

# Aiming Higher

Luton

April – July 2015



*'I learnt that if different bands come together it can make a great sound, and that everyone can take part together and sound incredible too.'*

(young musician, Luton Youth Concert Band)

## Evaluation Report

by

Orchestras Live

## Summary

Aiming Higher was a unique collaboration between a diverse range of Luton's young musicians and a team of professional artists from the orchestral genre. Composer John K Miles worked with five separate youth ensembles to create some new variations on the *Carnival Suite*, which he composed the previous year for more than 300 beginner instrumentalists from 19 Primary schools to perform with City of London Sinfonia.

The latest project focussed on advanced ensembles – Luton Youth Jazz Orchestra, Luton Youth Concert Band and Luton Youth Cantores – and on newly formed groups – a steel band at Foxdell Junior School and a group of young people with additional needs using assistive music technologies at Lady Zia Wernher School. John spent time with each group, gathering their ideas and adapting the *Carnival Suite* material into a set of bespoke variations that illustrated the character and capabilities of the young musicians, combined with the orchestral forces of City of London Sinfonia. The new variations were premiered in two live performances at the UK Centre for Carnival Arts for audiences of Primary school groups and the general public.

Outputs from the four-month process were as follows:

- 153 young musicians took part in 16 workshops, 2 rehearsals and 2 concerts
- Approximately 300 children and adults attended the concerts
- 35 young people assisted with filming, photography, lighting and sound at the final events
- 5 young people undertook Arts Award at Bronze level
- A souvenir programme was produced by a young designer at the University of Bedfordshire

Aiming Higher was produced by Orchestras Live in partnership with City of London Sinfonia, The MIX, Luton Music Service, UK Centre for Carnival Arts, Luton Culture and the Royal Opera House Bridge.

*“It has been an amazing experience. To work with a professional orchestra, to be able to put your skills to good use and do something different which we haven't done before is a really interesting thing and I've really enjoyed it. It's been such an inspiring experience. The fact that they're on that level that you've never really seen before, up close, and to be able to work with them and talk to them about it is such an incredible experience. Definitely the whole project has really helped to inspire me and others to pursue a career in professional music, to kind of aim higher, because you know that it's possible, that these people are actually doing it and that it's actually achievable. I think that's the greatest part of it.”* (Young musician, Luton Youth Jazz Orchestra)

## Project Aims

- To encourage more young people in Luton to take up and follow pathways of instrumental tuition, from elementary to advanced levels.
- To introduce new instruments (steel pans, digital instruments, etc.) and genres (Jazz, Afro-Caribbean Carnival, etc.) into the First Time Live style of work with a professional orchestra and composer.
- To embrace young people with additional needs in the creative programme.
- To create and transform music associated with Carnival for a performance event featuring the talents of young people.
- To continue to develop the legacy from First Time Live 2 through the Charanga online learning resource.

## Process

Following the success of Luton First Time Live 2 in 2014 when a large number of Whole Class Ensemble Tuition groups, especially from BME communities, were able to help create new music based on Carnival and perform it with City of London Sinfonia (CLS), there was great enthusiasm amongst the numerous stakeholders to continue this collaborative approach and promote sustained music-making with a broader range of young people in Luton.

The plan for ***Aiming Higher*** was to create some variations on the existing *Carnival Suite*, specifically for more advanced instrumental and vocal ensembles in Luton. These were:

Luton Youth Jazz Orchestra  
Luton Youth Cantores  
Luton Youth Concert Band

Additional participants were a new steel pan band at Foxdell Junior School and a group of young people with additional needs at Lady Zia Wernher School.

In a series of workshops between April and July 2015 composer John K Miles worked with the ensembles, collaboratively developing for each one a variation on material from the *Carnival Suite* which was suitable for their technical ability, including harmony parts in the vocal variation with Cantores.

The Lady Zia group used assistive technology such as Soundbeam 5 and other MIDI triggering devices to control sounds which were combined with the acoustic instruments of CLS players.

The project provided an opportunity to rekindle the use of steel pans which existed in a few schools but were largely dormant, bringing a more traditional Carnival genre into the artistic mix.

Each variation was orchestrated by John so they could be rehearsed by the ensembles in readiness for performances with CLS. The different elements were drawn together for two full rehearsals at the UK Centre for Carnival Arts (UKCCA).

