

Streetwise Opera

Canticles Project Final Report

'The transformation for two people has been considerable, one has started to attend a drama course and enrolled in full time education, another has been given the confidence to start to tackle an addiction'
– Wyn Newman, Youth Worker, *The London Connection*

'Proof that it is worth investing in the arts because they can improve people's lives, at ground level, where it's needed' – Erica Jeal, *Guardian*

'It's the best thing I've done in years'
– A homeless participant and performer

'Beyond moving ... The arts have this magical power to bring us closer together through our own creativity and through our responses to that of others. This event proved it beyond a shadow of a doubt. I doubt whether the performers or anyone else present will ever forget this inspired and inspiring occasion.'
– George Hall, *Opera*

'Truly awe-inspiring' – Rodney Milnes, *The Times* (5 stars)

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Project description and aims

- **Aim 1 – To empower the homeless**

The main aim of the project was to empower the homeless by collaborating with them to devise the first operatic staging of Britten's *Canticles* with opera professionals. We worked with participants of five homeless centres in London, The Dellow Centre (Shoreditch), Look Ahead Victoria, London Connection (Charing Cross), The Passage and the Queen Mary Hostel (Victoria) and the opera company, Tête à Tête.

The project consisted of 12 weekly workshops in each of the five centres. Participants were to be involved in every part of the production (from performing to helping backstage) or as ushers or directors (in presenting staging and conceptual ideas in the weekly workshops).

A team of opera professionals facilitated the workshops from Streetwise Opera and Tête à Tête. Professional singers, designers, choreographers, directors, technicians and other musicians guided the workshops so that the production was led by the participants themselves. In this way, they had ownership of the end product and felt like they had played a big part in something of merit. Many participants went to TaT's production of *Six-Pack* at the beginning of the project.

The work was presented at three public performances at Westminster Abbey to a paying audience on 21 and 23rd May and free to members of the centres at the dress rehearsal on 20th May.

It was very important at the outset that the production was performed to the highest possible artistic standard at a high-profile venue so that the participants truly felt that they were involved in something of quality, not a side-show. They were made to feel part of the team, accepted, valued and encouraged to explore their skills. For the period of the project, it was the aim to consider themselves not as homeless but as a production and cast-members so that when they took their bows at the end, they could feel proud of what they had achieved, empowered and their self-esteem raised.

Britten's *Canticles* were an ideal vehicle for this project since they had never been staged, thus adding to the excitement and saleability of the production. Also, the works were challenging in subject-matter and language so as to push the participants further. We believe the best results are achieved using challenging material.

- **Aim 2 – to shatter the public's misconceptions about the homeless**

We also wanted to improve the public's perception and awareness of the homeless and so, by creating a high-quality production involving the homeless, audiences could see professionals and homeless individuals working side by side. We also wanted to blur the audience's perceptions of who was homeless and who wasn't in the performance itself, thus making them realise that the homeless are no different from anyone else.

Particularly for members of the public unaware of homeless issues, to see the homeless so involved and so valued in a professional production will reduce the prejudices many have about homeless individuals.

The Workshops

Participant attendance and stats

Workshops from 11 March – 17 May

Number of workshops	65
Total number of participants attending	124
• Queen Mary Hostel	13
• Look Ahead	14
• Dellow Centre – Residents	16
• Dellow – Day-centre users	30*
• London Connection	29
• The Passage	22

(* The Dellow Centre offers accommodation to a handful of residents and around 200 day-centre users, most of whom are street sleepers. The main thrust of putting on the Canticles involved the residents, but we also ran extra general music-based workshops in the day centre for 4 weeks)

Ethnicity (tbc)

• White British	51.6%
• Black British	15.6%
• Black African/Asian	12.3%
• White Irish	12.3%
• Other	4%

Participants' special needs

We worked with homeless men and women of varying backgrounds from those who have recently become homeless to long-term street sleepers.

The main areas of special needs we found were as follows:

Depression and mental health problems

Alcohol use

Drug and substance use

Illiteracy

The Dellow Centre

Shoreditch

Type of organisation: A day centre, mixed hostel and residential accommodation (flats).

