

Sound Around 2016-18



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Sound Around Schools' concert at Northampton, 2017 © Photocall Event Photography



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Sarah Bedell
AAP Ltd
www.sarahbedell.co.uk
sarah@sarahbedell.co.uk
07956 528406

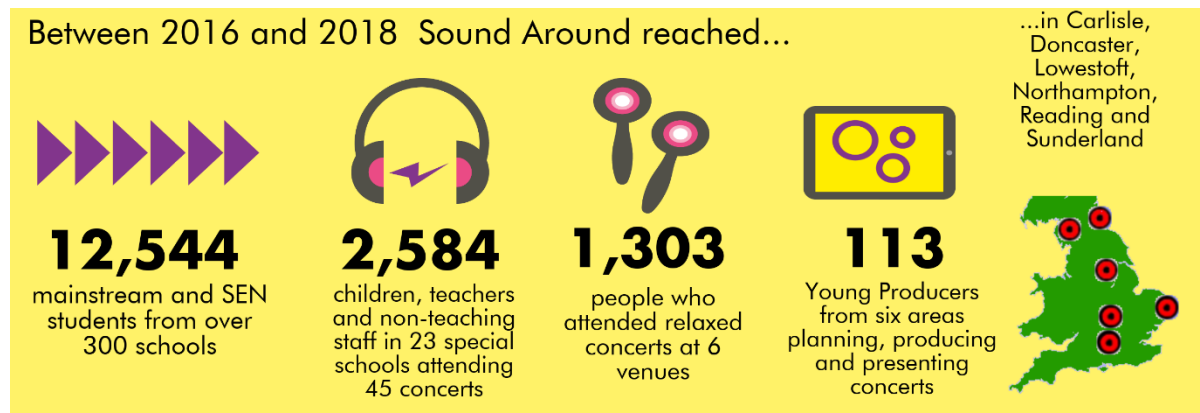
Executive Summary

Orchestras Live produced Sound Around in partnership with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and six Music Education Hub Partners in culturally under-provided locations between 2016 and 2018, with funding from Arts Council England's Strategic Touring fund, investing partners and trusts and foundations. Each location hosted a package of: Octet concerts in SEND schools, 2 schools concerts curated by an inclusive group of Young Producers; 1 Relaxed Sound Around concert for children and families with additional needs.

The evaluation provided an independent assessment of the Sound Around successes against its aims and objectives and was a way for Orchestras Live and the RPO to gain new understanding to apply in future projects, ensuring that formative evaluation directly supports planning and activity. The methodology followed a bespoke, supported evaluation approach, blending formative and summative evaluation to provide ongoing monitoring of progress and outcomes.

Sound Around wanted to see four key changes as a result of touring to six culturally under-provided locations between 2016-18:

1. Access to orchestral music and concerts for people who are normally unable to attend for a variety of reasons;
2. Attitudinal change: about classical music by these new attenders and working with new audiences alongside venues and partners;
3. Improving practice in partner venues and with colleagues and schools through offering bespoke support, advice and role modelling;
4. Embedding existing partnerships and strengthening newer ones in each location.



KEY IMPACTS

Sound Around has impacted in various ways on individuals, audiences, venues, partners and orchestral players:

YOUNG PRODUCERS

- The Young Producers model represents an interesting and nuanced way of working with young people, which requires careful description:

'Our work with the Young Producers was led by a collaboration in which young people had an equal voice and centred on the creative energy that came from professionals and young people working together.'

- Young Producers have each achieved the shared goal of producing and presented a Schools Concert in their home town and supporting the Relaxed Concert presentation; as individuals they have gained new skills, insights into the industry and career possibilities, built their confidence through their achievement, surprised peers and teachers with untapped talent or resilience, improved their teamwork and communication skills, and made friends. The Sound Around team and RPO musicians supported, encouraged, mentored, guided, coaxed and listened to the young people whilst also sharing their experience and underlining the standards expected.



Figure 1 – Lowestoft schools' concert © Paul Coghlin (ShowCapture.com)

VENUES & AUDIENCES

- The creation of an original and new way for musicians and audiences to interact, engage with and experience live orchestral music in the Relaxed Concerts
- Changing individual ideas and perceptions about what classical music is for many children and young people
- Many individual moments of joy and discovery, particularly for students at the Special Schools and Relaxed audience members, but also for Schools concert attenders, adults and children alike.
- New skills and awareness were brought to the venues taking the Sound Around tour, with training from Attitude is Everything, an audience development toolkit and in-depth technical and FoH discussions in advance, leading up to and during the visit. Several venues have embraced the opportunity to increase audiences: ATG has realised the commercial potential and has a national lead for inclusive programming, whilst the Lowestoft Marina have made practical front of house changes and programmed further Relaxed events.

