

CASE STUDY

# Music in the Community

Ed Yeo, Eton College



## ABSTRACT

An entry-level project which sent performers out to local primary schools, and used the energy gained therein to organise pupil-led community concerts on Sundays for small children locally.

## PARTNERSHIPS

Eton College  
Local Primary Schools

## OVERVIEW

For a long time, the Music Department at Eton has been engaged in a number of small-scale projects, including workshops for brass players in local primary schools and joint performance opportunities through relationships with local music services and hubs.

We were invited to make suggestions on how to further develop these projects and relationships, and to foster an ingrained culture of partnership within the departments and wider school environment. A number of ideas were floated, and as a starting point we fixed on two small-scale projects.



...we committed to establishing a series of Sunday afternoon 'Children's Concerts' aimed at young people between preschool and Year 6.



## PARTNERSHIPS

In their Lower Sixth year, boys at Eton have the opportunity to take part in Community Engagement projects on Monday and Wednesday afternoons. The range of activities on offer is diverse and ever-growing, including hospice visits, sports coaching in secondary schools, Maths mentoring and acting as a teaching assistant in a number of primary schools in the local area. In September 2017, a new project was offered entitled 'Music in the Community', and six boys volunteered to take part in the scheme. Their principal engagement was to visit primary schools in the Michaelmas term and lead some form of short music-based workshop and activity with students in Year 3 and 4. Other than the dates being fixed in the diary and the transport laid on, it was up to the boys to devise and manage these sessions as they saw fit.

## BACKGROUND

Eton has a full music programme, with a large number of events throughout the academic year, but at this point in time there was no provision for regular musical events targeted at the younger demographic in the local community. Following some research, and looking at Community Engagement projects offered by other schools, we committed to establishing a series of Sunday afternoon 'Children's Concerts' aimed at young people between preschool and Year 6. It was felt that it would not take a huge amount of work to get this project off the ground, and with staff and boys expressing enthusiasm for the project in its nascent stage, we believed there was scope for a popular series.

It quickly became apparent that there was an opportunity to marry these two strands together, and to give the Community Engagement Group the opportunity to widen their 'brief' and responsibilities. Alongside their fortnightly visits to local primary schools, the boys also became the primary promoters and 'concert managers' of this concert series – taking the lead on devising the structure of the event, organising the practicalities and advertising the concerts within the local community.



## NARRATIVE

### PROJECT 1 – Primary School Music Workshops

The boys returned to school in September, and had three weeks to plan and devise their workshop material. They benefited from having quite a diverse range of musical tastes and interests, including a classical flautist, pianist, drummer, guitarist and a keen actor with a musical theatre interest. The boys quickly decided that using singing and voice work as the principal medium would be the simplest and, perhaps, most accessible way to make music with the children. They sourced and rehearsed a number of short warm-up songs and activities including rhythm games ('Don't Clap this one Back!', 'Splat') with the idea of building up to learning a song as the main activity in the session. They divided up roles and responsibilities, and went into their first school with enthusiasm, energy and, it must be said, not inconsiderable nerves...

## LEARNINGS

The first session met a potential stumbling block when, instead of one year group filing into the hall, the entire school, some 210 children, arrived expecting musical entertainment. The boys met the challenge with courage, although it clearly limited the effectiveness and measurable 'success' of the session. It was very difficult for the boys to keep that number of different-aged children engaged, and their activities devised for 30-40 students did not necessarily lend themselves to over 200 individuals .

The most useful and effective ten minutes of the entire afternoon were during the bus journey home. The boys proved themselves to be highly reflective and realistic about the session, and spoke sensibly and creatively about how they could overcome the same difficulties were the same thing to happen again.

The rest of the term's placements went rather more smoothly, with the boys constantly refining and developing their ideas and delivery to match their audience. The most common themes in their post-activity debriefs included: pace of the sessions, too much 'faff' time between items, choice of repertoire, division of roles and responsibilities, success in engaging all the students.



'over 70 parents and children are attending the concerts, and the series has become an established fixture in the musical diary for each term.'



Towards the end of November we sat down to plan the projects for the following term, and the boys suggested they would rather work with a smaller number of schools more regularly, in order to build up better relationships with the students. This also meant they could devise a more challenging and linear project, as they would be seeing each school four times over the course of the term. The boys created a project that built on the previous term's work, with a clear set of musical objectives that they wanted the to children to achieve.

The visits went well, and at the time of writing the boys have just led a short workshop/concert in one of the host schools, together with children from another school and a small audience of parents and teachers. The boys have clearly enjoyed the project, and learned a great deal about how to engage young children in music-making. It was certainly not all successful, and the boys proved constructively critical when they considered the 'if we could do it all again' question in the wash-up to the project.

### **Wash-up themes included:**

- Choice of song is key. The most popular or recent hit from a movie seldom makes for the most effective or musically accessible repertoire.
- The amount of time it took to get through the material was surprising.
- To begin with, we tried to do too much too quickly.