Number of places: 200 non-residents, 38 temporary residents and 10 longer-term residents.

Age range: Over 25.

Artistic provision: The centre has an artist in residence and an arts co-ordinator. The centre has taken part in other arts projects in the past, including performances with Cardboard Citizens but no other music or operatic project.

Workshop report:

The Death of Saint Narcissus

Canticle V

Text by TS Eliot (1888-1965) from *Poems Written in Early Youth*
music composed by Britten in 1974 op. 89

Saint Narcissus was a bishop of Jerusalem in the second century, who like many of the earliest Christians in the Middle East, went to lead a solitary and harsh life in the desert to bring himself closer to God. In this piece, both Eliot and Britten turn the camera on the inner life of the man. So we follow him through all kinds of confused perceptions of his own self, before he ecstatically greets his own destruction. Clients at the Dellow showered light on this very challenging piece, many seeing their own very valid ways through it – “it’s about reincarnation, isn’t it” – “it’s about the way things spread and come into one” – on one or two readings, and far quicker than the director did himself. The workshops were very movement based, and included some amazingly sophisticated sessions, the fruit of which was seen in a small performing group at the performance, but with many choreographers.

Staff report:

I have spoken with staff and the opinion is that our residents enjoyed and benefitted from participating in the workshops. **I believe that the format and content of the workshops helps to develop a clients confidence**, this was certainly confirmed by Dekka and her performance at Westminster.

Elizabeth Ursell who acted as an usher at the performances was very enthusiastic about the whole thing and it did her a power of good to be involved. She is still talking about it!

George Tahta and Derek Maclean took part in some of the workshops and it was good for them to be able to interact with others.

Although only a small number of our residents were involved I have to say I think it was successful and we would happily be involved again in the future.

John Beswick

Manager

‘I really loved it – I can’t wait to do another show.’ A participant.

The Passage

Victoria, SW1

Type of organisation: A mixed day centre

Number of places: 200.

Age range: Over 25.

Special features: The nightshelter, Passage House was involved in the 3-month pilot project last year, *The Little Prince Project*, and there is huge enthusiasm from the staff and the clients for our work. We took over from an existing drama group here that had been running for a number of months. An art group and life-skills groups have existed here for a long while.

Workshop report:

My beloved is mine

Canticle I

Text by Francis Quarles (1592-1644)

Music composed by Britten in 1947, op. 40

The poem is a blissful outpouring in reaction to the love of god, moving from comparisons with nature and physical love to something far greater and deeper. The work ends with the message that whoever you are, and whatever your faith, you're never really alone.

The participants we worked with had many interests which broke down into three main areas: dance, drama and music. Therefore, we explored the work in these three separate ways coming up with music at the beginning of the performance devised by members of the group, singing at the end, a short playlet to introduce the piece, followed by the piece itself dominated by dancing and choreography.

Staff report:

The project was particularly successful in terms of interaction. **Many of the clients integrated with each other and with staff more because of the project.**

- Kasar didn't speak to anyone before the project – he sat in the corner with his hood up. The work made him very happy and now he speaks to staff and fellow clients
- John Jolly was much more interactive during the workshops and afterwards
- Peter Graham was very isolated before the project – he has now made more friends as a result of being in the show. It has also made him calmer.
- Robert has now been targeted for re-housing because of the project. He had never joined in anything before and because of his involvement with the Canticles, the staff know more about him. He drinks less now and has gained the confidence to ask for help. He has an interview for the King George Hostel. He said of being involved that it gave him 'a good foundation'.
- Blue's talent was noticed by staff and now Sister Ellen has asked him to record one of his pieces of music for the daycentre.
- Thomas made many friends.
- Many of those who didn't perform but attended the sessions came to the show. Albert came to all three performances and paid for tickets. 25 other clients from the Passage came to the dress rehearsal, 14 paid for the Tuesday performance (including drug users) and 15-20 paid for the Thursday performance.

The way the opera team and the homeless interacted with each other was also excellent – it became very difficult to know who was homeless and who wasn't in the show.

The project also gave the clients an opportunity to interact with clients from other centres and to make friends with those sharing the same experience as them.

