

Task and Finish Group on Participation in the Arts

Response from Welsh National Opera

Introduction

Welsh National Opera is the national opera company of Wales and one of the nation's flagship performing arts companies. Its reputation for musical excellence resonates worldwide.

The company comprises around 230 permanent employees – singers, musicians, craftspeople, technicians and administrators. Collectively, we are passionate about opera and want to encourage as many people as possible to share our passion. One of the key ways in which we do this is through our commitment to provide a programme of participatory activities, delivered through 'WNO MAX', the company's community and education department.

WNO MAX aims to:

- Create innovative and inclusive work of high quality, which engages participants with WNO, opera and creativity;
- Deliver memorable and powerful experiences, which impact on lives, change perceptions of WNO and create a sense of ownership of the company;
- Broaden and deepen relationship with participants and develop new ones by continuing to push creative boundaries;
- Invest in and engage the company and the wider community to create greater understanding of the company's work.

A copy of the WNO MAX strategy for 2011 to 2015 is provided at Appendix 1.

A list of partner organisations with which we have collaborated plus details of recent projects are also provided as appendices.

Answers to Inquiry's questions

1. Which groups of people participate in your organisation's arts activities?

We work with schools, community groups and individuals. Some of our projects also involve a close collaboration with specialist groups or organisations such as Alzheimer's Society, British Lung Foundation, Touch Trust.

A list of organisations and groups that we have worked with over the last 7 years is attached at Appendix 2.

2. a) Do you think that budget changes have affected participation in the arts, either positively or negatively?

Engagement through participation is a valuable part of our work. We believe this work is valuable in its own right but recognise, and hope, that in some cases it may lead to further engagement with the company or the artform in the future.

Although we have tried to protect this work when considering how to deal with reductions in our financial capacity, it has not been possible to maintain our full programme. The flat-funding from the Arts Council of Wales between 2007/08 and 2009/10 followed by recent cuts to funding from Arts Council England have meant that some reductions to overall budgets have affected the participation work. We have tried to minimise the impact by being more efficient in delivering the work. One example of the negative impact is that the annual 'Youth Opera' production now only takes place every two years. To ensure some continuity, we are running a 'light touch' programme of workshops during the 'gap' years. On balance we believe we are still able to offer a good range of opportunities for engagement and that we can do so through high quality projects. However, further significant cuts could affect our ability to deliver this work.

2. b) Do you think certain groups have been affected more than others?

It is difficult to gauge this. For most projects we aim to develop an interest among participants and to leave some legacy within the relevant community to support a continuing interest. We are concerned that cuts affecting those organisations with which we collaborate will make it increasingly difficult to sustain any interest that we initially stimulate.

If our financial position worsens, we may have to consider reducing the range of work we do and this could well affect one or more of the community sectors that we work with.

3. Are there gaps in provision for people to participate in arts activities, either demographically or geographically?

Our current practice is to have a twin focus for our participation work within Wales. We provide a programme of work in and around Cardiff, our home base, and also work in a specific geographical area for three years. Recently this was the south Wales valleys; between 2011/12 and 2013/14 we will be working in north Wales. In this latter programme, we are spending three years working with communities in Wrexham, as well as providing a number of community singing projects in Caernarfon.

By nature, there will always be gaps in provision, as we don't have the financial or people resources to deliver this type of programme across the whole of Wales at any one time.

4. Are there enough funding sources available other than the Arts Council of Wales? Are alternative sources accessible?

In straight forward terms, more money can reach more people. Although WNO does not rely heavily on local authority or other funding, we know from some of our partners that these previously rich sources of additional funding are increasingly difficult to access. In past years, we have been successful in attracting funding from businesses, individuals, and trusts and foundations. Although we still have a good track record for attracting such funding, the criteria for so doing are becoming ever more onerous and can sometimes dictate a change the nature of a project that is not necessarily positive. In difficult financial circumstances we must accept such compromises as a cost of maintaining project delivery.