The project culminated in two performances at UKCCA on 17 July. A 28-piece CLS was conducted by Hugh Brunt, with John K Miles helping to direct the groups of young musicians. Each concert opened with a piece of orchestral repertoire performed by CLS, followed by the new variations featuring the youth groups alongside the orchestra.

## Programme

### **SAINT-SAËNS**

**Finale from Carnival of the Animals** CLS

### **JOHN K MILES**

**The Carnival Arrives** Foxdell Junior School Steel Band and CLS

**The Great and the Good** Luton Youth Concert Band and CLS

**Carnival Variations:** CLS

*Theme and five miniature variations  
inspired by traditional carnival characters:*

- Jab Jab
- The Clown
- Sailor Mas
- Dame Lorine
- Pierrot Grenade

**Night Flight to Luton - Direct from Sau Paulo** Luton Youth Jazz Orchestra and CLS

**Together** Luton Youth Cantores and CLS

**Play the Music** Lady Zia Wernher School Digital Band and CLS

The afternoon concert was attended by 107 young people and 6 teachers from 5 schools. The evening concert was attended by approximately 180 adults and young people, mostly connected with the young performers. Both audiences gave a very positive response to the performances

Guests attending the concerts included Sally Rowe, Corporate Director - Children & Learning of Luton Council, and Marie Kirbyshaw, Chief Executive of Luton Culture.

35 students from Luton Sixth Form College were involved in the final rehearsals and performance day at UKCCA. They helped with event management, filming, photography, and technical aspects of lighting and sound, supported by professionals from UKCCA, CLS and Orchestras Live. 5 students achieved Arts Award Bronze accreditation.

Locally-based film maker Colin Fraser was engaged to film the latter stages of the project, resulting in a 10 minute mini-documentary which can be seen on the Orchestras Live website.

A souvenir programme was prepared by a young designer employed by Guildford Street Press, a staff research and student enterprise printing press based in the School of Art & Design at the University of Bedfordshire in Luton. These were signed by John K Miles and sold at the evening performance.

The entire project was managed by the consortium of organisations. From September 2014 periodic planning meetings in Luton were convened by Orchestras Live. The project schedule was co-ordinated largely by CLS. For the first time a Partnership Agreement was written and signed by the key partners, helping to clarify the roles and responsibilities of each organisation. The partnership worked well, with all parties contributing enthusiastically to the plans and practical arrangements. Luton Music Service played a pivotal role in co-ordinating and supporting the different youth ensembles.

Orchestras Live assembled the funding partnership and managed the budget. Artistic costs amounted to nearly £32,000, with the value of 'in kind' contributions estimated at £4,700. Financial support was secured from the Royal Opera House Bridge, Luton Music Hub, Luton Music Service and Orchestras Live.

The project was extremely successful, bringing together a diverse range of young musicians in an orchestral project that was relevant, truly collaborative and of a high artistic quality which had a range of positive outcomes for young people, youth ensembles, schools, artists and the partner organisations.

*'On a personal note it has been a real privilege to be part of this far reaching Orchestras Live project with City of London Sinfonia, Luton Music Hub, Luton schools, Charanga and the rich range of young music groups. It's stood out because of the continuity that has been developed, which has allowed the project to build in depth (and educational effectiveness) over successive years, with a substantial and meaningful legacy. Long may it continue!' (John K Miles)*



## Evaluation of the aims

- **To encourage more young people in Luton to take up and follow pathways of instrumental tuition, from elementary to advanced levels**

The project successfully engaged with 153 young musicians, from beginner steel pan players to the senior musicians of the advanced ensembles. Their enthusiastic involvement both in the creation of material and in its energetic performance was inspirational for young participants at all levels as well as for the young audience members.

The music will remain as a resource for Luton's youth ensembles and schools into the future, forming a unique ladder of instrumental progression developed with young people.

Participants felt the project had given them valuable experiences.

*'The workshops and working with smaller children.'*

*'Working with the professional musicians, gaining knowledge and experiences from them.'*

*'Singing and playing with CLS.'*

*'Being able to hear a professional orchestra play live.'*

*'Working with other groups / ensembles.'*

*'Listening and playing the music (listening to the solos) and meeting John and the CLS team.'*

*'Learning together.'*

*'Playing different types of music.'*

*'Working with an orchestra from London'*

*'Working with John K Miles in the workshops, and writing bits of the songs with him.'*

*'I think it was an amazing opportunity and I'm glad I took part in the project.'*

Most participants felt the structure of the project had been effective, although some would have liked more time together with City of London Sinfonia.