The work was more effective than Cardboard Citizens since they just deal with homeless issues. The strength of Streetwise Opera's work is that they realise that homeless people don't always want to talk about their problems.

More provision for shy clients would be good and more posters would attract a greater number of participants.

None of the clients caused problems at the Abbey – the only contentious issue happened when we had to bar one of the participants because they were too drunk. We decided with the Streetwise Opera staff that it would protect his dignity and safety if he was asked not to attend that performance. The next day in the day centre he was embarrassed and apologised to the staff.

There was never any suggestion of tokenism.

Pam Morris

Team Co-ordinator

'Tremendous, absolutely marvellous.' A participant

'I loved every minute of it.' A participant

Look Ahead Victoria Hostel

SW1

Type of organisation: A mixed residential hostel.

Number of places: 185.

Age range: 18-65.

Artistic provision: Look Ahead Victoria has, in the past, hosted a small number of arts projects, including the Cardboard Citizens. There is no regular arts-based provision.

Workshop report:

The Return of the Magi

Canticle IV

Text by T. S. Eliot (1888-1965)

music composed by Britten in 1971 op. 86 (1971)

In *the Return of the Magi* one of the three wise men reminisces, in old age, about their journey to Bethlehem to visit the infant Christ and they share their thoughts about the meaning of the whole episode.

Our transitory group at Look Ahead Victoria came up with the most amazing volume of reactions to this piece through the workshops, including poetry, drawings, improvised costumes, stagings, dramatic readings, musical responses – we followed the participants through their own journey with this piece, responding to their involvement until we came to rest with a staging that put a visual spin on the text of the Canticle using a vast piece of transparent material.

Staff report:

I am writing to say thank you to you and your team for the work you have done here with our residents on the Canticles Project.

The feedback I have received from our service users and staff has been very positive indeed. The residents who took part in the weekly workshops and those who participated in the concert found the experience very enjoyable and rewarding. **They felt a real sense of having achieved something in an area of the arts they normally wouldn't be in a position to access, let alone participate. Such initiatives can only help build self esteem and confidence and bring out skills and talents many residents never knew they had.**

Most of our residents have slept rough on the streets prior to coming here and as result have complex support needs. They often feel isolated and excluded and lack confidence in their ability to make a positive contribution to society and this project has without doubt allowed them to feel a greater sense of value.

I have also been very impressed with the commitment and enthusiasm of all your team who have attended each week without fail.

Jim Winter

Manager

***'It's the best thing that's happened to me in years; it brought me out of my shell.'* A participant**

The London Connection

Adelaide Street, WC2

Type of organisation: A drop-in centre catering for a mixed, young client group.

Number of places: 200 each day.

Age range: 16-25.

Artistic Provision: Much of the work of this centre is activity and participation based, and they have a long history of arts projects, including work with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

Workshop report:

Abraham and Isaac

Canticle II

Anonymous text, from the medieval *Chester Miracle Plays*.

Music composed by Britten in 1952, op. 51

The text for this piece comes from the medieval plays that were performed at festivals and markets as a kind of outreach exercise for the church. God tells Abraham to kill his son Isaac in sacrifice. Once Abraham's actions convince God that he is prepared to obey, God stops him at the very moment he would have committed this terrible act.

Working on this piece with a young group at the London Connection produced a huge amount of amazingly diverse and vigorous responses. After considering the story from all sorts of angles, the production was dominated by an exploration of the word 'sacrifice'. This bore fruit in two ways, with recorded vox-pop interviews we presented before the scene where members of London Connection were asked what sacrifice meant to them. Secondly, the production itself became an updated reading of the story, in the setting of a press conference where the premieres of the USA and GB were the Voice of God. The participants created and acted out roles of body guards and a camera crew.

Staff Report:

The Streetwise Opera workshops at The London Connection began on 11th March 2002. We held them each Monday up to the performances at Westminster Abbey at the end of May. Numbers attending each session varied between 4 and 12, and 8 of our young people were involved in the performances at Westminster Abbey. **This was a considerable achievement and reflects the commitment, enthusiasm and skill of everyone from Streetwise Opera.** None of our people who were involved had any previous knowledge of opera and it would be fair to say that this would have continued to be the case.

