



SLIDE 1: OOTS LOGO

Orchestra of the Swan is a professional UK Chamber Orchestra, founded in 1997 and resident orchestra at the Play House in Stratford upon Avon (for 23 years) and prior to 2018, Associate Orchestra at Town Hall Birmingham (for 12 years). In Sept 2018, we started 2 new residencies - the Courtyard in Hereford and the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire replacing the Town Hall. The former will be the focus of this presentation.

Does everyone understand what a chamber orchestra is?It's down to size & repertoire!

OOTS performs around 45 concerts per year, 30 of which take place regionally and are what we call self-promoted concerts. i.e. if we are lucky enough to be paid a fee, it is simply a contribution to the overall expenditure. The remaining 10 to 15 concerts are fee paying engagements. Like all orchestras, our self-promoted activity is underpinned by work in the community in care homes, schools, rural venues etc. The deal with each residency is different – some make a financial contribution, others don't, but the net result is a £350k annual fundraising target after ticket sales and fees.

Our players are all freelance but governed by an agreement between OOTS and the Musicians Union which sets the fees and expenses individual players are entitled to. These fees vary, depending on the type of work undertaken i.e. educational outreach work costs less than performing a concert....and as per most union agreements, it defines the maximum time players can be expected to perform and the minimum time they require for breaks. A complex jigsaw puzzle!

Anything associated with the word 'classical' is an immediate audience turn off, unless you are a classical music addict. i.e. the 7% of the population interested in this genre (according to ACE stats). A typical example I recently experienced – I am on the Board of the Lichfield Festival – a multi arts festival with classical music at its core. After 24 years of trying to get people to attend concerts and being thrilled if we get an audience of 500 in the cathedral for a performance by BBC NOW, the festival is putting on a fundraiser in December with Tony Hadley (Spandau Ballet) in the cathedral....and guess what? 1,000 tickets sold out in 45 minutes.

So here at OOTS, we have known for some time that we need to rethink the way we approach building our audience, and 2 years ago began discussions with the Courtyard in Hereford & the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire to work out what we needed to do to make a genuine difference.

Our realisations back in early 2018:

1. That each residency (bearing in mind we were planning 3) is centred on a community with very different needs, which means that we must do different things in each location;
2. That we are not regional experts and that we need to partner with local and national organisations who understand each area better than we do;

3. That all orchestras do extensive and very laudable community work, but as a chamber orchestra we have more flexibility and shorter planning cycles;
4. That in order to build an audience, we must become relevant to that community i.e. not just the classical music buffs, but the community groups who do not currently engage with what we do;
5. That the opportunities for children and young people to experience culture inside and outside of school are not equal across the region;
6. That there remains a persistent and widespread lack of diversity in the arts, particularly in the orchestral sector;
7. That funders can spot bolt-ons a mile off, so if we were going to do community activity it has to be integral to the artistic & organisational vision from the word go;
8. That evaluation is key for ongoing funding and that we must have a robust process in place to collect evidence;
9. That we were not always going to get things right, but that unless we try things out, we won't know what will succeed.

We spent some time analysing the needs of each community in our 3 residencies:

- **Stratford Play House** sits at the centre of a vibrant tourist town which gives the appearance of being affluent, but which superficially masks the underlying social & economic issues;
- The **Hereford** community around the **Courtyard** is rural with pockets of deprivation and social exclusion; an aging population that has difficulties with access & low levels of service provision contributing to health and social care problems;
- **Birmingham Conservatoire** has a student body of budding professional musicians in a newly opened campus (2 years ago) with a new concert hall and state-of-the-art recording facilities; audience attendance is low as the venue struggles to compete with both its 'dodgy' location and with the established Town Hall Symphony Hall, so audience data held is minimal. In fact, they only hold 2,000 contact details compared with the 400,000 at THSH. There is thus significant scope to improve both audience attendance and the impact of the Conservatoire on the Birmingham community.

We then looked at potential partnerships for Hereford & Birmingham and which partnerships in Stratford we should nurture and develop.

SLIDE 2 – Our circular model

What we ended up with is a residency model that is a focused and collaborative approach with partners who buy into the same local aspiration; co-developing carefully curated programmes of activity in each location designed with and for that community. All activity links together - nothing takes place in isolation, but as part of a planned strategic approach. No residency is the same as no community is the same.

So what does that actually look like? As Hereford is my focus today, this is what we did:

But first of all - the context:

Prior to September 2018, the maximum attendance at an orchestral performance at the Courtyard was 120 audience members, despite the Courtyard bringing in some of the best orchestras in the country. The Courtyard was simply not associated with being a classical music venue, and we needed to do something drastic to change that perception.

