

Appendix C: Families

Classical Guitar Weekend 2

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How many different art forms can you find?



Classical Guitar Weekend

Craig Ogden's Classical Guitar Weekend was a full programme of events on Saturday 19 and Sunday 20 January 2013, themed around the classical guitar and organised in partnership with guitarist Craig Ogden. The event consisted of family workshops (Stringalong - make and play a cardboard guitar, and Beat It - a samba percussion workshop); free foyer concerts, masterclasses and Q&As; open rehearsals, major concerts and a Guitar Jam in which over 100 young guitarists performed a specially composed piece all together on the stage of The Bridgewater Hall.

The evaluation strategy was to interview people at all the events, particularly targeting families and young people participating in the Guitar Jam. 79 people were consulted, of which 31 were children as main respondents. Six children registered for an Arts Award Discover which added depth to their involvement, although not all completed it.

As with other strands of the research we were focussing on:

- Enjoyment and perceptions of quality
- Impact
- Engagement with The Bridgewater Hall and future provision – what people would like, what keeps them engaged with the Hall?

Families

The workshops were very popular because they were

- practical and hands on, especially with the percussion instruments
- family learning - events adults and children of different ages could do together
- well organised, at the right price and the right time
- high quality – especially the rotation in the percussion workshop which allowed people to try many instruments
- above all, music based

Families who attended were those already motivated to seek out cultural opportunities for their children and the vast majority were taking part as family groups.

Parents whose children are guitar learners were looking for chances to extend their instrumental learning and had in some cases travelled long distances to do this.

A few families had experienced difficulty downloading or practising the Guitar Jam music and it was felt that more involvement of guitar teachers would have helped with this. One adult commented on the ticketing for the Open Rehearsal events – people had assumed they could buy tickets on the door (having not seen information which stated that this was not possible) and were disappointed not to be able to.

Children loved the chance to perform in the Hall with professional musicians. They had felt nervous in advance but then reassured by the approach of the other players and professionals, and the lack of exposure involved in playing in such a large group. They describe feeling proud and confident, empowered and boosted by the experience of performance. Parents describe their children as feeling more engaged with their instrument.

Adults valued equally the themed approach, the mix of activities and the informal atmosphere, with children present alongside adults (the presence of families was mentioned positively by 21 adult respondents of all ages). Informal and formal contacts among guitar enthusiasts had helped to spread the word and people had travelled long distances (Birmingham, Cumbria, Merseyside, South Yorkshire) for the weekend. This was worth doing because of the concentration of events, the range and above all the quality. People describe being fans of Craig Ogden, Gary Ryan or Tom Doughty as individuals. There appeared to be some crossover with the audiences for the formal evening concerts; 11 people had booked for the evening concerts and then been inspired to come to other events. Some had come to meet other enthusiasts and enjoy the 'guitar atmosphere'. The event was seen as good value for money and it was felt important that free events should continue to be included. This mix offers potential for other events and the vast majority of consultees wanted a repeat or development – some ideas suggested included similar weekends for the voice or for strings.

The Arts Award offer was not widely adopted although those who did it gained an extra element. The model – involving artists, getting people to wear identifying badges and encouraging children to talk to and interact with the artists, is a good one that the Hall could use for other events.

The majority of consultees mentioned the access to highest quality performers as being one of the main attractions and highlights of the event, with this impact being especially felt by those taking part in Guitar Jam.

Comments

Families are looking for music based activities: this is an underdeveloped market for The Bridgewater Hall and offers potential. The demographic of these families was not unusual for the Hall. If the activity was to be extended further, targeted events for a different demographic, perhaps focussing on families who do not visit already or engage with music, would be a socially valuable project. The hands-on percussion workshop is a good model for this as it was naturally inclusive.

An intensive themed event is popular, holding it biennially is a good strategy in keeping people engaged. Different themes could be explored.

Combining informal and formal events allows audiences to cohabit comfortably, with serious concertgoers happy to mix with families. It works well as an audience development tool for new attendees.

The guitar works because of the instrument's flexibility – there are groups of enthusiasts for different styles. An event around another instrument would need to be based on the same qualities, networks and enthusiasts.