The workshops were structured to allow people to participate in different ways. Some were keen to get involved in the performance while others were happy to contribute their ideas about the production. The workshops allowed people to get involved at any stage and in lots of different ways. This encouraged the high level of participation.

The workshops started at 2.30 when our building closed. The workshop leaders from Streetwise Opera were here well before that time to talk to people who were interested in participating. Bill, Matthew, Rowan and Dominic, attended other groups at The London Connection and as a result had a good idea of what to expect and how to get the best out of our young people. Each session was structured to get people involved from the start and to maintain involvement throughout. As the sessions progressed a regular core of people began to develop which produced the 8 who were involved in the performances.

The friendliness and approachability of all the people from Streetwise Opera who participated in the workshops was the key to the success of the project. They gained the trust and respect of our young people. People who were involved in the workshops but not in the performance were able to attend the Dress Rehearsal, and for those who wished, to help as Ushers at the public performances. A great deal of thought was given to how as many people as possible could be included at all stages of the project.

The project had a considerable impact on a number of young people who are still talking about the whole experience. All the projects we introduce to The London Connection are designed to develop the confidence and self esteem of our young people, this project was particularly successful in this respect. The majority of people who participated in the project and saw it through to the end had a lot of difficulties to overcome in their lives. The transformation for two people has been considerable, one has started to attend a drama course and enrolled in full time education, another has been given the confidence to start to tackle an addiction. It would be fair to say that as an organisation we had a number of reservations at the outset of this project. Our young people tend to be a very lively, enthusiastic bunch and opera was a long way from their experience. Our reservations were unfounded and we are very much looking forward to continuing to work with Streetwise Opera.

Wyn Newman

Youthwork Team

***'It was amazing – I couldn't believe I would be able to perform in front of all those people in Westminster Abbey.'** A participant*

Queen Mary Hostel

Greencoat Place SW1

Type of organisation: A church-run women-only hostel.

Number of places: 57 ranging from long-term residents to rough-sleepers.

Age range: 18-93.

Artistic provision: Though there are a great many residents with a great deal of time to kill, the hostel has never hosted a participatory arts project.

Workshop report:

Still falls the Rain

(The Raids, 1940. Night and Dawn)

Canticle III

Text by Edith Sitwell (1887-1964), from *The Canticle of the Rose*.

Music composed by Britten in 1954, op. 55

Still Falls the Rain invites the audience to consider the meaning of the Blitz in relation to the meaning of the crucifixion.

It was an amazing pleasure for us all to work on this piece with the women of the Queen Mary Hostel, some of whom have shared vivid memories of the blitz and it's aftermath with us. Thus, together, we've tried to create a context from which, like Britten, we can look back positively on this grim time, and to leave the audience with more than a little hope.

The attendance rate was close to 100% for the 12 weeks with a core group of 5 or 6 ladies turning up for each workshop. It was very clear that they looked forward eagerly to our sessions and working with drama, design and music. Because of the setting of the 1940s and the age range (55-93), we tried to create a tangible feeling of that time for the participants, encouraging them to remember the street parties after the war. We sang war songs, discussed styles of clothing and food of the time and made bunting, hats and looked at the music of the Canticle and considered its musical references.

Staff Report:

The Streetwise Opera came to work with the residents at Queen Mary Hostel just over five months ago. The idea was to run a weekly workshop with interested residents that would culminate in a performance at Westminster Abbey as part of *The Canticles* in May 2002.

Queen Mary Hostel offers a service to women who have primarily been street homeless and have varying degrees of mental health issues, many of whom have led very chaotic lives.

We are always delighted to have outside agencies come to the project to work with residents and have and are running very successful lifeskills programmes. The nearest the hostel had come to performing had been the occasional Karaoke evening and whilst we were hopeful of the Streetwise Opera success, we were a little apprehensive regarding the residents participation. Our worries were however unfounded and several of the resident's took to the project whole-heartedly. The workshops were held on a Wednesday evening and proved to be very popular. **The project staff were very surprised at which residents took part. Residents whom have always been extremely quiet and withdrawn seemed to take enormous pleasure in their new found voice and were more than willing to partake in the main performance. Working with Streetwise Opera has assisted**

some of our residents in increasing their self-esteem and given them an increased level of confidence.

