

CASE STUDY: Arts For All

Chamber Music New Zealand and its performance with disabled youth

August 2013

A grant through the Creative New Zealand and Arts Access Aotearoa partnership programme, Arts For All, supported Chamber Music New Zealand to present a music workshop and performance to intellectually disabled children and young adults. Jessica Lightfoot and Victoria Dadd of Chamber Music New Zealand talk to Arts Access Aotearoa about the project; how it developed; the challenges they encountered along the way; and the key elements that made the project a success.

1. Background: about Chamber Music New Zealand

Chamber Music New Zealand is the country's largest presenter of top quality, nationally performed chamber music concerts. Our activities are divided into three strands:

- the Concert Season, showcasing top international and New Zealand artists
- our Regional Concerts, focusing on New Zealand performers
the New Zealand Community Trust Chamber Music Contest, fostering talented young musicians.

Binding together these strands is a strong commitment to New Zealand music and musicians. This has led to many specially commissioned works from New Zealand composers, and to the promotion of New Zealand performers.

We're a not-for-profit organisation and receive major funding from Creative New Zealand.

2. The project: what it is, why you did it and what you wanted to achieve

Chamber Music New Zealand presented a concert for physically and intellectually disabled children and young adults on 24 October in the Wellington Town Hall. The concert was led by Julian Raphael, a community musician based in Wellington, and the Enso String Quartet, an American ensemble touring the country during October and November as part of our Kaleidoscopes Concert Season.

The aim of the concert was to enable the students to experience live music up close; interact with the musicians and their instruments; and appreciate classical music in a welcoming environment.



Arts For All is an Arts Access Aotearoa/Creative New Zealand partnership programme. The aim of this programme is to encourage arts organisations, venues and producers to improve their access to disabled audiences. Download *Arts For All*, published in 2014 by Arts Access Aotearoa, at artsaccess.org.nz or call 04 802 4349 for a hard copy.



In addition, several students from Kimi Ora School were able to participate in the concert alongside Julian and the quartet. Leading up to the concert, the students spent two weeks working with Julian preparing for their performance.

3. The process: developing and implementing the project

The idea for this concert came about in October 2011 and was based around a desire to expand our accessibility to new audiences, demonstrate our inclusive spirit and raise the profile of Chamber Music New Zealand. Getting the Arts For All grant provided the impetus for us to start planning.

- We approached the Enso String Quartet at the end of 2011 to be involved, and they were more than happy to come on board for the project. They have experience working with autistic children in projects similar to ours. This, combined with the fact they were visiting us later in 2012 (with a free day scheduled in Wellington) made them a great fit for our project.
- With Julian Raphael on board, his first task was to make contact with Kimi Ora School and its music therapist Andrew Tutty.
- We started to plan the basic details of the project but it was difficult to know how to proceed or who we should be in touch with beyond the small circle of contacts we already had.
- In August, we approached Art Access Aotearoa and asked for a meeting so we could brainstorm ideas with our colleagues in the Arts For All Wellington Network. Particularly valuable was the feedback we got from the network's disability organisations.
- From there, the planning came much more naturally and we were reassured that we were on the right track.
- We started contacting the schools and community organisations we wanted to invite to the performance; planning the schedule for the day; and communicating Julian's musical ideas to the Enso String Quartet before they came to New Zealand.
- In the two weeks leading up to the concert, Julian and Andrew worked with selected students to devise a work for performance.
- With all of the above in place, it was matter of juggling different aspects of the project and our other work, and ensuring it all happened smoothly in a relaxed and friendly environment.

4. What were the key challenges and how did you overcome them?

This was a new area for the organisation – and for the two of us managing the project. We're well-versed in event management but relatively new to workshops like this that require special accessibility considerations.

Our first major milestone was the Arts Access Aotearoa lunchtime forum held earlier in the year with other members of the Arts For All Wellington Network.