*'Yes it was well organised and I felt confident in the concert.'*

*'Could have been more time with the orchestra.'*

*'The type of music was new and different, and we had plenty of time to practise with John but not enough with the CLS.'*

100% of the respondent participants said they enjoyed the project. There were just a few reservations.

*'Long wait between playing.'*

*'Performance space was so uncomfortably warm.'*

*'Some of the parts could've been more technically challenging.'*

Key partners felt there were positive outcomes around the focus on progression.

*'The different tiers of experience involved in the project created a visible pathway between beginner and professional musicians. This was overtly on display, not only to beginner, intermediate and advanced participants, but also to the primary school aged audience in the afternoon concert. All the participants gained a lot from observing the gold standard of musicianship displayed by CLS, whilst having the opportunity to display their own skills in the best possible light by having a bespoke piece of music written for their own particular ensemble.'* (John K Miles)

*'This type of project always encourages people to continue – they are always looking for more opportunities to perform, and to play alongside CLS is a new experience for most of the young people.'* (Kerry Watson, Interim Manager, Luton Music Service)

*'What a fantastic opportunity for our students, and I am hoping to be able to encourage them to play instruments next year. One of them has already expressed an interest in continuing violin from her Wider Opps this year, and hopefully, the fact that she has seen violinists playing, up close, in an orchestra, will encourage this.'*  
(Cathy Mitchell, Head of Music, Foxdell Junior School)

*'The concert day had a fantastic atmosphere, and it was great to see that all the different groups were excited to come together to perform, celebrate and share a love of music. The pathways from beginner musician to professional were really clear on the concert day which was central to the success of the project, but one of the other exciting things was seeing the mutual respect and admiration that ran between all the performers no matter the skill level. The rehearsal evening was invaluable; bringing together the young performers and CLS musicians to rehearse really helped to create a bond before the pressure of the performance day. I would be keen to explore the side-to-side approach that naturally started occurring through the rehearsal and concerts, which could be a really exciting feature for a future project.'*  
(Pia Luck, Education Projects Co-ordinator, City of London Sinfonia)



*'...I was also impressed with the local bands and choir. The lead trumpet was outstanding!' (Martin Lawrence, French Horn, City of London Sinfonia)*

- **To introduce new instruments (steel pans, digital instruments, etc.) and genres (Jazz, Afro-Caribbean Carnival, etc.) into the First Time Live style of work with a professional orchestra and composer**

A priority for UKCCA was to include more traditional Carnival genres in the process and sound world of the project. Behind this was the aspiration to rekindle and cultivate the playing of steel pans in Luton schools. A youth steel band was successfully integrated into the new piece whilst helping to establish a regular lunchtime steel pan workshop at Foxdell Junior School, supported by a Luton Music Service percussion tutor.

*'Aiming Higher offered a chance to extend the learning gained on "First Time Live 2" by exploring the carnival theme within different styles of music and with students from a range of abilities.*

*It was particularly important for UKCCA that the Steel orchestra was included to reflect the diversity of musical instruments and forms that exists within the world of Carnival and to show that these can be used within a classical concert.*

*As a direct result of working within the Aiming Higher partnership, Luton schools will be given the opportunity to perform live at the 40th anniversary of Luton Carnival in 2016, including a schools Samba band, a schools Steel orchestra and a schools Jazz band.*

*A steel pan teacher has been found, Farley Junior School has acquired a set of steel instruments and lessons are being planned. This will be a great legacy from Aiming Higher as the children will perform live to over 25,000 people, placing their musical learning and experience within a live Carnival context.*

*It was also wonderful to see our building filled with young people performing within an inspiring arts venue.’ (Clary Salandy, Associate Artistic Director, UKCCA)*

*‘The commission aspect of the project provided an opportunity for participants to input into the development of the compositions. It created a context where diverse genres, traditions and bespoke instruments could inform the music. Because the music was carefully tailored to each ensemble (of varying styles and levels of experience) the participants could shine, whilst also being challenged, performing alongside a professional orchestra.’ (John K Miles)*