Following the success of *The Canticles* project Queen Mary's has invited the Streetwise Opera to run further workshops, which are presently operational. These include Noel Coward Evenings and many others. These have also proved to be extremely popular. The Streetwise also recently provided the musical entertainment for the projects tenth anniversary party.

Anna Cooley

Deputy Manager, Queen Mary

'There wasn't anyone who got more out of the project than I did.' A participant.

The Production

Dan Norman – Tenor
Simon Baker – Countertenor
James Bowman – Countertenor (Voice of God, Abraham and Isaac)
Ian Partridge – Tenor (Voice of God, Abraham and Isaac)
Tom Guthrie – Baritone
Alice Trentham – Harp
Evgeny Chebykin – French Horn
Tim Blowfield - Dancer
Dominic Harlan – Pianist, Music Director
Bill Bankes-Jones – Director
Matthew Peacock – Producer
Rowan Fenner – Project Co-ordinator
Carrie Southall – Designer
Tom Albu – Production Manager
Mark Doubleday – Lighting Designer
Marius Ronning – Stage manager
Lucy Khan – Wardrobe
Terry Doyle – Production Assistant
Una Murphy, Nicole Proia, Claire Parry-Jones, Nina Brazier, Jemma Gardner – Assistant Directors
Deka, Elizabeth, George, Peter, Pat, Peter, Thomas, Paddy, Robert, Blue, Kasar, John, Paul, Hakim, Danny, Dave, Wayne, Yusuf, Jodie, Tony, Sam, Damion, Anthony, Graham, Ann, Valda, Camilla, Ben, Clare, Tamala, Michael, Jo, Tordeevil, Kefin, Jason, Freddie, Nick, Brad, Shaun, Cheryl, Emma, Shane, James, Darren, Renee, Jorgen, Smurf, Doreen, Ann-Marie, Pansy Alison, Eileen, Pat, Trudi, Audrey, Sally, Dereck, Forbes, Des, Sally, Yvonne, Angela, Paddy, Paul, Mark, Lisa, Antonio, Rosalind, Damon, James, Scott, Luigi, Sofia, Debbie, Mark, Nick, Annie, Khalid, Daniel, Albert, C-J, Thomas, Richie, Reg, Isaac, Spencer, Steve, Nik, Richard, Joseph, Roxanne – Homeless participants on and back stage

The production was performed as a promenade: Each of the five Canticles was allocated a different area of the Abbey, taking advantage of the incredible building. The audience followed the pieces round the building, lead by Abbey marshals and ushers from the centres (another way in which we blurred the audience's perception of who was homeless and who wasn't, was by matching the marshals' red cloaks with blue for the ushers).

The Canticles were performed in the following order and area:

- The Death of Saint Narcissus – Dellow Centre
In the North Trancept
- My Beloved is Mine – The Passage
Behind the main altar by the Coronation Throne
- The Return of the Magi – Look Ahead
By Poets' Corner in the South Trancept
- Abraham and Isaac – London Connection
The Quire
- Still Falls the Rain – Queen Mary Hostel
By the Tomb of the unknown warrior

In most of the pieces we made a feature of the journey of the audience by attracting them to the next piece with music (My Beloved is Mine, Still Falls the Rain) or by spoken voices (Abraham and Isaac). Before the final piece, we lead the audience round the cloisters which were candle-lit and poppies strewn round the grass.