- It became clear that reinforcing material and concepts was key – a good performance one week didn't guarantee they'd remember it in a fortnight's time.
- Less talking, more singing and music-making.
- Have a plan, but be prepared to adapt or move away from it if necessary.
- Seven year-olds are a remarkably astute and critical audience!

## NARRATIVE

### PROJECT 2 – Sunday Afternoon Children's Concerts

One of the first elements to consider was who was to be involved, who was to lead the sessions and who was to perform. It quickly became apparent that a natural, and as yet largely untapped resource, came from the school's visiting music teachers, who proved very receptive to the idea of leading the sessions. Another key tenet of the project was that the boy musicians at Eton should be very actively involved, both in the planning and the performances, and that this should provide a different performance platform than the usual concert hall or chapel service.

Following some brief research, members of the local community highlighted Sunday afternoons as a suitable time for these concerts. This crucially also suited our boys, as this time of the week tends to be rather quieter in terms of extra-curricular commitments. 30 minutes at 2:15pm was decided on, and three dates put into the school diary for the coming term. A selection of visiting music teachers volunteered to devise and lead the sessions, with a broad title given to each concert – 'Spotlight on Woodwind', 'Journey Around the World', 'Animal Crackers!'.

The boys took on a significant amount of the practical workload involved in staging the concerts – preparing the performance space, 'staffing' the concerts and providing refreshments. This sense of 'ownership' was an important factor in the devising of the project and, whilst not necessarily directly responsible for the musical content, they have taken an increasing lead in fronting the sessions and engaging the children. Having a dedicated team taking on these practicalities also allowed the leader of the session to concentrate solely on the musical delivery.



We also advertised the concerts in the primary schools involved in the Music Workshop projects led by boys in Year 12.



## COMMUNICATIONS

Publicity for the concert was achieved primarily through a poster campaign in the local community, word-of-mouth and social media. We also advertised the concerts in the primary schools involved in the Music Workshop projects led by boys in Year 12.

## IMPACT

The first concert proved a popular and very enjoyable event, with positive feedback from adults and children alike, and audience numbers have grown pleasingly since the first session in September 2017. At the time of writing, over 70 parents and children are attending the concerts, and the series has become an established fixture in the musical diary for each term.

## LEARNINGS

It is of course also important to reflect on the impact that the project has had on our own students, and what refinements and developments can be made. The boys have met new challenges – they've discovered that trying to engage and maintain the attention of a three year-old is not quite as easy as they may have originally thought, and it has become clear that repertoire choice is important. The boys have learned new skills and tricks involved in communicating with a responsive but not always predictable audience. Interestingly, the boys themselves were keen to maintain that these concerts were truly that – an opportunity to perform in front of a younger audience in a concert setting (however informal or noisy), rather than just entertaining childcare for half an hour.

### Early practical refinements:

- Too much chat between musical items meant a loss of concentration and interest.
- Be careful not to start the concert with too lively a warm-up – early experience showed it made it tricky to settle the children afterwards!
- Overly long musical items and too much of the same thing resulted in wandering attentions.
- Variety is key – different instruments, musical styles and different combinations (duet, trio, solo) are required.
- 30 minutes is long enough.
- Consider some form of practical activity for the children during the concert which would keep them busy but still engaged in the music. e.g Can they draw the instruments?

## FINAL THOUGHTS

The most effective and impactful tool has been this cadre of boys who are engagement-minded and willing to take a risk. The synergy of the two projects under the boys' stewardship has been very interesting and exciting to watch, and has given the projects an added dimension of energy and enthusiasm. It's also proved that projects, in their early stages, don't have to involve huge numbers of people or be in themselves innovative – some boys making some music with or for children in the local community has worked well, ...and has given our students the opportunity to take a lead and also take a chance.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

- Wider engagement with the local community.
- Option for 'workshop' style sessions that actively involve and engage the children for half an hour.
- Marrying up the two strands of boy involvement in the Community Engagement Projects. Encouraging more children from the link primary schools to come to the concerts. This may also lead to those primary school children themselves performing in one of the concerts. The workshops that take place weekly on a Monday afternoon could be in preparation for a performance opportunity in a Sunday concert.

### Ed Yeo

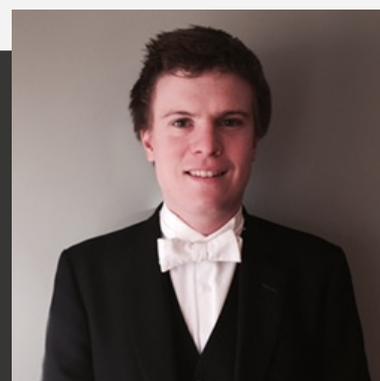
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## BIOGRAPHY

### Ed Yeo

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Ed Yeo studied Music at the University of Durham where he was also a choral scholar in the Cathedral Choir. He taught in Oxford for two years and has been on the full-time Music staff at Eton since 2012, where amongst other responsibilities he co-ordinates the musical outreach and partnerships projects.



Taken from the publication:

**ALL TOGETHER NOW...**

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