Added to this, Herefordshire has many small rural venues, many of which are led by volunteer promoters on very small budgets, so a concert in a rural venue by a professional orchestra was rare, unless funded externally by Orchestras Live or through ACE touring initiatives.

To compound this yet further, a needs analysis of Encore Enterprises (the music hub) stated that as the local music education hub, they were required to address the issue of low orchestral numbers in the county, the lack of live performance in schools & a lack of SEND engagement.

In other words, three layers of problems!

SLIDE 3 – Branding

The solution: The Courtyard recognised that they needed to develop trust between their audience and a classical music brand and that as the best professional regional orchestra, OOTS could potentially deliver this....so we did a deal. They would allocate their annual classical music budget to OOTS (which would have to be match funded by us) and close the doors to any other professional orchestra for up to 3 years while we worked together to build an audience. We would jointly market all events and we would split the ticket income 50/50. The Courtyard would produce a classical music brochure dedicated to all OOTS' activity in the county, even if the Courtyard themselves were not benefitting financially. The theatre was branded with bright yellow flags which nobody could miss!

We then decided what that activity should look like and who the ideal partners would be.

SLIDE 4 – OUR PARTNERS

The partners who came to join us – ACE, Orchestras Live, Arts Alive/Sticks in the Flicks, Encore Music Services.

Why?

ACE – speaks for itself, but they recognised that the model we were proposing was unique in the orchestral sector and one which, if successful, could be shared as an exemplar in the sector.

Orchestras Live – their entire remit is to enable chamber orchestras to be heard in remote rural locations. They were already contributing towards the Courtyard's orchestral series and as frustrated by the lack of progress as the venue. Their involvement was a no-brainer.

Arts Alive & Flicks in the Sticks – taking professional arts and film events to village venues in Shropshire & Herefordshire. Every year they put together a menu of potential shows which they present to the promoters on their lists asking for a contribution of as little as £500. Promoters sign up for the shows they are interested in. Arts Alive ensures that everybody gets a fair crack at the whip and that there is a fair distribution of each genre across the counties. We could not have partnered with Arts Alive were it not for the match funding from ACE, the Courtyard & Orchestras Live.

Encore Music Services – they agreed to contribute their resources (i.e. musical instruments, staff) and broker introductions to key personnel at local schools. Why reinvent the wheel?

And our funders in Hereford? Elmley Foundation, Garfield Weston and Perry Family Charitable Trust, without whom we could not have delivered the full suite of activity.

The activity in Year One:

SLIDE 5 – Guest Soloists

3 concerts with international conductors & soloists at the Courtyard. We played safe and made sure the soloists were well known performing relatively popular repertoire. Tai Murray (Mendelssohn Violin Concerto), Peter Donohoe (Mozart Piano Concerto no25), & Nicholas Daniel (Strauss Oboe Concerto) with conductors Julian Lloyd Webber and Michael Seal.

SLIDE 6 – Rural Series

4 rural concerts took place at The Steiner Academy, The Venue Ross on Wye, Conquest Theatre Bromyard & Eardisley Curzon Village Hall, preceded by workshops and whole school assemblies in 4 schools (The Steiner Academy, St Joseph's RC Primary School Ross on Wye, St Peter's Primary School Bromyard & Kington Eardisley Primary School) including 2 open rehearsals.

Again each of the concerts was carefully crafted to appeal to a slightly conservative audience!

Each school enjoyed a whole school assembly linked to the rural concert of the day. Players talked about the composers to be featured and pulled out elements of the programme to highlight what the composers did. These were followed by workshops which were more focussed on what the schools wanted – Steiner was strings masterclasses; St Joseph's was 2 whole class general music lessons covering improvisation and composition; St Peters – the Head Teacher wanted us to work with their choir & ukulele group – so players based the theme on Tchaikovsky Waltz of the Flowers – using the BBC Ten Pieces resources to compose around this piece; At Kington Eardisley it was a recorder and Dude workshop (recorder with a clarinet mouthpiece) focussing on instrumental technique for new players.

SLIDE 7 – Family Concert

1 circus-themed family concert took place as part of the Courtyard's annual Family Festival with free tickets. This was all about having fun and dressing up....it's amazing how much the players like a bit of fancy dress! To make it even more accessible, the concert began in the foyer with a small group of players leading the audience into the concert hall like the pied piper. Narrator Matthew Sharp brought the whole circus theme to life and with 1,000 attendees at the family festival, the venue was buzzine.

SLIDE 8 – Thank you card

A school sharing concert took place at the Courtyard preceded by 16 workshops in 4 SEND schools (Westfield School, Blackmarston, Barrs Hill and Hampton Dene). This slide is the thank you card from Barrs Hill made by the children. Players worked with children with very limited musical experience. Workshops began with singing and percussion games leading up to composing songs linked to themes children were working on during that term. There was no direct link to our concerts per se. Outcome – 4 new compositions written & performed by the children alongside OOTS players.

