

BATTERSEA ARTS CENTRE

The Battersea Tech Beat Orchestra

THE DELIVERY ORGANISATIONS



Battersea Arts Centre (BAC) is a theatre and arts centre based in Battersea, with a mission to "invent the future of theatre". The centre supports talented emerging artists as they create and develop new ideas which engage audiences. BAC runs a number of activities to increase involvement in its work, including a Young People's Theatre programme, evening classes for adults and a Schools' Participation Programme.

THE PEOPLE

Participants: Sixteen 13-15 year-old pupils from Battersea Technology College (now Battersea Park School), including some of the schools' most disadvantaged young people.

Staff: Liz Moreton (BAC) producer; Jes Sadler (workshop session leader); MC Zani, the 2008 UK beatbox champion (who assisted with workshops); Shlomo (beatbox artist from 'All From The Mouth' and resident artist at the Southbank Centre) was a guest artist and consultant on the Beatbox Academy; two young workshop assistants acted as mentors and supporters.

THE PROJECTS

This project was the means by which BAC delivered the Youth Music Action Zone Singing project at Battersea Technology College, offering training and involvement to young people at risk who wanted to learn more about singing and beatboxing in a six-week after-school club throughout June and July 2008, called the Battersea Tech Beat Orchestra. This project has led to a longer Beatbox Academy being established at BAC with support from Youth Music.



Out of the Beatbox

In May 2007, BAC ran an outreach project called the 'Shlomo Weekender' involving local residents of all ages in singing and beatboxing workshops. During the project, Battersea Technical College (BTC) was identified as a potential setting for this type of work, and BAC ran an outreach session and a teachers' INSET session there, with some pupils joining Shlomo's weekend sessions. The Battersea Tech Beat Orchestra project was then delivered at BTC, by means of a six-week after-school club throughout June and July 2008.

Using the format of an after-school club, pupils were to learn in a familiar environment and come to the sessions straight after curriculum classes without the need for further travel. It also allowed BAC to develop a strong relationship with the school. The project aimed to increase participants' enjoyment of learning and improve their behaviour as well as giving them new musical skills.

Five weeks of workshop sessions were followed in the sixth week by a performance in school assembly. During the sessions, participants learnt techniques in singing, beatboxing, rap and vocal percussion, emphasising the use of pitch, volume and rhythm to create new sounds. They devised their own music as individuals, improvised sequences within groups and sang together in unison as a vocal orchestra. The 16 pupils showed great commitment, and indeed this was reported as "the highest level of commitment to any arts-based extra-curricular activity at the school". Many had special learning needs and all required a high level of supervision delivered by the workshop artists, workshop assistants, project producer and teachers. The final performance involved eight of the participants and included singing in unison merged with beatboxing beats supporting the base line, and individual solos in both disciplines from all performers. The confidence levels of many of the group members had been boosted enormously.

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The participants

BAC's aims through the project were to see: an increase in the participants' enjoyment of learning; an improvement in their behaviour at school; and a participants developing their singing and beatboxing skills. The project was also an opportunity for BAC's staff and artists to work more closely with young people at risk over an extended period of time and create tailored workshops to meet their particular needs.

BAC has created a number of individual case studies which give a flavour of the experience undergone and progress made by some of the participants. The following paragraphs summarise some of them:

Boy A: This pupil showed himself keen to learn and proved to be a confident and fast learner. However, he was often disruptive in school and a series of suspensions from school led to his being unable to take part in all the sessions, and to miss the performance. BAC reported that: "we believe that more sustained involvement with a role model, such as Jes or Shlomo, would make an incredibly positive impact on his consideration for others".

Boy B: This young man also showed immense skill and did a lot of personal practice, but displayed a lot of behavioural difficulties. The artists found that giving him special projects to work on, his behaviour improved. BAC said: "his high level of practice at home meant that he was quickly able to manage different exercises in class and he would have responded well to a greater level of challenge in the group".

Boy C: Having only just arrived at the school, this pupil spoke almost no English. However, the project enabled him to grow in confidence and self-esteem.