5. What role does the voluntary arts sector play in promoting participation in the arts in Wales and how can this be supported?

WNO's engagement with the voluntary sector is primarily as a source of recruiting when we are looking for participants.

There is a major debate around quality in participative arts and how it can be defined. We believe it is important that the voluntary arts sector engages in this debate in order to help to raise standards and expectations and then help to cascade best practice.

Although not strictly relevant to the voluntary sector, WNO is helping to address issues around participatory practice on a national level by leading *ArtWorks Cymru*, which is the Welsh pathfinder for the Paul Hamlyn Special Initiative *ArtWorks: Developing Practice in Participatory Settings*. This initiative is a workforce development scheme that seeks to meet the needs of artists at different stages in their careers – from the aspiring young artist embarking on training, to experienced practitioners who wish to progress their output. It is seeking to build on good practice to enhance the existing development infrastructure.

ArtWorks Cymru is a research project run by a partnership of organisations which all work in participatory settings – WNO, National Dance Company Wales, Sherman Cymru, Streetwise Opera, Community Music Wales, Community Dance Wales and Professor Hamish Fyfe at UGLAM. The partnership in Wales seeks to create a transformational and sustainable

participatory arts sector that grows and nurtures artists working with and for the people of Wales, define best practice and create excitement and dialogue around the work, bringing depth and meaning to every interaction.

ArtWorks Cymru will run in three phases: Phase One will consist of an audit and consultation process; Phase Two will create a Learning Framework around five projects run by Pathfinder organisations; Phase Three will consist of a symposium to distribute and discuss the findings of the Pathfinder, as well as recommendations for going forward to create a more joined up training network.

6. Is the strategic relationship between the Welsh Government and the bodies that distribute arts funding effective in increasing participation?

WNO believes the Arts Council of Wales provides clear advice and guidance and an open process for accessing project funding. However, we are not in a position to say whether or not this leads to an increase in participation overall. Certainly, in our own case, ACW is instrumental in discussing, assessing and monitoring the work we do in this area and, combined with our own commitment to this work, this results in an effective programme that is realistic within our financial parameters.

It may be the case that an organisation, say a school or community group, that has not been involved in participatory projects before may not know where to look when seeking a project artist or partner organisation. A higher profile / greater visibility for the participatory sector as a whole would be beneficial.

7. All public bodies in Wales will have published a strategic equality plan by April 2012. Do you think that these new public sector equality duties will help to increase participation in the arts among under-represented groups in Wales?

A plan alone won't increase participation with under-represented groups. In our experience of working in 'hard to reach' communities, you have to take a step by step approach, person to person, slowly building a network of individuals who are open to engagement. Any plan must be accompanied by appropriate levels of additional funding and realistic targets and timescales for success.

Appendix 1

WNO MAX Strategy 2011/12 to 2014/15

The Max Promise

- WNO MAX creates innovative and inclusive work of high quality, which engages participants with WNO, opera and creativity;
- WNO MAX delivers memorable and powerful experiences, which impact lives, change perceptions of the company and create a sense of ownership of WNO as a whole;
- WNO MAX will broaden and deepen these relationships and develop new ones by continuing to push creative boundaries;
- WNO MAX will invest in and engage the company and the wider community to create greater understanding of our work.

Strategic Objectives for 2011 – 2015

WNO MAX helps to deliver the wider strategic principles¹ of the company, especially:

- SP1 We will provide a wide programme of opera experiences for the widest possible public;
- SP2 We will be accessible to our audiences in terms of attitude, price, geography and participation;
- SP5 We will extend the range and reach of the company by responding creatively and flexibly to the diverse communities we serve, often challenging established perceptions of opera;
- SP7 We recognise the responsibility we have, as a large organisation, to support professional development and share resources. We will bring a collaborative spirit to our relationships with other arts organisations in Wales and beyond;
- SP10 WNO is proud of its Welsh roots, and seeks to be a cultural ambassador for Wales, both in the UK and overseas.