It was a crucial gathering of minds and expertise from across Wellington's cultural and disability spectrum, and gave us practical insights and ideas into how best to do it.

After the forum, we created more targeted roles and achievement milestones, and began holding regular meetings with the rest of the Chamber Music team to maximise our breadth of feedback and insights.

Arts Access Aotearoa and the Ministry of Education were our primary resources for information about accessibility, appropriate contacts in schools and transition groups. Our general approach, the appropriate terminology and target audience all became well-defined with their early help.

- **Marketing:** This involved reaching out to groups and individuals with whom we had no prior experience, nor an established profile. This was one of the most challenging aspects because we didn't have the knowledge of who best to contact and how best to make our invitation known.
- **The budget:** We had little idea of the costs going into the project and had to make it work on a shoestring. We were also very fortunate to receive a venue subsidy from the Wellington City Council for the Town Hall hire. This stretched our funds much further than they might otherwise have reached.
- **Timing:** The concert and the months leading up to it were a really busy time and we were juggling many projects. As October drew nearer, however, we were able to just get on with it, reassured by the feedback we had sought and received early on in the piece.

5. What were the key elements that made the project a success?

The opportunity and decision to work with Julian Raphael proved to be our greatest success. The expertise and experience that he brought to this project was invaluable and we would have been lost without him. Julian, who is the musical director of the Wellington Community Choir, has a rich history of leading workshops and advocating for "arts for all" across the country.

Other notable things that made it such a successful project:

- Working with the Enso String Quartet and welcoming them on board was fantastic. Their experience, openness and flexibility was integral to our success.
- We approached a wide range of potential audience members from eight different schools and young adult transition groups in the Wellington region. By doing this, we achieved a really diverse, inclusive audience.

- More than 200 people attended the concert. We had anticipated an audience of around 100 so this blew our expectations out of the water and created a lot of excitement for the future.

6. If you did it again, would you do anything differently?

Holding the performance in October coincided with a particularly busy time of year for us. If we did it again, our first major consideration would be to choose a month that gave us more time to prepare.

Finding this off-season time and achieving a balance with our other projects is definitely a priority. However, we also need to work in with the schedule of touring artists who have the skills, the time and willingness to take on this project with us. Enso were great!

A major challenge would be to find and secure musicians of a similar calibre to Enso. Alternatively, it would be good to upskill local musicians and build up a pool of musicians able and willing to work in this area. This could also provide the opportunity for multiple workshops around the country on an annual basis.

We would also contact schools and other participants much earlier to allow for maximum reach and attendance. Some of the schools were unable to schedule in the workshop even though they were very enthusiastic about the project.

7. How did you evaluate the project? What did the evaluation show?

We collected surveys from teachers and support staff from all the schools that took part. Results were very favourable, the consensus being that our communication channels had worked well and all parties were sufficiently informed. The flyers we distributed gave all the details of what would happen when, and made it clear that the atmosphere would be very relaxed and informal in the hope that it would spur more people along.

We received a few helpful practical considerations in feedback received from audience members. This included sightline issues, with the quartet and audience on the same level causing some visibility issues, and sound issues.

We have great confidence that future workshop projects like this will build on this initial success, now that we've established communication networks and an elementary understanding of this new and very welcome community.

Examples of feedback:

"I really liked the students being given a chance to perform and share their musical skills with a wider audience." – Andrew Tutty, musical therapist, Kimi Ora School

"I really enjoy the interactive, participatory nature of the concert – especially looking around and seeing the engagement and excitement from the school kids. I liked how welcoming the Chamber music staff were, and I thought the wigs were a great idea." – New Zealand Symphony Orchestra

Five tips for other arts organisations organising a performance/workshop involving people with an intellectual disability

- Plan, plan, plan.
- Discuss your ideas with a wide range of groups and people – particularly the disability sector and other arts organisations.
- Think about the timing of the event. Is it competing with other major activities?
- Don't be afraid to ask questions.
- Make it fun.

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