*‘Our children have really enjoyed working with their steel pan teacher, and the Orchestras Live team, to be part of the summer concert. The whole experience - from learning their part, to rehearsing with John K Miles and a film crew, to meeting Luton youth orchestras and vocalists, and the City of London Sinfonia - was very exciting for them and was a wonderful opportunity to be part of the musicians' world of performance. It has been an inspiration for them on their musical journey.’  
(Cathy Mitchell, Head of Music, Foxdell Junior School)*

- **To embrace young people with additional needs in the creative programme**

Building on the previous work by Drake Music at Lady Zia Wernher School, a group of students with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities and Physical Disabilities were successfully involved in the creative process. Additional workshops were organised to give John K Miles the time required to develop an appropriate way of working and enable the participants to feel comfortable about making and controlling sounds in the context of a wider piece. 13 young people and care staff took part in the afternoon performance, where their amazing contributions added a unique and moving dimension to the final variation. Due to their profound disabilities and needs they were unable to take part in the evening concert, and instead John gave a verbal description to the audience about how they had been involved.

*'The Lady Zia Digital Band ended up being central to the Finale of the concert. Their piece became the vehicle to bring all the ensembles (beginner to professional) together in a celebration of the diversity of music making on offer through Luton Music Hub.'*  
(John K Miles)



Some of the young musicians from the other ensembles found this aspect of the project especially rewarding.

*'[I most enjoyed] being and performing with Lady Zia pupils.'* (Cantores musician)

*'[I liked] doing the project for the less fortunate, so the joint work with Lady Zia was good and shows how the community can unite by the power of music.'* (LYJO musician)

*'It was wonderful to see the faces of our students light up as they listened, and they also commented on Lady Zia Wernher's children, and how impressed they were to see them perform.'* (Cathy Mitchell, Head of Music, Foxdell Junior School)



- **To create and transform music associated with Carnival for a performance event featuring the talents of young people**

John K Miles utilised his original *Carnival Suite* in a range of ways – from a very similar version of the vocal movement which was sung by all participants, to the use of fragments, rhythms and harmonies to subtly inform the new variations. Members of each young ensemble contributed their own musical ideas during the workshops, which became embedded in the new material or influenced the composer in his writing. Most of the movements saw certain young instrumentalists or vocalists having solos, and the LYJO movement contained sections of live improvisation in keeping with the jazz tradition. The central part of the piece was a set of five short variations for CLS alone, inspired by traditional Carnival characters, giving an opportunity to showcase the sonic palette and virtuosity of a professional orchestra.

*'All the music was created using the traditional Brazilian rhythm Afoxe as a starting point, which although not explicitly associated with Carnival, has many parallels with Samba and Calypso. Lyrically all the words were directly inspired by Carnival and community celebrations. Because the music also responded to the generic styles of the different ensembles involved (Chamber Orchestra, Jazz Band, Concert Band, Choir, Steel Pans, Digital Orchestra) the music was transformed into something (stylistically) much broader. It showcased the talents of all the participants as a central feature of the final outcome.'* (John K Miles)

*'I think that the pieces that John has written are amazing and I would love to work with him and the CLS team again.'* (Cantores musician)

*'[I liked] how we could talk directly to the composer of the pieces we were playing.'* (LYCB musician)

*'I thought it was an excellent concept and it was so good to hear such high quality music making from the kids. The music we performed was just right, well organised and the objectives seemed clear.'* (Paul Archibald, Trumpet, City of London Sinfonia)

*'John K Miles was as always amazing at bringing people and music together throughout the project. John's commissions were carefully tailored to match yet also stretch the level and personality of each group, whilst also resulting in a balanced and exciting concert programme!'* (Pia Luck, Education Projects Co-ordinator, City of London Sinfonia)

- **To continue to develop the legacy from First Time Live 2 through the Charanga online learning resource**

Charanga remained involved in the planning of this latest project, which coincided with their launch of a package of online resources based on the *Carnival Suite* from First Time Live 2. This resource will underpin at least one orchestral Carnival project in another part of the country.

*'The concert used two of the original Carnival Suite pieces in the concert (now published by Charanga and Music Sales) and all the new music was developed as further variations of the original suite (also on offer to Charanga should they choose to publish). The legacy for learning outcomes is significant with a lot of bespoke ensemble music written for future generations to play, and with Charanga's involvement there is a lasting legacy of a nationwide interactive online resource for whole class instrumental music making, listening and appraisal, and singing with an orchestra.'* (John K Miles)

## **Outcomes for the young musicians**

Participants said they learned and gained a range of things through the project.