Alongside these, the following strategic objectives have been identified for the period 2011 – 2015:

- To engage with participants in north Wales and create a sense of ownership of the company;
- To work through formal education networks to engage pupils with opera through projects and performances linked to the curriculum;
- To create and develop relationships between the company and young people as participants, mentors, audience members and performers;

¹ WNO's business plan has ten strategic principles that collectively guide and influence the company's work. Those listed above are the ones most relevant to the work of the MAX department.

- To further develop WNO EXTRA linking it firmly with the seasonal themes of the mainscale programme;
- To lead the ArtWorks Wales project and contribute to the development of the participative arts sector;

WNO MAX will deliver these objectives through four strands² of work:

WNO Community
 Young WNO
 WNO Extra
 WNO Academy

WNO Community

WNO Community connects the company and community through a series of participatory projects.

The following project objectives have been identified:

- To take opera into the heart of communities and use it as a tool to aid community cohesion and address social exclusion;
- To bring community narrative back to the community through opera;
- To work with the harder to reach and less enabled communities;
- To locate performances and workshops within communities;
- To explore how WNO can create legacy for the participants;
- To create a series of community singing opportunities for participants.

The main geographical focus of this work from 2011 – 2014 will be north Wales and the West Midlands, but this strand will also address communities in south Wales and the Valleys.

Young WNO

Young WNO aims to use opera to inspire children and young people.

It will do this by fulfilling the following objectives:

- To run Singing Club (10 – 14 year olds) and Youth Opera (14 – 25 year olds), enabling young people to have an ongoing singing relationship with the company, and to tour the work of these groups more widely across Wales and England;

² WNO's overall artistic programme is expressed through six strands of work, the others being *Mainscale* and *Concerts*.

- To create a portfolio of projects that engages young people in formal primary and secondary educational contexts with opera, both as participants and audience members, linking in to the curriculum and music education structures in England and Wales;
- To research and implement ways for young people to be embedded into the fabric of WNO and influence the company e.g. by running a Young Board;
- To bring young people into contact with the company as often as possible and provide them with an opera experience which will stay with them for life.

WNO Extra

WNO Extra enables our existing audience members to deepen their experience of the art form with events which utilise the intrinsic artistic and external motivations of each audience segment. By doing this, WNO Extra seeks to increase the frequency, risk-taking and retention of our existing audience. Some WNO Extra events are aimed at first time attendees.

The programme for WNO Extra will be inspired by and enlarge upon the seasonal themes of the mainscale programme.

The strand has the following underlying objectives:

- To engage people with the company in a way that they have not done before, by offering specific events which are tailor-made to enhance the operas in the repertoire;
- To help first time opera attenders by offering accessible and interactive events, which allow attenders to fully engage with the experience;
- To help bring people to performances, with a mixed level of opera experience, by running a variety of events which are specifically targeted to identified segments of the audience;
- To encourage audience members to book for something with which they are less familiar, by breaking down boundaries and generating interest through the Extra events on offer.

WNO Academy

WNO Academy will provide a range of opportunities for people to engage with the arts as an industry and potential career, and explore and consolidate relationships with key training and further education institutions.

Over the next five years Academy will encompass:

- Consolidating the links with RWCMD through young players project, youth opera and the links with the Opera Course;
- Continue the relationships with the National Opera Studio, giving singers on the verge of a career an experience of working with WNO;
- Leading ArtWorks Wales and exploring training in the participatory arts sector;
- Expanding work experience and work placement opportunities;
- An investigation into possible further creative apprenticeships within the company;
- A joint opera conference with Cardiff University, with access for general public.