Pairs of players made use of a further day by performing 4 free foyer concerts before 4 theatre productions in the Courtyard – each of which was preceded by a 3hr taster session in 4 care homes (Leaden Bank Ledbury, West Eaton CH, Credenhill RH, Holmer Court).

The net result: 13 'performances' over the year, 24 x 3-hr workshops in schools & care homes. A good spread of activity.

What difference did it make?

878 tickets were sold to the 3 main concerts. Audience numbers have tripled and the Courtyard is becoming associated with high quality classical performance.

The family concert sold out i.e. we asked people to reserve a seat even though it was a free event.

SLIDE 9 - Primary Schools

3 of the 4 rural concerts had 90% capacity or sold out; 950 primary school pupils participated in the linked activities. All rural school visits were evaluated post-session answering 10 key questions relating to OOTS organisational ability and the activity content on a scale of 1 to 10. All responses reported 10 out of 10! Amazing.

“This experience was simply life changing for our students. Having the ability to listen and learn from world class musicians will have a lasting effect in the years to come. The staff helping to organise could not have been more friendly and helpful throughout the weeks prior and throughout the day. I really hope that we can work with the orchestra again as they were simply incredible. Could not have asked for more from the whole organisation.” St Peter’s Primary School

SLIDE 10 - SEND

50 special needs pupils joined our schools sharing concert.

“To receive an e-mail offering a series of workshops from highly skilled professional musicians at no cost was a joy. Music is one subject that teachers feel anxious delivering, especially to older pupils, who have already covered the basics of percussion. The pupils felt really valued and ‘important’ being able to perform on stage, and to demonstrate their achievements to friends and family. Sadly, the world of publicly funded organisations has been stripped back to the bare essentials, so this is not something that would have otherwise been available to this group.” Blackmarston School

SLIDE 11 – Care home work

We reached 104 people living with dementia, their family & carers during the 4 taster sessions in 4 care homes.

Dear Sal & Diane, Monday afternoon was a truly special time as your sounds drifted through our building. I could see residents responding with singing, being alert and looking happy. Kathy had the joy to be dancing along with you. Thank you for playing all the requests and much more. You have a very special way of communicating with people. With your kindness and talent, you bring happiness into people’s lives. Very many thanks and we do hope to see and hear you again soon. Very best wishes, Ursula” Activity Co-ordinator, Leaden Bank Care Home

Slide 12 – Big Give Campaign

In addition, we signed up for a very important crowd funding campaign – The Big Give Christmas Challenge – based entirely around our Hereford residency. For those unfamiliar with this online campaign, it is based on a match funding model where the Reed Foundation agrees to match fund online donations received by each organisation during a time limited period (in this case Nov 27th and Dec 4th). It means you spend 2 months building up to this 7 day window, gearing up your audience and forcing them to, in the case of the over 60’s,

change the habit of a lifetime and donate online. I am proud to say we were so good at this, that we won 2nd prize nationally for the best online campaign (competing against over 500 other charities) exceeding our target of £15k and raising £34k in the process.

What went wrong:

There were about 100 no-shows for the family concert. Perhaps people don't attach value to a free event, so drop out if something more interesting pops up. This year we remedied this by charging £5!

Although the audience numbers increased three-fold, they are still predominantly over 50's who attend our concerts.

What are we planning next?

We have appointed a Director of Impact & Learning from January whose job will be to ensure that all activity planned over the next few years is in direct response to community needs and wishes. She will review all our activity, and actively seek out community groups that are not engaging with us, finding out how we can become relevant to them. This appointment is new to the UK orchestral sector and an attempt to ensure the immersive residencies deliver on their vision. Grass roots upwards as opposed to top down.

Funding permitting, we will increase our engagement in the 4 care homes and deliver up to 8 sessions per care home. In line with our other residencies, from 2021, we will be setting up a satellite mini residency in a local school – probably Blackmarston SEND.

ACE has released the initial draft of its new 10-year plan which states that from 2020, the organisations that ACE want to support in their National Portfolio will be reflective of the diversity of their communities, relevant and valued by the communities and partners with which they work and capable of adapting to meet the opportunities and challenges of a rapidly changing economic and social environment.

What more can I say..... A happy coincidence! We are ticking that box.....

And at my meeting with ACE on Tuesday, our relationship manager confirmed that what we are doing is unique in the orchestral sector. The results so far speak for themselves, but the real test will be whether we can maintain audience numbers after the novelty of year 1 has passed.

Debbie Jagla
Managing Director
5.11.19