- Teamwork with other bands of musicians
- Confidence in singing with an orchestra
- Experience of new rhythms and new styles of music
- Different compositional techniques and methods
- Improved instrumental technique (from interaction with CLS players)
- Rehearsal etiquette
- How to have fun!

*'I learnt that if different bands come together it can make a great sound, and that everyone can take part together and sound incredible too.'* (LYCB musician)

The project inspired some participants to want to pursue music in the future.

- Composing their own music
- Work with young people through music
- A career in a professional orchestra

- Join a voluntary music band
- Learn a new instrument
- Continue to study music at a higher level

*'[I would like to] join an awesome orchestra, if ever possible.'* (LYCB musician)

For some participants the project changed their attitude towards orchestral music:

*'It has shown me how interesting it is.'*

*'I like hearing how all the pieces fit together.'*

*'It's made me like jazz.'*

*'I realised that it sounds good when you have all the instruments together.'*

*'Yes it is definitely not as boring.'*

*'It can combine in all sorts of ways and sound good.'*

*'I like listening to more orchestral music now because I find it more fascinating to watch and actually listen to it rather than just have it on as background music when in class.'*

*'It has changed my view about strings.'*

*'I already appreciated it. If anything, I just respect the professionalism of the players more now.'*

## **Outcomes for Luton Music Service and The MIX**

- Advanced young players and singers targeted, having a unique opportunity to help with the creative process that led to a combined performance
- Core roles of The MIX fulfilled, especially giving young people the opportunity to play to a very high standard in a performance venue with professional players, whilst also contributing to other core and extension roles including singing
- A significant legacy of written music (and online resources) established for the ensembles and whole class instrumental teaching at Luton Music Hub
- Promotion and exposure of orchestral music to a diverse group of young people in Luton
- Visible pathways to orchestral music-making and access to world class professional musicians for young musicians in Luton
- Generic musical styles defragmented, connecting classical orchestral music with a range of different genres
- Meaningful peer learning, inspiration and skills sharing through a single project bringing together a diverse range of experience, needs and abilities
- Relationship deepened between Luton Music Hub, Orchestras Live and CLS, directly impacting on the ongoing experience of young musicians in Luton

*'The feedback on this project has been overwhelmingly positive from our staff, and we are all keen to work with Orchestras Live again next year!'*

(Kerry Watson, Interim Manager, Luton Music Service)

## Issues and learning points

The Lady Zia Digital Band could have benefitted from more time in terms of planning and workshops. To address this it might be beneficial for any future project to have a longer planning period, with the appropriate resources already in place.

The performance day coincided with Eid which meant some students involved in workshops at Foxdell Junior School could not take part in the concerts.

More schools could have attended the afternoon performance, which would have made a bigger contribution to recruitment for the instrumental offer made by Luton Music Hub, as well as potentially introducing orchestral music to greater new audiences.

It was intended that Luton Culture would support Arts Award with the young participants. However, staff at Lady Zia Wernher School did not wish to undertake this process with their profoundly disabled students, and the students involved in the steel pan group at Foxdell Junior School did not meet regularly enough for the Arts Award process to be viable. A number of students at Luton Sixth Form College did undertake Arts Award Bronze through their involvement in the project, facilitated by Luton Music Service.

## Legacy plans

Luton Music Service is keen to work with Orchestras Live and CLS on a new project with a focus on orchestral playing – giving Key Stage 2 instrumental players the opportunity to experience and take part in a large scale event with a professional orchestra (possibly related to the national BBC Ten Pieces scheme). This may well involve a new commission for young musicians to sit next to the orchestral musicians and perform together. Orchestras Live has committed partnership funding for such a project, and planning discussions will begin in autumn 2015 with a view to work happening in spring/summer 2016.

It is hoped a separate orchestral strand direct with UKCCA can continue through Creative People & Places Luton, with a vision to work with communities in different parts of the Borough, linked to the Carnival theme and events.

UKCCA will build on Aiming Higher by developing steel pan bands in an increasing number of Luton schools. Many young musicians will be invited to take part in the 40th anniversary Luton Carnival in 2016, performing live to more than 25,000 people. John K Miles' *Carnival Suite* song could also feature in the main Carnival street procession.

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All photos by Colin Fraser 