

# ArtsProfessional

Issue 176 | 25 August 2008

www.artspromotional.co.uk

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Brent Junior Choir  
(Photo: Nadia Attura for Brent Council)



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ISSN 1474-385X



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Issue 176  
£4.25

ACE public engagement plan could affect RFOs' funding agreements and artistic policies.

## Drive for public involvement

Strategies for increasing audience engagement and making the arts more relevant to current and potential audiences will be included in Arts Council England (ACE) funding agreements from 2009/10, according to a document to be published by ACE this autumn. 'Public Engagement in the Arts - Arts Council England's Role 2008-11' has been "developed as a tool for Arts Council staff to be used as background guidance" an ACE spokesperson said. The document reveals ACE's intention to increase engagement in both live and online events, and in policy development and decision-making, involving "a wider range of voices, including artists, arts professionals and members of the public, in our organisation".

ACE will expect organisations it funds to "share in [its] mission to increase quality and engagement", and outlines issues for dialogue between Regularly Funded Organisations (RFOs) and lead officers. These include understanding geographic and demographic barriers, assessing the organisations' audience development needs, engagement with local authority targets and involving children and young people in key initiatives including Find Your Talent and Young People's Arts Awards. ACE believes that service, umbrella and networking organisations should look at their customer base and consider the diversity of the artists and organisations they currently work with. Organisations focusing on innovation and risk may be allowed to set audience targets which show no growth.

The document implies that audiences should have more influence over RFOs' activities. It asserts that an organisation should plan how it wishes to broaden the base of those engaging with it, and states, "an organisation that does receive meaningful feedback about the depth of engagement of its audience/ participant base will need to put measures in place to understand the impact of its work on different elements of its audience and alter its artistic policy accordingly." However, an

**ACE will expect RFOs to share in its mission to increase quality and engagement**

ACE spokesperson told AP that "this is not about audiences leading artistic direction". Funding agreements for 2009/10 will include audience and participation targets and "steps to further understand the impact and relevance of the organisation's artistic programme, if required, and/or agreed steps to make the organisation's product relevant to its current and potential audience". A tool for measuring audience engagement will be developed, drawing on experiences of other sectors such as broadcasting.

ACE also plans a nationwide marketing, media and broadcast campaign "to encourage the broadest range of people... to enjoy artistic experiences". It will aim to change the way a significant section of the nation thinks and feels about the arts and will encompass a national arts brand to "bring everyone together", a TV, radio and multi-media "big bang of awareness", an 'arts hub' web portal and a co-ordinated programme of high profile and high quality arts activities under the new brand. ACE will appoint an agency to carry out the campaign, which will have an annual budget of £1.5m, by November. ACE told AP that "the marketing and design agency roster will look after marketing for the whole organisation, achieving economies of scale and ensuring consistent communication."



Photo: Diversions Dance Company, photographer: Roy Campbell-Moore

In a keynote speech at the National Eisteddfod in Cardiff, Alun Ffred Jones, the recently-appointed Minister for Heritage in Wales, has set out his vision for Culture and the Arts, emphasising the need to "prioritise our work and our expenditure to maintain excellence" in the face of tightening financial constraints. His speech referred to the recent announcement of the list of 'Beacon companies' in Wales that will benefit from a £4.5m 'merit pot' created by the Welsh Assembly Government to reward excellence and innovation over the next three years. From 69 applications for Beacon company status, 22 organisations of different scales and artforms have been successful. Awards range from £25,000 to £140,000, with Diversions Dance Company (pictured) and Welsh National Opera gaining the highest awards. The Minister added, "I will wish to see the fruits of these decisions before gauging if the fund is working effectively, or if any change is required in its size and objectives."

## Bullying

**Sergio López Figueroa's** project wasn't originally about bullying, but the lessons of the past proved highly relevant to young people's lives today.

# Unseen voices...

Developing new work in collaboration requires a combination of trust and risk. Any interdisciplinary learning art project aiming to tackle uncomfortable issues in new ways risks some degree of ambiguity and complexity: outcomes may be unpredictable. Unseen Voices was a project starting from these aspirational principles, because underneath there was a sense of purpose. We started with lots of questions. What is the real impact of a school-based project in the community? How can we tackle difficult issues using the arts? How do young people deal with discrimination, hatred, human rights abuse or gang violence? What happens when we bring these questions, in the form of a live performance, to venues?

