



BRITTENPEARS
ARTS

ThinkTank – Music in Later Life

21 – 22 March 2023

Executive Summary

Overview

Think Tanks 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 the arts, health and wellbeing.

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

Through these Think Tank events, Britten Pears Arts aim to be a strong voice in a 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.

Think Tank: Music in Later Life

Music has power to improve quality of life and wellbeing in later life. It encourages connection, reduces isolation and loneliness, improves mood, memory and sleep

quality, reduces feelings of stress and anxiety, and helps lower the impact of conditions like depression and dementia. Whatever way we decide to engage with it, the power of music cannot be underestimated.

Much work has been done to focus on targeted groups and conditions such as dementia or Parkinsons, but as we have an increasing older population it is important to consider how music enhances all our lives as we age.

There are limited studies which explore social connection as a primary outcome. Furthermore, older people who are female, white and aged 65-75, are the most commonly represented group within the literature. This raises several questions:

- What are the skill sets, approaches and models used to deliver music in later life and to what extent should these be 'condition specific'?
- How can we best support and empower musicians with skills and awareness to create a tailored approach within more open sessions?
- How can we find lonely and isolated people who would benefit from music programmes and market appropriately?
- How do we engage a wider demographic in music making?
- What challenges do older people face: social, economic, health?
- How do we tailor our approaches to meet these needs?

Britten Pears Arts work in Music for Later Life

Britten Pears Arts (BPA) is a key contributor to the arts and culture sector, and one of the primary arts hubs in the eastern region. Comprising heritage house, archive, concert hall and artist development centre, we offer an unusually diverse range of opportunities and resources to those we work with. Our mission is to make the arts and culture useful to people's lives. Our performance programme draws respected international musicians to our concert hall. Our artist training and development programmes work with emerging and professional artists from across the UK and the world. We work with schools across the country and collaborate locally, nationally, and internationally with partners in the fields of arts and health.

Our community programme is well-established and has nurtured strong relationships across the region over many years, with individuals, groups and partner organisations. This, combined with our position in the UK music sector, makes us well placed to lead on testing and developing new ways of using the creative arts to improve people's lives. We are listening to the voices of our communities, and learnings from across the sector, to make our projects and programmes increasingly responsive and agile as we rebuild activity.

Our work with older people aims to combat emotional and geographical isolation as well as helping manage the symptoms of conditions such as Parkinson's and dementia. It has evolved over many years in response to feedback, evaluation, and

a growing understanding of need. At its core is our Participate' programme that delivers creative activity to older adults whilst developing new ways of working, training practitioners, and sharing best practice locally and nationally. Through a network of local partners, referrals through social prescribers and GP surgeries, and word of mouth, the number of participants has grown exponentially since September 2021 and there is clear evidence of the need for it.

Our aims for Later Life work are:



Delegates

This event was facilitated by Kate Organ and included: Angie Lee-Foster (Producer, Creative Health at Britten Pears Arts), Catherine Bullough (Producer, Community Programme Britten Pears Arts), Daisy Swift (Director of Learning and Participation, Wigmore Hall), Sharon Cuthbert, (Dementia Project Manager, Leiston Dementia Project), Stuart Hobley (Director, The Linbury Trust), Clare Langan (CEO, Lost Chord UK), Lucy Geddes (Co-Director/Musician, String of Hearts/Manchester Camerata), Caroline Specca (Community Musician, Britten Pears Arts), and Douglas Noble (Strategic Director Adult Social Care and Healthcare, Live Music Now).

Key Discussion Points

What music does for us:

- Music is a universal language or an act, it helps us to express emotions and process ideas, it builds communities and shapes the worlds we inhabit, it helps us celebrate the things we share and what makes us unique and different.
- Music has evolutionary origins and a neurological impact. Research has shown that the brain lights up with neurological connections when exploring musical cues, melody, harmony, recognising, playing and singing. Music triggers memories, experience and pleasure. It has a role to play in managing mood, releasing emotion and energising us as well as comforting and soothing us. Participatory music facilitates identity,

individual personal histories and preferences. Music affects us all in this way, whatever our age, and whether we have dementia or not.