Appendix 2

Partnerships, collaborations, relationships last 7 years

Joint projects with:

3 G's Community First	National Theatre Wales
Literature Wales	Reel Access
Arts Active, St Davids Hall	Riverside Warehouse
Bangor University	Safer Wales
Birmingham Hippodrome	Sherman Cymru
Butetown Community First	Touch Trust
Find Your Talent, Telford	Trinity College, Carmarthen
Fotogalari	Ty Cerdd
Gloucester Music Service	Urdd
Hay Festival	Valley of Hope
Hijinx	Wales Millennium Centre
National Dance Company Wales	Women's Arts Association
	Wrexham Museum

Jointly commissioned work with:

Birmingham Hippodrome	National Dance Company Wales
English National Opera	Opera North
English Touring Opera	Royal Opera House
Glyndebourne Opera	Scottish Opera

Composers commissioned:

Alex Douglas	Lou Noble
Brian Irvine	Lynne Plowman
Elfyn Jones	Mervyn Burtch
Errollyn Wallen	Orlando Gough
Helen Chadwick	Paul Jones
Helen Woods	Peter Swaffer Reynolds
Helen Woods	Richard Barnard
James Clarke	Richard Chew
James MacMillan	Ruth Byrchmore
Joe Townsend	Simon Thorne
John Hardy	Stacey Blythe
John O'Hara	Steven Deazley
Julian Philips	Tim Riley
Karen Wimhurst	Will Todd
Liz Johnson	

Writers commissioned:

Alan Harris	Jenahe Markum
Alan Osbourne	Karen Hayes
Ben Gwalchmai	Louise Osbourn

Berlie Docherty
Ceri Elen
Claire Williamson
Clare Potter
Gary Owen
Glenys Evans
Greg Cullen
Gwyneth Lewis
Helen Griffin
Jane Buckler

Louise Walsh
Mab Jones
Mark Williams
Mandy Ross
Menna Elfyn
Michael Symmons Roberts
Michael Wicherick
Patrick Jones
Simon Rees

Key venue relationships:

Aberdare Colliseum
Aberystwyth Arts Centre
Birmingham Hippodrome
Bristol Hippodrome
Cilycwm Community Association
Empire Theatre, Liverpool
Galari Caernarfon
Grand Theatre, Swansea
Mayflower, Southampton

Merthyr College
Milton Keynes Theatre
New Theatre, Oxford
St. David's Hall, Cardiff
Stiwt Theatre, Rhosllanerchygog
Theatr Brecheiniog, Brecon
Theatre Royal, Plymouth
Venue Cymru, Llandudno
Wales Millennium Centre

Other venues work presented in:

Aberdare Colliseum
Ariel Centre, Totnes
Belfast Grand Opera House
Blackwood Miner's Institute
Central Hall, Southampton
Colliseum, London
Colston Hall, Bristol
Crescent Theatre, Birmingham
Cyfartha Castle, Merthyr
Eastwood Park Prison
Edinburgh Festival Theatre
Gwyn Hall, Neath
Hay Festival
Headington Theatre, Oxford
Holloway Prison
Hong Kong Festival
Liverpool Lighthouse
Llanfair Caereinion Leisure Ctre, Powys
National Eistedfodd in Cardiff
New Theatre, Cardiff
Oakengates Theatre, Telford
Parc and Dare Theatre, Treorchy
Park Centre, Bristol
Plymouth Pavillions

Porthcawl Pavillion
Rhondda Fach Leisure Centre
Rhyl Pavillion
Richard Burton Theatre, Cardiff
Riverfront, Newport
Rookery Arts Centre, Birmingham
Sadler's Well Theatre, London
Senedd Building
Sheldonian Theatre, Oxford
Sherman Cymru
Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington
DC
St Georges, Bristol
The Berry Theatre, Hedge End
The Point, Eastleigh
The Shed, Bristol
The Stables, Milton Keynes
Theatr Clara, Welshpool
Theatr Clwyd, Mold
Theatr Harlech
Theatr Mwldan
Uchuldre Centre, Holyhead
William Aston Hall, Wrexham

Other agencies collaborated with:

Arts Council Northern Ireland
Bridgend Arts Development
Bridgend Youth Offenders
Bridgend Youth Service
Bristol Music Service
Caerphilly Music Service
Coleg Gwent

