Outreach*). Opera North wanted to engage children at pre- school age, from difficult social and cultural backgrounds, who wouldn't have yet access to similar programmes through the formal education system (0-4yrs). It was also important to incorporate parents/ carers *and* children in sessions, as a huge focus for the work centres on parental engagement, encouraging bonds between adult and child, and increasing confidence of both parents and children so that the work can continue at home.

These two *Little Voices* projects aim at facilitating creative learning from a very young age onwards, connect families and very young children with singing activities and music and provide direct contact with musicians and artists. Via this high-quality musical offer, irrespectively of the children's age or social background, the families, parents and children advance and gain in confidence concerning their use of music and song, even in their everyday lives. In the case of *Little Voices Outreach*, it was particularly important to keep communication clear and regular with all partner organisations during the entire project, so that they can re-use these teaching techniques and pedagogical competencies –developed thanks to research into early childhood led by the education and artistic team of Opera North- in their future activities with small children.

Little Voices and *Little Voices Outreach* are led by professional singers, who have both an excellent professional singing level or experience in conducting choirs, as well as strong personal and relational capacities and the ability to communicate well. The main focus is placed on the quality of music, the use of voice and access to musical creation. Traditional rhythms and songs as well as elements of classical music are used rather than restricting the repertoire to children's songs. Respecting the unique and recognisable context of *Little Voices* workshops, the workshop leaders have developed tools, that enable the children to discover and identify with different styles of music but also adapt to and participate in different learning situations.

After several months of participating in these workshops, a significant improvement in the children's language and communication skills, but also in their general well-being was observed. They express themselves in a more spontaneous and elaborate manner, ask questions during sessions and integrate the workshop activities into other contexts. Similarly, the parents, who initially were rather reluctant to participate, develop self-confidence and become increasingly engaged and integrated. Demand for these two programmes is continuously increasing.



Vauvojen taidetuokiot, Finnish National Opera (Finland)

Type of project: Artistic workshop

Age group: 0 - 18 months

Venue: Foyer of the Finnish National Opera

Running time: monthly activity, 30 minutes

Date: Since 2013

Contact: Tuula Jukola-Nuorteva - tuula.jukola-nuorteva@opera.fi

Vauvojen taidetuokiot are monthly opera and dance workshops, offered to babies and their parents/ accompanying adults free of charge. These workshops, organised by the education department of Finnish National Opera, are the fruit of successful cooperation between the opera house and the Sibelius Academy's Music Education department, pooling their experience and jointly developing their expertise in the field of arts activities for the early years. Since 2013, babies and their parents come once a month to share a special moment of discovery of opera and dance with artists of the Finnish National Opera and Ballet. These workshops are always linked to main stage productions, sharing the richness of Finnish National Opera's programme with infants and parents. Thus, they discover major works under a very different angle, adapted to very young audiences. In order to create the most favourable experience for the children, these workshops are divided into two sessions depending on the children's age: from 0-9 months for children who are not yet autonomously mobile and need to be carried and from 9-18 months for those able to crawl or walk. Each child is accompanied by one or two adults.

During these 30-minute workshops, musicians, educators (students of the Sibelius Academy) and artists work together to open the artistic universe of FNO to the very young: the sound of a harpsichord, a flute, cello, the voice of a soprano or a tenor, the delicate movements of a ballerina.... Together, parents and babies discover the joy of music and develop their senses. Every workshop is based on active participation of babies and parents, allowing them to explore their expressivity and perception via singing, dancing, movement, seeing and touching. The babies are confronted with all sorts of different colours, textures, shapes and sounds, discovering all channels which compose an opera or dance performance: a complete sensory experience.

Since the launch of this project in October 2013, thousands of children and parents have participated in these workshops. They have thus discovered the positive impact of music and dance in their everyday lives and the joy they can bring. This programme is very successful; the tickets for every workshop are snatched up within a few hours at most. We observe that parents are very interested in artistic activities that allow them to share a privileged moment of discovery with their children. Often parents come to FNO because of the workshops and then realise that FNO is far more than "just" its main stage opera and ballet performances. They start seeing FNO as an education resource for their children. Additionally, this possibility to meet the artists and create a new link with an operatic work promotes interest in the main stage programme.