Audience Attendance

Dress rehearsal (homeless and staff from centres) SOLD OUT	181
Tuesday 21 May SOLD OUT	200
Thursday 23 May SOLD OUT	200
Production team and Abbey staff over 3 nights	60
Total	641

Response from the media

‘Proof that it is worth investing in the arts because they can improve people’s lives, at ground level, where it’s needed’ – **Erica Jeal, Guardian ******

‘Beyond moving ... The arts have this magical power to bring us closer together through our own creativity and through our responses to that of others. This event proved it beyond a shadow of a doubt. I doubt whether the performers or anyone else present will ever forget this inspired and inspiring occasion.’ – **George Hall, Opera**

‘Utterly extraordinary’ – **Natalie Wheen, Classic FM**

‘I could sing a hundred praises of this superb stage premiere, yet still undersell it. This was peripatetic drama at its best: powerful, involving, sympathetic, touching, inspiring’ – **Roderic Dunnnett, Independent**

‘Truly awe-inspiring’ – **Rodney Milnes, The Times *******

‘Every performer and director – for there were many – should be proud: a witty, brave, imaginative evening’ – **Anna Picard, Independent on Sunday**

‘So powerful was this production that it should be snapped up by every festival that can lay its hands on it’ – **The Church Times**

‘In helping homeless people to build stable and fulfilled lives, providing accommodation is just the first step. That is why London-based Streetwise Opera is so important’ – **Chris Senior, Caduceus**

Other comments

'The idea behind the Canticles and the resulting production has been inspirational. To see homeless people so valued, and given the chance to work alongside professionals was something very much in line with the Trust's ethos of rebuilding self-respect and value among homeless and disadvantaged people'

Watford New Hope Trust

'You hardly need me to write to congratulate you and to thank you to all that you had brought to the Abbey in the course of this imaginative event. It was a pleasure and a privilege for the Abbey to be involved'

The Very Reverend Dr Wesley Carr, Dean of Westminster

'I thought it was a thrilling performance, and fully deserved the marvellous reviews'

Sir Robert Carnwath, Chairman, Britten-Pears Foundation

'Last night was just marvellous. I was quite overwhelmed. Many congratulations to everyone involved'

Dr Patricia Morison, Director, Linbury Trust

'Congratulations! A really magnificent event – beautiful and moving. May all your projects flourish!'

Dylan Hammond, Director, The London String of Pearls

'I wanted to thank you for such a powerful and moving experience. I was moved by most of the performance but Abraham and Isaac made me enter in to the story in a way I never had before. My thanks and congratulations for an unforgettable evening'

Rev Rachel Bending, Methodist Central Hall, Westminster

'Congratulations again on what you achieved - it was magical, mystical, wonderful and truly life enhancing. To get such rave reviews puts a nice cherry on an already great achievement'

Kenneth Richardson, Former Director, Covent Garden Festival

Conclusions

The project has resoundingly met its two primary aims in **empowering the homeless**; giving many of them more confidence and self esteem and **raising awareness** and profile of the homeless with audiences. In this way it has demolished many people's preconceptions about the homeless.

Feedback from the staff of the centres has been particularly encouraging with many first-hand reports of clients' quality of life being improved as a result of the project. It has had a profound impact on many clients.

Some working practises to be highlighted, strengthened or altered:

- Posters are an excellent means of recruitment – the glossier the better in attracting participants. We have designed some colourful posters for our follow-up workshops which are already proving very successful in recruitment.
- The intention at the beginning of the project was to involve more clients in backstage work – lighting, designing, production management, costumes etc. These roles are particularly appropriate for very shy clients and clients with communication issues. This provision became impossible in the Canticles Project since we had only one hour for 'get in' before the show. The Tête a Tête and Streetwise team therefore felt that it would be impossible to include the homeless participants in this part of the production for primarily safety reasons. Instead, the director introduced the role of Performance Ushers for the production, guiding the audience round the production. This was a role in which many homeless participants took part with great success. In the next project, we will try to provide a vehicle for more backstage work.
- At the outset of each workshop, a little time was devoted to explaining the project and its aims for new-comers. We must continue to highlight that the show is for them and we want their input in whatever way they feel comfortable sharing. We should continue to point out all the possible ways they can be involved on and off stage.
- It was mentioned by an audience member that some clients had very minor roles. We need to highlight more in our programmes and publicity that the clients are allowed to give as much or as little on-stage or back-stage input as they want. The work grows organically in the workshops with some participants directing and staging large chunks of the finished work. If these participants do not want to perform or want only small roles, this is honoured. The end result may not have a lot of homeless clients on stage but dozens may still have been involved in the process. We were congratulated by staff members for not setting up any of the clients to fail. We think it vital to encourage rather than force.
- It was noted that we did very well in taking control of the room for the workshops. A good way we achieved this was by creating a circle of chairs for the participants at the outset of sessions (staff suggestion).
- We should try to reflect the wide ethnic mix of clients with the staff we chose and the male and female mix (staff suggestion).
- The number of residents attending workshops from the Dellow Centre was lower than the other centres. This was because there were only a few residents present in the centre when we came to run workshops at 6pm. The workshops we ran for the day centre users at 2pm were very well attended and received, but because of the needs of the clients, it would be hard to focus their attention enough to work on a show. For our follow-up work, we aim to try to include members from both groups, almost certainly by using the art room which is visible from the outside but enclosed and contained at the same time
- We had absolutely no problems with violent or unsociable behaviour from the clients. It is still important to make the safety of the workshop staff a priority, particularly when we are working in sessions without a member of the centre's staff. We will produce a guide to working in centres for those who have never worked with this client group before and by taking advice from the staff of the centres