Find Your Talent, Telford
Gloucester Music Service
Milton Keynes Music Service
Multi A, Bristol
RCT Music Service
Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama
Torfaen Arts Development

Community groups worked with:

Aberfan Wives Group
Alzheimer's Association, Cardiff
American Youth Chorus
Arthur Jenkins Residential Care Home,
Blaenafon
Atlantic View Care Home, Cardiff Bay
Big Pit National Mining Museum
Blaenafon Youth Theatre
Briar's Croft Care Home, Birmingham
Butetown Youth Theatre
Buzz Information Centre, Grangetown
Caerphilly Miners' Hospital
Cardiff Institute for the Blind
Catref Aneirin Bevan, Tredegar
Coleg Sir Gar, Llanelli
Compton Hospice, Birmingham
Congress Youth Theatre
Countess Mountbatten Centre,
Southampton
Dolanog Residential Home, Rhyl
Dorothy Lewis Home, Cardiff
Fairview Court Nursing Home, Bristol
Gelligear Boxing Gym
George Canning Care Home,
Birmingham
Grange Road Care Home, Birmingham
Kids R Us, Tredegar
Llandough Hospital, Cardiff

Meachum Red Cross Centre, Wolverton
Parc and Dare Brass Band
Perry Bar Day Centre, Birmingham
Rehoboth Choir, USA
Risca Male Voice Choir
Riverside Luncheon Club, Cardiff
Sedbury Park Nursing Home, Chepstow
Shirehall Residential Home, Cardiff Bay

Sonig Youth Music
Southampton Society for the Blind
Southerdown Care Home, Southerdown
Spectrum Centre, Cardiff
St Anne's Hospice, Newport
St Dunstons Care Home, Griffithstown
St Isan Home, Cardiff
Stay Young at Heart, Trelewis
Stroke Unit, Cardiff Royal Infirmary
The Engine House, Dowlais
The Garden House Hospice, Lechworth
Torfaen Travellers Site
Tredegar Brass Band
Ty George Thomas Day Hospice, Cardiff
Tyndale Circle day centre, Bristol
Valley of Hope Project, Aberdare
Y Bwthyn, Pontypridd

Schools worked with:

Between 50 to 90 workshops / projects in schools each year throughout Wales.

Appendix 3

Participation projects 2010/11

Project	Description	Location	Participant figures	Audience figures
Alzheimers' Society Residency	Turandot residency for dementia sufferers	Cardiff	36	165
Atmospheres	Secondary school composition and music technology project	Wrexham & Cardiff (also Bristol, Liverpool, Milton Keynes, Plymouth)	59	n/a
Community Singing Days	Singing workshops for public	Caernarfon, Mold, Angelsey, Wrexham, Glasbury, Cardiff	322	673
Concert Parties	Concerts in care homes, hospices and community centres	Various	24	470
Orchestral Safari	Primary school singing project (Cardiff linked to St David's Hall Primary Prom Concert). Children perform with WNO Orchestra.	Cardiff & Caerphily Wrexham	918 259	1386 409
RWCMD collaborations	Students play within Orchestra of WNO in rehearsals and as part of WNO/RWCMD residency	Cardiff	30	n/a
Summer Dance Project	Young musicians play for National Dance Company Wales project	Cardiff	48	323
WMC collaborations	WMC open days, pre-school music, commuter singing sessions, European opera day	Various participatory workshops	253	238
WNO Extra	Events and activities, including workshops, talks and study days, to support mainscale performances including	Cardiff, Swansea, Llandudno	584	584
WNO Open House	Open day for public engagement including workshops, singing sessions etc.	Cardiff (alternates annually Llandudno)	359	5026
WNO Singing Club	Saturday club for 10 – 14 year olds to develop singing skills	Cardiff	46	660
WNO Youth Opera –The Sleeper	New commissioned opera performed by young people aged 16 – 25	Cardiff (Also taken to opera festival in London)	110	715
Workshops	Schools workshops for students attending mainscale performances or dress rehearsals	Cardiff	41	n/a