HUBS & SCHOOLS

- Providing in-depth, intensive creative opportunities for young people to work alongside creative professionals to produce original, high quality concerts for children and young people
- Enhancing and enriching the offer for Music Hubs through the extended programme and working with Special Schools
- Learning and CPD for teachers and staff, including those in Special Schools who have adopted some of the musical games from the Octet, and are investigating further music experiences for students

ORCHESTRAS

- Opportunities for creative development and freedom for the RPO musicians, who were challenged and stretched as they explored entirely new ways of working alongside young people, extending their understanding and awareness of working with diverse audiences, and explored new ways of presenting live orchestral music.
- The deployment of the entire orchestra and teams to support Sound Around is effective in terms of resources and is driving a reputation among players that the RPO is a progressive, innovative orchestra, impacting on recruitment (more choice from more players)
- Developing potential new touring products and programmes with the Octet Tour, which will build on improving access and making an appropriate cultural offer to new audiences.
- The RPO has been able to build and deepen partnerships created during and because of Sound Around, supported by having continuity of personnel, within the RPO and with partners, Orchestras Live.

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- Sound Around has started to make real changes to practice and attitude in most of the areas it toured to, and Orchestras Live is cascading the knowledge out to new venues, as well as building on partnerships created during and because of Sound Around.
- The Sound Around and Young Producer models have been tested, refined and improved over the two-year cycle, applying learning as it was gained, and are adaptable for use and up- or down-scaling in future iterations.
- The learning and models are being adapted to different scales and initiating new partnerships in regions outside those included in Sound Around.
- The continuity of the team personnel has been identified as a key factor for success in co-delivery: continuity, organisational memory, time to build relationships and find effective ways of working with multiple partners all contributed to a well-planned and well-delivered initiative.

TOURING & FUNDING

- The cultural sector is now producing inclusive cultural offerings, but companies need to have a strong touring circuit to present this work: if the experience is not good for these new audiences, they will not return and the investment will have been wasted.
- Those venues that embraced Sound Around gained the most benefits: as these are communicated and circulated through the touring network, it is likely that others will follow, leading to an improvement in practice for all touring companies and audiences.
- Orchestras Live has been able to extend and explore further models suited to touring, especially into areas with low cultural provision or participation.

Outline Conclusions

Orchestras Live and the RPO have achieved the Sound Around vision: working together, they have achieved a step change in the RPO's and some partner venues' ability to engage with young people with additional needs, the schools and their families in orchestral music.

Sound Around has made significant progress in effecting a sea-change in orchestral and venue practice, workforce and staff development, in addition to delivering on its core aims of increasing access to live, orchestral music by people who have previously been excluded because the cultural offer did not meet their needs.

Sound Around has shown that it is an effective driver for long-term, large-scale change in orchestral and venue practice if the following issues are addressed:

- Sustained, strategic investment and activity to build on this success through long term funding streams
- An alternative way of measuring the value of the outcomes and impacts for the sector, audiences, schools, the cultural workforce and musicians so that risk and costs are set against measurable, longitudinal improvements
- Exploring and developing alternative business models that enable the orchestral sector to develop touring product and circuits whilst developing the market and audiences
- An open dialogue with funders and stakeholders about the full costs of programmes like Sound Around, including hidden costs and additional resources like goodwill.
- A discussion and understanding that experimental, pioneering or innovative work is not as straightforward to plan or budget because it is unknown, but there is no leeway or room to manoeuvre when delivering on the ground, creating a reluctance to innovate because it is seen as too risky: the financial risks, the potential for not reaching new audiences, the sheer organisational upheaval to incorporate new work, which will be damaging to the sector in the long-term.

Strategic recommendations

It is recommended that

1. Orchestras Live supports and develops reiterations of the Sound Around model. Sound Around offers an effective, strategic, long-term approach for sustained audience development and engagement for live, orchestral music, as well as having

created an entirely new 'product' in the form of the Relaxed concert. However, unless there is follow-up and longitudinal tracking, it will not be possible to sustain this initial progress and so the value of the original investment will be lost.

2. Orchestras Live and the RPO open a dialogue with funders, stakeholders and policy makers about the 'value' as opposed to the 'costs' of inclusive touring work. The dialogue needs to include the subject of adequate funding for projects that have been carefully budgeted at the application stage and flexibility in the budgets with exploratory or innovative projects. Organisations delivering the work, funders and policy-makers need to know the cost of transformation and making long-lasting, sustainable change to the cultural landscape and opportunities.
3. Orchestras Live advocates for a wider debate on the subject of the 'value' of socially driven, innovative, experimental models that test new cultural product and develop new audiences.
4. Orchestras Live and the RPO continue their partnership to commission research into different business models that also incorporate social responsibility and impact, to inform a high-level discussion within the sector and with funders and stakeholders. This is important for the sustainability of creating and presenting more inclusive work because the existing business model does not make financial sense and is creating a risk-averse culture.
5. As a sectoral support initiative, Orchestras Live leads on investigating a more holistic approach to assessing the return on investment for a large-scale, multi-faceted, long-term orchestral project like Sound Around.



Figure 2 – Sunderland octet concert © Kev Brady photography

AAP would like to thank the Sound Around team, Orchestras Live, the RPO, partner venues, Music Hubs and schools who responded and contributed to this evaluation. All images provided by Orchestras Live.

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