

Musical Rumpus: Children freely exploring music through specially commissioned performances Spitalfields Music



CASE STUDIES

Spitalfields Music, based in East London, is a classical music organization which produces two music festivals a year and a year round Learning & Participation programme. Renowned for commission new music, it places exceptional music making in unexpected places.

Musical Rumpus is a key part of the organization's work: an evolving programme of early years work that started out in 2009 with new-born babies and their families.

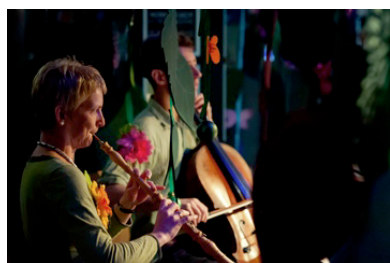


Activities

- Artists/musicians/composers are commissioned to create performance pieces specially for an Early Years audience. In most cases these pieces drawn on existing works (e.g. an opera by Purcell, Monteverdi's madrigals), which are being performed within the festivals.
- Specialist EY music leaders work with festival Musicians
- The pieces are performed to groups of young children (30 -50) in community venues.
- Stage is given over to children: including musical free play (between 15-60 minutes) when children and musicians interact and explore freely – improvising in and around the music, instruments and voices following the 30 minute performance.

Outcomes

- High quality musical experiences for children
- Music organisation develops stronger relations with local community
- Local community (children's centres, parents etc.) develops links with local



- performing arts work
- Growing collection of high-quality repertoire specifically produced for young children
- Shows have gone on to tour with young audiences
- Musicians with new skills to provide participatory experiences with young children

Requirements

- High quality professional artists (usually three instrumentalists/actors and two singers)
- Musicians who are keen to learn about working with young children, even if they haven't done so previously

- A specialist early years music leader, with a good understanding of child development and children's musical play, who can work with children, EY staff, parents and the other professional musicians
- Productions, repertoire and materials specifically produced for young children
- Work with local community (e.g. parents, libraries, Children's Centres, hospitals) to design experiences that will work well for them



Recommendations

- There is no need to dumb down artistic integrity. Musicians should feel confident that they can perform repertoire and act as they would with adult audiences: they don't need to be entertainers but more 'hyper-present' at what they normally do.
- Performers should be encouraged to perform with the children, not at them, this work is not about training obedient audiences of the future.
- We cast our children as a part within the story and ensure that their role is thought through with the same level of care as every other performer.
- * The free-play element is crucial and works best when children are free to play, explore and interact throughout the performance.
- Sometimes you need to establish that there are 'no rules' – e.g. parents might be reluctant to let go of their children to wander around, or to let them talk.
- Make space for magical moments: e.g. a musician with his guitar and a baby with her shakey egg did a spontaneous Hoedown style duet together for 20 minutes!

Background



In 2009 Spitalfields ran two projects for 0-2 year-olds. The first was a partnership with Vital Arts at the Royal London Hospital, working with new parents; the second was a partnership with the local libraries network. Inspired by these, Spitalfields wanted to commission special performance repertoire for very young children. A series of commissions, performances and tours developed: *Blue Butterfly* for under 5s and their parents; *Fairy Queen* for 0-2s with the Gabrieli Consort, Genesis young singers programme of The Sixteen and OAE Experience players; and *Mudlarks Dances* with the Early Opera Company, currently touring Barking and Dagenham libraries and Newham community centres as part of an ACE Strategic Touring award.

More information & Acknowledgements

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