Follow-up and future work

The five London Centres

It is clear that the boost in self-esteem and sense of achievement of the participants can only be followed-through if we continue the work without delay. In this way, we have designed the following structure:

- 2 weeks of evaluation interviewing staff of the centres and participants of the production. What did the participants get out of the project and how could our work be improved?
- A trip to the Theatre Museum within a fortnight of the show (including a make-up and costume workshop) to get the participants together and to make sure they know that we will be continuing to work with them.
- Weekly follow-up workshops beginning 2-3 weeks after the production with a combination of the old team and new faces. These workshops will introduce more singing and theatre skills work to the participants.
-

The workshop plan over the first 6-8 weeks after the Canticles Project will follow the following format:

- Queen Mary Hostel – musical evenings of singing and dancing once a month featuring music by Ivor Novello, Noel Coward and others. A designer and Streetwise staff will take weekly workshops to design the musical evening with the participants, concentrating on how to decorate the room, what music to sing, what to wear and what were to styles and dances of the time.
- Look Ahead, London Connection and The Passage – singing sessions and stage-craft workshops. How to perform, project the voice, and be aware of the audience. This will lead on to the selection of a work to be staged in the autumn.
- Dellow Centre – general sessions in the day centre with singer-songwriters. Introducing the participants to a variety of different instruments and scope to try-out the instruments. Workshops will also continue for the residents in the evening exploring dance and singing in particular.

Following this phase, we intend working on specific musical works or work with other musical groups/individuals over a 6-8 week period. We are working closely with Business in the Community to give homeless participants more experience.

We will continue to arrange opera, theatre and concert trips for participants as well as backstage tours.

Further afield

Nottingham

We are in the planning stage of running a large-scale production in Nottingham in collaboration with a number of local institutions. We recently met with the Music Officer of **East Midlands Arts**, the Directors of **Framework Housing Trust** and the **Hostels Liaison Group** and representatives of **Magdala Opera**.

We have inspected a number of homeless centres and venues in the area. There is a great deal of excitement about using the main town square (Slab Square) in Nottingham for an outdoor production (the town council are involved and are keen for it to happen).

Other suggestions have been the Castle and Sherwood Forest and working with a local music technology group.

Suggestions have been made at this stage for the work to be based around the Robin Hood legend. This project is set to be a tremendous event for the whole community.

Watford

The **Watford New Hope Trust**, the main homeless resource in the area, is very keen to work with Streetwise Opera on a project. The Trust has fantastic facilities in the town and concentrates a great deal on the empowerment of the homeless. A representative said of the Canticles, 'To see homeless people so valued, and given the chance to work alongside professionals was something very much in line with the Trust's ethos of rebuilding self-respect and value among homeless and disadvantaged people'.

Initial meetings suggest that this could involve many people in the area and we will be visiting the main New Hope Trust resources, St Marys' Church (a central Watford landmark, and the church from which Watford New Hope Trust first grew), The Colosseum (the large concert venue in town) and The Palace Theatre (a local theatre).

We will work with clients from the main New Hope centres:

The Haven – a day centre for around 60 homeless and vulnerable men and women each day.

