



Making Music London

Question Time No.2 – 6Oct09 at London's Living Room, City Hall

MEETING NOTES

Panel

Peter Lawson, MM Board member and meeting chair
Heather Tomala, MM London Development Officer
Matt Fretton, guest speaker

Attendance

There were 19 groups represented here: 11 choirs / vocal groups, 8 orchestras / instrumental groups, 0 music clubs.

Guest speaker session: Matt Fretton, artist manager and *This Isn't For You* concert promoter

Matt began with the reasons behind his inspiration to set up *This Isn't For You*, a series of concerts which challenge the traditional format and content of many classical events. He wanted to:

- encourage younger people to enjoy classical music.
- use presentation to solve the problem of dwindling audiences.
- remove the sense of awkwardness an audience feels, e.g. what to wear, when to clap.
- maintain a high standard of programming.

This led into an interesting group discussion, including the following questions and suggestions:

- using a carrot to attract audiences, e.g. a 'classics' programme with a guest conductor
- making players / singers available to talk to audience members, especially younger ones, in the interval and/or after the event
- investigating whether audience levels for smaller community orchestras show better support than for groups which people would have to travel a long way to see
- questioning why classical music neither features more prominently in the press compared to pop, folk, rock, Glastonbury Festival etc., nor 'sells' well generally
- recognising that large proportions of audiences for amateur groups tend to know someone performing and/or turn up because of a piece that they know and like
- considering tapping into the popularity of film music

The subsequent Q&A session touched on the essence of Question Time, with members raising problems, possible solutions and other ideas regarding concert format.

PROBLEMS

- finding 'neutral' spaces in which to perform, esp non church venues, in central London
- opening up, or simply discovering, new or lesser known venues
- non-affordability of music hire costs, especially film music (see suggestion above)

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

- progressing to give potential audiences information in the way they would like to receive it, e.g. using Facebook, Twitter, etc.
- adding educational material to a group's website

- using theatrical elements in concerts, e.g. lighting, multimedia projections, positioning of performers – some pieces lend themselves better to this than others so thoughtful programming is needed
- partnering with a charity to bring in new people because of that charity, whilst giving the group more publicity
- offering an opportunity for older people to return to or try music for the first time as participants
- programming classical music within festivals with a wider remit e.g. Edinburgh, Glastonbury, to catch people unawares with a small sample and hopefully draw them in

Making Music London Question Time and discussion

This session allowed time for specific questions regarding Making Music London, and represented a chance to ask Heather Tomala for answers on behalf of the London's Development Officer Team, as well as the opportunity for members to confer and discuss as a whole group.

ISSUES DISCUSSED in addition to venues and music hire costs already mentioned above

- possibility of MM funding the cost of purchasing sheet music for a community choir

MM has no funds to distribute and more creative means are necessary, such as: MM sheet music exchange scheme, or for individual copies of single pieces and more unusual repertoire it may be necessary to put together a project requiring external funding and budget for sheet music as a component cost; purchase of equipment / materials is very difficult to fund alone; London Regional Development Officers can help groups construct such project funding applications to external sources.

- venues, including possibility of making a directory available on the London website

A comprehensive directory would be impossible but there has been such a directory run by London RDOs for a couple of years and available to member groups. Very detailed research has been done into several London venues this Summer by a volunteer, also available on request. RDOs can upload this to the London website for ease of access.

- websites

First of all, there was much confusion over *which* website. There are two:

- Making Music national – www.makingmusic.org.uk for general membership information, opportunities, award schemes, members' area, etc.
- Making Music London – www.makingmusiclondon.com which lists London's member groups, helps people find them to join or watch perform, MM London awards, non-MM events or opportunities of interest to London groups, downloadable London Harmony magazine, etc.

- facilitating members posting comments re. venues and other subjects on London website

A chat facility currently exists on MM London website but is poorly used. RDOs will consider trying to get site redesigned to accommodate a posting facility although this likely comes with the need for moderation / policing. MM London has a Facebook page which may provide a temporary solution.

- improving the accessibility of information available on both websites re. MM services, etc.

It was agreed by the majority that there is much on offer from MM that members simply don't know about and/or cannot find. Altering the national website is out of MM London's power although there are ongoing discussions about its design and features. However, this is only half the story – it emerged that the MM rep in many cases was not fulfilling their very important role of distributing information which arrives with them as the principal point of contact.