Detailed findings: Family workshops

Stringalong

19 people surveyed: 8 family groups, 4 children

Most enjoyed

- Practical, making, craft based – 8

"It's great to have things that are about music – anything practical, fun but with informal music afterwards and it's important that it's ok if they make noise" parent

"Making something is the attraction, something practical to take home but with music too" parent

- An activity about music and about the guitar – 6

"I love guitars. I play the guitar because it was the only instrument that I could find but it's the most popular instrument. I really like the wah wah pedal" child

"I like making things and playing music – I do African drumming and I'm coming to Beat It" child

"It's a good sort of event because you never know which of them might go on to take up the guitar" grandparent

- Timing and organisation fit with family needs – 2

"The timing's good because it gets you up and out and you've done something good with them" parent

Least enjoyed

- Trouble getting the finished guitar to sound – 3

"I can't work out why the notes aren't sounding true, I made it very carefully" guitar teacher friend of grandad

- Didn't want to be here – parents booked him in whilst they went to another event in the weekend – 1 child

Beat It

14 people surveyed: 4 family groups, 1 adult group, 1 child

Most enjoyed

- Rotating so that everyone got a chance to play different instruments - 5

"I liked to move round I thought the drums would be hardest but I found out they weren't" child

"Mixing people up meant that everybody made a piece of music together" parent

- Quality and variety of events, and family learning – 6

"It's fantastic to do events with such high quality artists" adult

"It's the range of activities for all ages and families too that brought us from Brum specially. Did we enjoy it? Can't you see our faces?" adult

"We wouldn't have come to a daytime concert without family events" parent

"It's brilliant to have a mix of concerts and workshops and free events. The foyer performances show children what they could achieve – it's really interesting for them. They're too young for a concert so it shows them what one is like" parent

Guitar Jam

37 people: 10 individual adults, 7 family groups, 19 children

Most enjoyed

- Being on stage - 16 (children) - very much enjoyed, although one or two suffered from nerves

"I really enjoyed it especially being on the big stage" child

"Being on stage was exciting but scary" child

"Really good fun but I'm glad the Hall wasn't full" child

- Playing in a big group - 10 (children)

"At home when I practised it, it didn't sound like much but then when we played altogether on the stage it sounded amazing" child

- Being able to perform with professionals - 7 (adults and parents)

"People were sharing their music stands with major players, all helping each other. We saw Gary Ryan sitting next to this child and he was nervous and he basically gave him free tuition, helped him keep up, that's fantastic for him" adult

"It's been inspirational. His teacher has been telling him [her son] he could be a professional and go to the RCM and he has also seen plenty of concerts, visiting artists and things like that but he never really felt he really could do it. Working with the Quartet you could see him thinking it over, he has been saying maybe I could do it as a career after all" parent

- Exploring the instrument's potential - 6 (adults and children) – especially liked: using the guitar as percussion

"I learnt new things you can do with it" child

Challenges

- 2 children and 1 adult mentioned difficulty downloading the music; it was suggested that file formats such as Shockwave or Quickstart be used

- 3 children felt they had not had enough time to practise the music (in one case because the guitar teacher was ill) and this made them nervous.

General audience comments from the Gary Ryan and Craig Ogden concert, masterclass and open rehearsal
27 respondents: 2 families, 25 adults, 2 children.

- Loved the guitar focus – rare to get it - 23 people
“The guitar doesn’t usually get this much attention” adult
“It’s great to get people involved in the guitar. It’s been really social, meeting people we know” adult Guitar Society member
“There’s a lack of places for young classical guitarists to just join in” parent
“Do more themed events” adult
- Loved the range of events – cost, variety, age range all catered for - 21 people
“I love the fact that you can dip in and out” adult
“I don’t play an instrument and have never been to a concert hall. I came because my friend had a ticket and I thought it was really good, there’s been lots to enjoy even if you’re not knowledgeable about music. I might well come again” adult
- Love families being here – 20 people
“They’re the future, they’re more important than us!” older couple
“We wouldn’t have come to a daytime concert without the family events” parent
“All generations together is brilliant!” older couple
- Love the informality – 15 people
“We come regularly but we’ve brought Mum this time because it’s informal and she’s loved it” adult couple
“Being informal gives it a wonderful atmosphere” adult
“Informal is great – it’s wonderful when you arrive and there’s that lovely music in the foyer” family

Suggestions

- Annual event (a large number of people mentioned this)
- Keep it biennial so the novelty doesn’t wear off! (3 people)
- Do more/different themed events (majority of people)
- Put family activities on all day both days
- Concentrate family activities into one block/day
- More tickets available for workshops
- Circulate Guitar Societies

- Better communication about catering

“Box Office said there wouldn't be food so we went out for lunch and then saw there was pizza.”