'Unseen Voices' was an experiential learning and outreach project developed in partnership with Brent Council for Holocaust Memorial Day. The subject of the project was the rebuilding of people's lives after the Second World War and the Holocaust, and the real story of 10,000 children refugees of the Kindertransport. The challenge was how to use original documentary film archives, digitised clips and photographs from 1940s to allow students to create a narrative that would engage them and the audiences

emotionally, culturally and intellectually. We had to re-think, re-use and re-cycle to question all the time what is true and what is false, with all the shades in between. Everybody in the class connected with the story of separation and survival. By doing so we brought the emotional attachment that engaged students on a debate as well as creative participation.

Following a visit to the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition, interactive talks by Anne Frank Trust, a meeting with a survivor and a series of intensive research, editing, music composition and music workshops, we created a performance of live original music to a new digital silent film made by secondary music students from Preston Manor High School. A DVD of four documentaries and further resources was distributed to 100 schools in the Borough.

Bullying in schools and the workplace is a consequence of a culture of competitiveness, individualism and hidden expressions of racism. Bullying was not in the original agenda of our project. However, issues of cultural, religious, sexual discrimination were present throughout. Gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses and homosexuals were also victims of the Holocaust alongside the six millions

Jews. Sometimes it is easier to deal with internal local issues when we make an act of displacement on time and space. The whole exercise of looking back to the Nazi laws and the representation of the Holocaust on film brought out a healthy debate. The importance of remembrance was not an act of nostalgia but a way to relate past and present to question the future.

Unfortunately issues such as bullying, genocides and violence are still relevant today.

The final performance took place at Brent Town Hall with the participation of Brent Junior Choir. Young children walked into the stage singing covering their mouths with lollipops showing various signs that identified the whole spectrum of victims of the Holocaust. They represented the unseen voices of victims and survivors. Maybe the only question to ask us is simply... why? ■

*Sergio López Figueroa is the Director of Big Bang Lab, a cultural-social enterprise that creates and delivers outreach projects and cutting edge productions combining original music with archive and silent films.*

*w: [www.bigbang-lab.com](http://www.bigbang-lab.com);  
[www.unseenvoices.org](http://www.unseenvoices.org)*

## Job Ladder

ArtsProfessional reveals the career paths of the sector's senior managers.



**Nick Giles**

### **Director, The Corn Exchange & New Greenham Arts (January 2008–present)**

The Corn Exchange was a really exciting (not to mention daunting) opportunity, and one which meant I could combine programming with executive management. The venue has a great reputation (built fantastically by my predecessor Martin Sutherland), not just for an interesting presented programme of new theatre, dance, music and film, but also for nurturing artists and new work. It was this latter part of the work that particularly appealed to me, and I am excited about continuing with our new 'Evolve' programme. It's also great to be back into a mixed programme.

### **Deputy Director, Oxford Playhouse (2005–2007)**

I had admired the Playhouse for many years, and as I come from just outside Oxford, it was lovely to return to the area. The quality of the programme at the theatre – especially the international work – and involvement with the in-house producing activity were key for me. It was great to move to a purely theatre environment and Tish Francis was great to work for – an inspiring example of how a venue can be imbued with the warmth and passion of its Director. A very happy two and a half years.

### **Chair, Hextable Dance (2006–present)**

I was originally a project consultant and then an inaugural trustee, working with the late Richard Whistler, who became a great friend. I took over as Chair

in 2006, formally establishing the Trust and helping to lead the next stage of the organisation's development. It's been a labour of love – and a steep learning curve!

### **Executive Director, iF Festival (2002–2005)**

The Isleworth Festival was a contemporary music event I got involved with as a volunteer in 1998, eventually becoming Executive Director in 2002. I'm a music graduate and one-time aspiring composer, so it was good to work with Colin Riley, who was a Director and with whom I studied composition. Both of us share a passion for expanding new music beyond what can seem narrow confines.

### **Centre Manager/Centre Director, Riverside Studios (2000–2005)**

Riverside was such a great venue – I loved the energy that came from the mix of work, including TV. My role was very broad general management and it challenged and excited me constantly – no two days felt the same. The experience of working with companies like Complicité and The Wooster Group will stay with me throughout my career.

### **Manager, Spero Communications (1999–2000)**

A useful stepping-stone between the commercial sector (I trained as a Manager for Marks & Spencer), and the arts. The agency was involved in a number of cultural projects and provided a great introduction to innovative arts sponsorship.