- disappearance of Players & Singers List from MM London website

This has been semi-permanently removed due to the lack of data updating taking place – member groups sourcing extra players & singers from the List and finding that many of them had changed contact details, no longer wanted to be contacted, moved away, etc., and therefore the List was beginning to waste more time than it saved. Additionally it was including inappropriate 'adverts' from people selling themselves as professional musicians, which was never its intended purpose.

The List was formerly run by a volunteer, who would cut and paste information from e-mails received to post on the site. It was considered in the past to change the system to allow individuals to submit information directly to the site, but once again this would require a moderator, and it is questionable whether the extra workload which would fall to RDOs would benefit many member groups. Any group looking for extra personnel is welcome to contact their RDOs who would be happy to post a news item on the website in an appropriate place.

- changes to Concert Diary on London website and 10% 'charge' to use We Got Tickets

The Concert Diary has in fact become more efficient. There was little point in continuing the London Harmony listing per se – who specifically looks for an amateur concert if they don't already know it's happening? With assistance from a volunteer diary compiler, RDOs will now be able to update concerts once a month direct onto the London website, rather than three times per year. In addition, member groups are strongly encouraged to list their events with We Got Tickets, for several reasons:

- it costs nothing to the group, yet listings are duplicated free of charge elsewhere such as concertdiary.com, giving coverage that MM London alone cannot achieve
- there is no penalty or loss if no tickets are sold using this method
- the group need not lose 10% of their standard ticket cost for advertising here, rather a 10% charge be made to the customer for the convenience of using the service

- suggestion to set up working parties of groups in a similar area or with similar issues

This form of 'cluster' working has been tried in other regions. London RDOs decided against it because they believed it must be need driven, i.e. there should not be a push to make, for example, all treasurers in North London meet regularly, unless they wanted to and had specific reasons for doing so. RDOs would, however, by all means offer support to any groups that did want to form, organise and administrate themselves yet need extra advice every so often. It was suggested that a group like this could discuss marketing, new audiences, community engagement, and maybe even club together to buy equipment which they could then share.

- request to set up a particular meeting of more than one member group

RDOs are very happy to help with this, can offer MM's office in Shoreditch as a free venue, or will help to look for an alternative if this is inconvenient, and at least one RDO will attend, minute and support a meeting – in effect, be the secretary. It is possible to use e-mail technology to invite other locals on behalf of the group(s) instigating the meeting and a notice also could be posted on the London

website. The ongoing running of a working party like this must then fall to its members, with support from MM London as and when needed.

- Gift Aid

A member group recommended becoming a charity and registering for Gift Aid, currently worth 28p per pound. They found it a relatively easy process with help from MM and the Charity Commission, although it can be difficult to interpret the Inland Revenue's guidance with regard to subscriptions.

- commissioning of new music to be shared amongst choirs

MM has indeed done this before, the two most recent pieces being Peter Maxwell Davies' *The Kestrel Road* and David Bedford's *The Soft Stars that Shine at Night*. Choirs bought into the commission and the right to perform it. While Maxwell Davies' piece was very popular, take-up for the Bedford was poor and plants a doubt in this scheme because MM has to risk covering any financial shortfall. As we approach MM's 75th birthday, a similar idea has been suggested although as yet nothing is confirmed.

It was also suggested to investigate using the BBC to help source new pieces which could be given their second performance.

- more follow-up needed for composers winning the MM Composers Award

Although it was nice to win this Award, this seemed to be the end of the story and there was very little follow-up afterwards. Winning composers could possibly be promoted to other groups.

- importance of MM rep and shortcomings of this system

Information is fed from MM through the MM rep. Increasingly MM contacts additional people depending on the circumstances, which can include chair, treasurer, secretary and musical director, but the MM rep remains the principal point of contact between MM and its member groups. If committee members feel that they don't receive enough information, we recommend that they first ensure that their MM rep is in a position to circulate everything quickly, and also explore adding further officers to the MM circulation list as above. Several groups realised that they may need to change their MM rep to a more appropriate person. After the meeting several people supplied new or additional contact details for their group.

- making better use of London RDOs Heather and Tom

Part of the RDOs' role is to serve the London membership. If a group cannot find information they are looking for, or do not know whether or not it exists, they should not suffer in silence but contact their RDOs. Heather and Tom work 2 days each per week for MM and are both successful professional performers and musical directors away from the office, and therefore understand first-hand many of the problems faced by MM's member groups because they experience the same situations themselves. They have a large number of contacts amongst other music and arts charities, organisations and departments, so if they can't advise on a problem themselves they will probably know someone else who can.

HT, 12Oct09

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