Open Sesame, Glyndebourne (United Kingdom)

Type of project: Artistic workshops

Age group: 0 - 2 years

Venue: Hailsham East Children's Centre

Running time: weekly children's workshops

Date: exploratory phase from February to July 2015

Contact: Chris Stones - chris.stones@glyndebourne.com

Open Sesame is a cooperation project between several cultural organisations and early childhood professionals led by East Sussex County Council and the cultural development agency Culture Shift. It's an ambitious programme spanning two years, financed by Arts Council England, that aims at creating innovative artistic activities for very young children (0-2 years) and train professionals working with this age group, enabling them to implement this type of activity in their organisations. Glyndebourne is one of the programme partners and participates in the development of musical activities with its young composer in residence, Lewis Murphy, who is meeting the children- and their parents- of the Baby Group of the Hailsham East Children's Centre as well as the education team of the nursery every week since February 2015. Together, they are exploring different ways to interact with music, to awaken babies and toddlers to sounds, notes, instruments, emotions, to conceive activities adapted to very young children's understanding of the world. These weekly meetings, the exploratory phase of *Open Sesame*, will last until July 2015. The aim of these workshops is to search for and classify good practice for the development of early musical learning for under 2 year olds. The nursery professionals and parents present during the sessions can reuse these educational tools to reproduce similar workshops in future. For Glyndebourne, it's the occasion to examine all sorts of possibilities of working with very young audiences. Its education and artistic teams, as well as of course the composer Lewis Murphy, can develop their competencies and ideas for future projects for under threes. Also, this exploration is accompanied by academic research: Brighton University and the company for productions for early years Octopus Inc. are supporting the project and offering reflection sessions and practical workshops to the participating artists and nursing professionals.

The *Open Sesame* project is not limited to music or opera. Many other artists, from very different artistic disciplines, are also partners of this project and are carrying forward artistic exploration in other children's centres and nurseries. The objective of this first exploratory phase – apart from providing training for nursery professionals on different cultural activities – is to regroup these diverse artistic practices in order to create a joint performance or cultural event. Currently, the best way to continue this project remains to be determined and will depend on the results of the explorative phase in each art form.



What advice would you give organisations interested in developing opera, music or dance projects for babies and toddlers?

“TRY! Just find the right people, sensitive artists, emotional people able to understand the audience’s needs. For example, timing and length are crucial. {...} Music really is a universal language.” - Michela Mannari (AsLiCo - Teatro Sociale di Como)

“In my opinion: Rule nr. 1: Work with a team that loves and knows babies and toddlers well. Rule nr. 2: Don’t think like an adult, but begin with the child’s universe, and your own inner child. Rule nr. 3: Don’t try to be didactic, but try to be sensitive. The child’s world is visual, olfactory, sonor, tactile, and it seems important to me to create a work that will nourish these different aspects. Rule nr. 4: the rhythm of a very small child is very specific, you need to immerge yourself in it in order to create a work which takes the child by the hand, so that they are not afraid.”

- Violaine Fournier (Cie Minute Papillon)

“Don’t make it too long, but don’t be scared of serious topics: trust your audience. They can take more than you think. Observe your audience, try to see the performance from a child’s point of view. Finally, try, do things, follow your gut feeling and go for what you like, don’t loose your artistic identity.” - Mia Ringblom Hjertner (GöteborgsOperan)

“Don’t think from the perspective of an adult, see the world through the eyes, the hands and feet of a little child. You will be surprised what you discover.” - Hanne Deneire (House of Music)

“I would say: take either your own baby, or the son/daughter of your sister and make the show just for them. Not for an abstract "baby" – but for this very child. If he/she enjoys your show, others will enjoy it too.” - Georgiy Isaakyan (Moscow State Opera and Ballet Theatre for Young Audiences)

- *“Plan your repertoire well – don’t be lazy just because this is a young audience who you think may not know any better!*
- *Engage artists who are both musically skilled and are engaged in the project as a whole – and therefore are able to build relationships with parents/carers/staff.*
- *Work with your partners to ensure the work is still relevant for them.*
- *Take calculated risks, e.g. challenging repertoire*
- *Assess and critique your work – interrogate your choices as necessary” – Jo Bedford (Opera North)*

“Work with small group so that everyone can have a good seat. Also, this makes it easier to “control” the kids, because if one starts moving, the others will want to do the same...

Children are like a white sheet, they don’t have expectations, they don’t know the opera, they will accept anything. This leaves more freedom for the artists.” - Josephine Schreibers (Opera Ballet Vlaanderen)



"Be yourself.

We made something beautiful, charming, imaginative, gentle, open and peaceful (I know, not today's most important values)." - Filip Bral (Pantalone)

"Be bold, be radical and have the courage of your artistic conviction and your instinct for encouraging artists to think creatively about these audiences. We have found that the under 3s and their families are extremely discerning audiences and eager to experiment with new work. They are hungry for new and inspiring musical ideas." - Clare Lovett (Spitalfields Music)

"The time in the sessions was precious and the work grew organically once the mothers were comfortable with each other. Tea, cake and time to just talk were vital parts of the project." - Paula Scott (Welsh National Opera)