Girl D: This very shy girl was *“too anxious to improvise or attempt beatbox techniques during the sessions or group jams”*. She was given lots of pastoral care within the project and was able to perform a solo singing piece in the final show.

The legacy begins

Two participants in the project were twin brothers J and B. B attended the Shlomo weekend and taught the beatboxing techniques to his brother. As well as practising at home, they joined the after-school club *“as two of the most skilled members”*. They took part in all the sessions working closely with Jes to improve and develop their technique, and improving their confidence alongside the improvement in ability. BAC invited them to perform

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at a local feeder school – Westbridge Primary – a week before the final event at BTC. They performed in front of a whole school assembly at the primary school, and created their own piece of music with Jes. The primary children had been learning rap with another BAC artist, and were able to perform with J and B doing backing beats to a rap ‘battle’. BAC reports: *“This was a truly inspiring day, allowing B and J to grow in confidence as they performed to younger children, and exciting the primary pupils about what they could potentially learn in beatboxing at secondary school. Both boys performed confidently in front of their own school assembly and have shown a true commitment to learning through this after-school club”*.

The future

BAC has plans for the future, in particular wanting to establish a long-term academy, with lots of children from different schools taking part on Saturdays. The organisation has developed an outreach programme at secondary schools and youth clubs, which then encourage young people to enrol for a term of Saturday afternoon sessions. BAC is working with Wandsworth’s Children’s Services to identify groups to take part, as well as with the Youth Offending Team to target and identify individual young people most in need. BAC has good contacts with teachers in local secondary schools and is also trying to establish contact with new school partners. Outreach work took place in



February and the academy sessions started in March. The work is funded by Youth Music up until March 2010, but has also benefitted from a private donation from Elizabeth and Reade Griffith, a couple who wanted to support the work.

BAC has also been awarded a Sing Up flagship grant to develop singing and beatboxing projects at primary level, as well as to develop the skills of beatboxers and music leaders working in the classroom. *“It’s a long-term outreach programme which we’ve wanted to achieve for a long time, and Sound Connections has played a really important role in making that happen,”* said Lydia Fraser-Ward, BAC’s Development Manager. There is also an intention to implement the Arts Award as part of the activity of the Beatbox Academy.

Staff development is also on the cards. Two young workshop assistants, both from BME backgrounds, acted as mentors and supporters in the workshop with the young people. One is Conrad Murray, who was on BAC’s youth theatre programme for a while, and who is training to be a workshop leader on Beatbox Academy. The other is Monique Duchen, who has taken part in Youth Theatre projects and done casual work at BAC. *“She was a great female role model, especially with girls”* says Lydia. She is now a workshop assistant on Beatbox Academy.

LESSONS LEARNED

“ Sound Connections can provide more than project funding – support to achieve long term goals. ”

What we would keep or build on

- ▶ The fact it was based on singing and beatboxing challenged the participants and the staff, and was very exciting creatively.
- ▶ The after-school club timetable worked well, though BAC had never done it before with a school setting. It tested commitment levels in participants: the proof that they were enjoying it was observable in the fact that they continued to attend.

What we would change

- ▶ It would be better to create a longer period activity, to enable better engagement with participants and monitor progress more effectively. This is particularly important when working with young people with behavioural problems or poor attendance: for these participants, missing one or two weeks out of six can have a significant impact.

What relationships need to be built

- ▶ BAC would like to continue working with Wandsworth Youth Offending Team.
- ▶ BAC definitely built a stronger relationship with Battersea Park School and the teachers there. The organisation is now carrying out some of its secondary school education work there.
- ▶ BAC is continuing to work with Youth Music and Sing Up.
- ▶ The existing relationship with Wandsworth Music Service was enhanced through the project, including having WMS staff attend the sharing event.

Funded through:



*Written by Sarah Bedell and Catherine Rose.
Research and delivery by Catherine Rose’s Office Ltd. www.catherineroseoffice.co.uk*

Published by Sound Connections © April 2009.