Be Hear Now

Half term musical discovery sessions for young people with special educational needs and their families, developed in collaboration with One Education (MY Hub) and Live Music Now. Sessions are designed to be enjoyable and accessible for disabled young people, their siblings and parents, and to include a combination of listening and participatory activity. Young people were loosely grouped into two age groups - 0-11 and 12-19 – with a longer term aim of increasing the number of performances and narrowing these age categories. Tickets cost £5 – subsidised on initial numbers, but with the potential to be self-funding – with tickets for any family grouping of up to 5 people for £20.

- The only person who made reference to pricing said it was 'good value for money'
- Response to the programme was extremely positive from both adults and young people
 - 'Inspiring' was identified on the list of words by 12/15 respondents
 - 'Fun' and 'Educational' were also popular choices - Educational was identified more by adults completing the forms
- Future activities
 - Not everyone completed the second section relating to future activities, so it is harder to get a clear picture
 - Amongst those who responded, there was a good mix of future activities that people wanted to do - the feedback reflected what the young people at the school had said - they identified music workshops/projects (the making of music) as being of interest
 - Three of the 12+ group who completed their forms themselves said they would like to come to lunchtime concerts
 - People who made additional comments generally wanted more, said 'thank you' and were very positive.
 - Only two respondents identified areas for improvement and they were connected to individual needs - for one it didn't coincide with their school holidays and another parent identified that their child is hypersensitive to sound so a gradual increase in volume would be beneficial (another identified that their son loved the loud music, especially the drums)

Early Years at the Bridgewater Hall: general comments from families

Within the consultation period, an open invitation for responses was shared via the Learning and Participation web pages and by email. Whilst the number of responses was small, the majority of suggestions related to the introduction of activities for under-5s. A selection of ideas are below:

I was really pleased to read about your consultation as I visited the Bridgewater Hall's website to see if there were any events planned to which I could bring my toddler.

My daughter is fourteen months old and I'd love to be able to take her to a session where perhaps a few bars in various styles could be played on orchestral instruments, the organ, or anything really - singers, other instrumentalists, whoever was available. I was hoping there would be something which would show some of the range of sounds that can be made either by individuals or groups. Perhaps it would also be possible to play a few very short pieces to demonstrate the different musical periods? This could go under the name of baby education but also give a little confidence to parents who might be unfamiliar with classical music.

From my point of view (yours may differ!) the ideal would be a large, flat, open space where toddlers could move around while the music was playing. They could walk around, maybe even between musicians. There could be different sessions of the same thing for different ages as older children will often overwhelm younger ones.

You could go further and make it multi sensory but I don't think there's any need and it might actually detract from the experience. There are a number of multi sensory play opportunities for babies and children, but no real introduction to live music unless it happens in or around the home. The key thing would be the idea that they could move around as the chances of getting them to be still and totally quiet for any length of time would be slim. Parents of toddlers and young children are also often intimidated by formal situations as, in my own experience, you know your child will be unhappy if you try to hold them back or down and you know other adults will disapprove.

I think this could really work well if it was adopted as the children wouldn't be intimidated and this could also invite their parents in. Even regular concert goers would be put at their ease and be pleased to have their children enjoying experiences they could not give them at home.

It would be a wonderful thing to have all the little children dancing, inspecting, listening, enjoying and dragging their parents around quite unafraid and totally natural in their responses. If you advised local (and further afield) Surestart centres when the sessions were running I'm sure you'd be overwhelmed with applicants for the places without having to do anything else.

I hope this suggestion is of use to you and will be considered. Do let me know if I can be of any assistance.

Just as an addendum to my previous email I wanted to explain that what I was thinking of was rather more like Entry to the orchestra for tinies than A Little Bite Music* as children are regularly invited to engage with basic percussion and take part but hardly ever to experience the orchestral instruments until they're ready to sit silently - for some this never comes, for others it comes after they have learnt to be intimidated by the formality of the way classical music is often performed. Of course, A Little Bite Music is excellent too, but it would be nice if there was something different available as well.

*The respondent wrote Bridgewater for All, but we assume her reference was to A Little Bite Music, which pre-school families are encouraged to attend.