

BRITTEN PEARS ARTS

ThinkTank Coproduction Music and the Arts

July 5/6, 2022

Executive Summary

The purpose of our ThinkTanks

ThinkTanks are facilitated and curated discussions held at Britten Pears Arts' unique site at Snape Maltings involving a broad range of stakeholders and cross-sector groups exploring specific themes.

This interdisciplinary focus may include academic, health, social care, arts, culture and fundraising sectors aiming to embrace a wide range of perspectives and stimulate fresh thinking on contemporary topics in arts, health and wellbeing.

Through connecting cross sector worlds, exploring cultural differences and establishing a common language, our ThinkTanks facilitate knowledge exchange, contribute to culture change and lay foundations for research, project development and collaborations.

Through these ThinkTank events, Britten Pears Arts aim to be a strong voice in changing landscape, helping shift culture away from siloed thinking to co-creation so that arts, health and wellbeing can flourish and be embedded in research, policy development, training and delivery.

ThinkTank: Co-production Music and the Arts

Co-production is an evolving field in the arts. Effective co-production is grounded in the principles of accessibility, diversity, equality and reciprocity. This approach to art making involves work which is co-created and co-designed. Co-production is a democratic creative meeting of minds.

This raises questions for the process of co-production in music and the arts:

- What are the motives for approaching creative production this way?
- How can co-produced work be organised effectively?
- What are the challenges and opportunities associated with co-production?
- Who decides the parameters of power, expression, opportunity, and outcomes?
- What are the effects and impacts of co-produced music and arts?

- How does co-production challenge prevailing perspectives?
- What institutes and structures need to collaborate to enable co-production to flourish?

We brought together key practitioners, thinkers and those with lived experience to explore these questions. Delegates included: Hannah Conway (Executive and Artistic Director, Composer at Sound Voice), Joe Cummings (MD and Animateur at Hold the Drama), Caleb Madden (Creative Director for Outlands Experimental Music Network), Richard McMann (Northeast Lived Experience Champion) Mark Robinson (Consultant, Thinking Practice) Jo White (CEO of Wishing Well Music for Health) and Sofi Nowell (Programme Manager, Residencies Britten Pears Arts).

What do we mean by coproduction (or cocreation)?

Coproduction and cocreation means different things to different people and have many definitions. We asked our participants what it means to them.

“A journey that starts with people coming together who would not normally meet”

“A democratisation of input, power, access and process and listening with intent to be influenced.”

“Respecting all involved, sharing power and control in a transparent way, giving time and resources and agreeing on a plan”

“Producing a piece of art with multiple people, parties and organisations; collaborating to make something.”

“Equal levels of respect for the skills, roles and ideas that each person and party are offering to the creation of a piece of art.”

“Including multiple voices in the development of work projects and frameworks.”

“Coproduction suggests a longer-term project with an outcome at the end; cocreation is an equal exchange of ideas in the moment.”

“Coproduction is making a thing together equally. Cocreation is making (a sometimes temporary) culture together.”

What are our motivations for coproduction or cocreation?

“To aid a silent revolution by empowering, aiding and developing the isolated or ignored”

“For impact and meaning”

“I embrace the co-creative because it enables richer musical output and because alone, I don’t have all the answers.”

“The wider the range of ideas and experiences the better.”

“I don’t have all the answers. Deeper listening and deeper exploration mean better results for more people.”

“It matches my skills and passion and has much more exciting potential than creating work alone.”

“I want to shine a light on what people can do – create, learn, express – at a time of loss. I want to empower and alter perceptions.”

“So that patients become people through their self-expression; a rich tapestry of talent, knowledge, stories exist within hospitals that need space to be expressed.”

“It's more interesting to seek connection, it leads to bridging, bonding and discovery.”

What are our hopes for coproduction and cocreation?

“That there will no longer a need to discuss it and it will be as commonplace as a pint of milk.”

“That creativity is valued as a tangible way to support and improve health and wellbeing and way to empower the hospital community.”

“It will lead to connection, peace, love and understanding.”

“That I can connect with people and have deeper relationships without using words.”

“More people make exciting art with or without me. Creating art which is meaningful because it has been cocreated.”

“More good stuff and more access”

“The more we are prepared to risk the more significant the outcome. We need to be brave and bold.”

Key Discussion Points

“It is only possible because I met you, and you are you, I am I and we are existing in the space together to achieve whatever the dream is.”

- Coproduction and cocreation is a broad and irreversible shift in society and culture; an evolving approach to value creation. It leads to increased innovation, diverse creativity, improved communication, understanding, relevance and social cohesion.
- Cocreated work is about process of discovery and built on a community of voices, it is not a singular vision. It ethically reframes who, what, how and why we create work. It is intrinsically relational, and people centred. Deep listening is key.
- Coproduction and cocreation can be unexpected, inspiring, challenging and provocative. It may stem from ‘collision’ in an unplanned way or collaboration where more forethought and preparation are involved.
- Context of the work is fluid, organic with elements of surprise and it is full of curiosity. It involves vulnerability, uncertainty and risk and is based on transparency, respect and trust.

- It takes effort to lay a landscape for equal participation and equal voices. Mutual respect for expertise and experience is vital. It effects how we organise ourselves, our work and our organisations.
- It does not just interpret the world but changes it. It flips the focus on the power of creation. We need to be aware of what stops people giving away power and how to we mitigate the risks.
- Cocreation and coproduction covers a wide spectrum of work. From projects to strategy, from governance to evaluation. The trajectory from initiation and inception to delivery and evaluation can be coproduced.
- Coproduction is a systemic shift. If we do not enable coproduced work, we will miss potential for innovation and creativity.
- If we embrace cocreation in one aspect of work, why is it not across our programmes? If coproduction and cocreation can be a means of solving societal issues we need to be clear about what to focus on and why, what we need to learn, and what support and resources are needed.
- Shifting from outcomes and outputs to inputs can engender a more open space for discovery without an imposed agenda.
- An analogy is the difference between rewilding - restoring ecosystems to the point where nature can take care of itself and reconnection with what matters; and conservation - a planned management, tightly managed and targeted approach to protect a natural resource. We need more 'wild spaces' and fewer 'pruned gardens'
- We need to ask: are we offering people a voice in a predetermined structure or are we coproducing structures themselves? Can we give full responsibility to participants and the resources to make their own decisions and projects? If we don't do this, is it an elitist imposition of culture where we might miss unknown potential?
- Centrality of experience is important to shifting the balance of power. We need to address the perception that participatory arts are not equal to other arts practice.
- Coproduced work has a vital role in providing opportunities for agency in an unequal society. All participants should be valued and rewarded.
- People want involvement in coproduced music for entertainment, relief, expression, and healing. Cocreation enables narrative sovereignty. Co-collaborated work must be seen as high-quality work not just community work. We can value work on its artistic merit.
- Continuity should be carefully considered, what happens at the end of a project? Consideration needs to be given to a planned exit or sustainability.
- We need to share skills and practises of making, thinking, learning and evaluating together.

Recommendations

- Address the place of co-creativity at organisation and structural as well as project level and enable coproduction to shift the narrative for evaluation.
- Develop networks around coproduction and cocreation and build a network of supportive venues to host cocreated work.

- Share and build skills around interpersonal interaction in cocreation and look at ways to encourage coaching and mentoring.
- Develop a clear framework or manifesto for ethics, risks, benefits and values for coproduced work and consider an industry standard for cocreated work that demonstrates good practice.

Angie Lee-Foster Producer: Arts, Health & Wellbeing July 2022