The Sanctuary – an emergency nightshelter with 15 beds.

New Hope House – a shared home for 10 residents.

The Community Home – a residential house for 5 residents.

The ethos of the staff at the Trust is exactly in line with the aims of Streetwise and we are looking forward to this project with great excitement.

Dulwich

The **Dulwich Picture Gallery** have made an approach for us to facilitate a project. We would work with their education department in utilising the gallery's stunning collection in an opera project with the local homeless.

Oxford

We are in negotiation with a leading homelessness charity in Oxford to run a project with clients from the city and surrounding area. The production will be staged in one of the college chapels.

Other possible collaborations

Sinfonia 21 (proposed 6-8 week residency in December 2002); Live Music Now!; Training for Life; Streets Alive Theatre Company.

Training and employment

Streetwise Opera Project work placement

As a commitment to our aims and a further method of practical assistance to our participants, Streetwise Opera employs a homeless participant in each project. The participants are chosen by a panel of workshop staff and are offered part time work in an area of aptitude that the participants have shown through our work with them.

In the Canticles Project, we were able to offer a participant a role as Project Assistant. He had been selected from the participants of the pilot project, *The Little Prince* in 2000. He has since been re-housed but is still out of work.

He liaised with the director, producer, designer and project co-ordinator to provide support during some workshops and to undertake production research which was invaluable in staging all five Canticles. He then worked closely with the Production Manager and Stage Manager in the production week helping them with all aspects of the get-in and get-out. He was in-charge of the decoration of the Cloisters for the production.

This is what he said about working for the Little Prince Project:

'Taking part in the Little Prince Project gave me a sense of purpose and helped to recover my feelings of self-worth at a time when my morale and self-esteem were at a very low ebb, and my personal outlook seemed unremittingly bleak. The feelings of elation and accomplishment which I, in common with the other stage-crew, felt standing on the stage to acknowledge the applause at the end of the production were something I will never forget, and played a large part in helping me to overcome my difficulties and start putting my life back into order. I urge you to support Streetwise Opera in their endeavours, so that other homeless people may benefit as I have.'

Work placements in the community

Streetwise Opera are working hard to provide lasting opportunities for our participants. Some participants of the Canticles have already used their new-found confidence to join drama groups, tackle their addictions, or sign-up for full-time education.

We also want to provide opportunities for them to use their skills and talents in work placements with other arts organisations and businesses. We are pioneering a scheme with **Business In The Community** to link some of our participants to companies in the arts. Those participants who have shown particular strengths in certain areas and a willingness to commit to our workshops will be put forward for this scheme – each placement will last two weeks or longer. BITC has never placed participants in arts organisations before.

Biography and contact details

Streetwise Opera has been launched to empower homeless men and women by collaborating with them in the staging of professional opera productions.

For some, this empowerment may involve giving them a platform for their ideas; helping them to rebuild feelings of self-worth; providing a vehicle to express themselves; the confidence that comes from contributing to a creative process; a broadening horizon or, simply, a stable routine.

Opera is a very broadly-based discipline with many facets which can reflect the different needs of the homeless: The participants can collaborate in any aspect of the production from lighting to directing, acting, singing, making props and costumes. A key element of our work is to produce operas of the highest possible artistic standard at high-profile, respected venues. In this way, the homeless participants truly feel that they are involved in something of the highest level and when they take their bow on the stage at the end, their sense of achievement is heightened further. Committing ourselves to high production standards will also help raise awareness of homelessness further through more traditional opera audiences and prove that opera isn't for the privileged few.

Streetwise Opera was set up following the success of the company's pilot production, the *Little Prince Project* in 2000 at the Royal Opera House with participants from the Passage Nightshelter and a chorus from a local primary school. The company will run at least one large-scale opera production every year, the *Canticles Project* being the first. Between productions, we will continue our work in the participating centres, bringing a whole range of music for the participants to explore from opera musicians and production personnel, music theatre singers to contemporary dance troops and orchestral players.

Patron, Duchess of Kent
Director, Matthew Peacock
Project Co-ordinator, Rowan Fenner

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