

Sage Gateshead's amateur turns commentator

A GROUP of GCSE and A-Level students in the north east of England have had their experience of a full orchestral rehearsal enhanced by a novel use of new technology. Clarence Adoo, education animateur at The Sage Gateshead, sat at the side of the stage and whispered brief explanations of what was happening as the Northern Sinfonia rehearsed a programme including Mozart's Symphony No 41, 'Jupiter' with conductor Garry Walker. Special radio-linked headsets allowed the students to hear both the rehearsal and the commentary without disturbing the musicians, borrowing the technology that is used for audio description.

The 14 students, from Eaglescliffe School sixth form, were studying the Jupiter Symphony as one of their set works. 'I gave a

live commentary so that, for example, when nothing was happening I could explain how the conductor was trying to achieve balance,' explained Adoo. 'I found it important not to speak the whole time, as the magic of the experience I think comes through hearing the wonderful sound in a wonderful acoustic.'

The students were sitting behind the orchestra on the main stage of The Sage Gateshead, as close as two feet from the players, gaining immediate experience of the rehearsal process. 'At one point the cello soloist [Guy Johnston in the Schumann Cello Concerto] wanted to move back to feel more part of the orchestra,' said Adoo. 'I was able to explain what was happening and why.'

'In the fugue sections of the Mozart the students could see and feel the fugue being

passed around within the orchestra. I could also explain how the players have to memorise just how loud they play at each section, so that although they may have looked casual and relaxed they were actually taking it all on board in a very detailed way.'

There were enough headsets for about half the students so they had to be passed back and forth. 'This ended up being quite a good thing,' said Adoo, 'as they had more chance to listen to what was happening.'

A proportion of the students will be progressing to train as professional performers and gained an invaluable insight into life as a working orchestral musician. The session added an extra dimension to their experience of the evening concert.

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KEVIN STEPHENS

Southampton students pass on their skills

MUSIC STUDENTS at the University of Southampton have led an education project in a number of the city's schools, helping them to learn more about the orchestra and how the sound is created.

The project involved members of the Southampton University Symphony Orchestra (SUSO), with support from the university's music department and the Turner Sims Concert Hall, an internationally-respected venue based on campus. The students visited three schools in their local area, performing to over 400 school children. Composition students in the music department penned music specially arranged for the project, and members of SUSO took assemblies at the schools, talking to young students about music and giving some of them the opportunity to have a go at conducting.

Kat Hattersley, a third-year music student was the driving force behind the project. She went into the schools in advance of the main



performance workshops to talk to the children about what they knew already about classical music and what they would like to hear. She also acted as compère on the day, introducing the pieces and fielding questions from the children.

Dr Andrew Pinnock, head of music at the university, stressed that the most important achievement of the project is 'for the children to see the musicians working together and to experience a big orchestral sound. Small groups

of professional musicians visit schools fairly regularly, but it's rare to get a whole orchestra playing in a school hall. We hope it will encourage children to go to more performances.' In respect of how the students coped with the project, Pinnock felt that 'different students reacted in different ways, but I've been hugely impressed with their enthusiasm, professionalism and open-mindedness.'

The project was funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and Southampton University Student Union Community Volunteering Projects Fund. It is part of the Creative Campus Initiative, which supports the London Olympic Games 2012 Cultural Olympiad. Both Hattersley and Pinnock are hopeful that the project can be extended to other schools in the Southampton area (and perhaps beyond) in the future.

CLAUDINE NIGHTINGALE

Drake Music Scotland hits the jackpot

DRAKE MUSIC Scotland has won just over £48,000 of National Lottery money in the People's Millions competition for its TRACS project to set up a recording studio in Edinburgh for people with disabilities. The competition was run through the local ITV network, STV, and involved two worthy causes going head to head each night with the winner decided by an audience vote.

Thursa Sanderson, director of Drake Music Scotland, says half the money will go towards equipping the studio while the remainder will

be used to fund five projects over the summer. These will include people of all ages with all types of disabilities from teenage bands wanting to record their first demo to groups of elderly people. 'A lot of people have said to us that making good quality recordings of their own music is one of the things they most want to do. It's important to them to produce a CD they can share with other people and give to their friends as it's a tangible thing, but we've never had the funds to do this until now.'

Many disabled people in the Lothian area, as

well as some groups from further afield in Fife and the Borders, already receive tuition through Drake's Music Space programme. Through this they have access not only to conventional instruments and a drum kit, but to the latest music technology which is where Drake's specialised expertise lies. Sanderson adds that the TRACS recording equipment will add another dimension to what Drake can do, particularly through connections with other local groups and music activities in the area.

SUSAN NICKALLS