A new way of looking at music in later life:

- We are often locked into in way thinking of dementia in terms of a medical model; focusing on the condition rather than the person. We have a lot to learn from the disability equality movement in terms of applying [The Social Model of Disability](#) to creative arts in later life.
- Everyone has a different need/interest/desire to engage with music in a different way. While it is possible to provide an individualised approach, we often must deliver participatory music in groups for cost-effectiveness, this then relies of the skill of the musician to make the session accessible and nuanced so that all participants can benefit. Consideration needs to be given to condition specific or mixed groups depending on participants and context. However, value for money isn't just determined by the number of participants but also by the experience each individual has.

Music as part of an infrastructure for care:

- Music can form a vital element of ageing in place and the importance of being able to live well. It has potential to be integrated within social and health care to form creative sustainability as part of the landscape of care.
- Music can facilitate compassion in caring. The humanising power of music creates a role outside of language supporting caring to be a relational rather than transactional process.
- We recognise the importance of supporting carers and care staff and recognise that carers are pressured and overstretched. The aspiration is that music could be woven into the infrastructure of people's lives and bring benefits to all.
- Musicians working in later life often have to navigate complex settings, funding and systems. More cross sector understanding, support and training is needed.
- While quality is a loaded and subjective word, our focus is on the importance of making music with intention and purpose; not just background music to pacify, but participatory music to stimulate.
- There could there be opportunities for a network of district musicians; someone who could be called upon in each area.

Funding and measuring impact of music in later life

- We need more nuanced wellbeing frameworks to evaluate impact. And while top level evidence is apparent as to the efficacy of music in later life, there will always be a need to demonstrate its direct impact to funders.

- Funders, commissioners and policy makers create a situation where people are constantly recycling evidence. We need to develop a framework with varied outcomes and learning.
- Evaluation has an important role as a learning tool moving away from 'proof' and enabling us to have a deeper understanding.
- The funding relationship needs to be around the value of the project rather than value for money, and a conversational relationship rather than transactional one.
- Funders, commissioners and policy makers need to focus less about finding the next new thing, but about continuing support for existing valuable work whilst giving space for activity to be responsive to changing context and challenges, as well as supporting core funding.

Qualities and principles of delivery

- We can explore ways of involving older musicians themselves in delivery of this work. The older demographic is changing, we need to respond to that musically. Everyone in the space shapes the experience.
- People with existing privilege often have access to music and it has been part of their lives, we need to address diversity and class and enable participation by communities who have not previously had access to music making.
- Social prescribing has a vital role to play in this landscape, but it is not cohesive and often the opportunities to refer to are not there.
- We need a bespoke carefully constructed programme, properly resourced so that it can have a broader reach. This is difficult in a sector that isn't always joined up, or in competition with each other.
- We can define and, to a large extent, develop the qualities and principles needed for this work. This includes active listening, awareness, attentiveness, eye contact, compassion, empathy, positive energy, choice, patience, engagement, focusing on older people's strengths, facilitating a process that is non-judgmental, inclusive and flexible, trauma informed practice, diversity of musical experience and importantly excellent technical musicianship.
- Thought and planning needs to go into information, acoustics, venue, transport, defining outcomes and defining capacity.
- It is important to have a broad idea of what we are aiming to achieve. A clear structure gives space to create and the flexibility to move around/within it.
- It is essential to develop trusted partnerships with different settings or healthcare/community venue and a mutual understanding of what we are claiming to achieve.

- We need to look at public health and living well from a different angle: Music and the creative arts help us live healthily because it provides opportunities for meaning, connection and expression.

Quotes

Music and the arts are often seen as the icing on the cake – and often the cake [the basic services and support] is missing.

Music participation enables people to live well. It is intrinsic to health and wellbeing.

The participants are at the centre of this music making and conversation is a vital element.

Like the world of improvisation, we don't block other people's responses, we accept what the other person gives you and try and connect and play.

Participatory music has such an invaluable social aspect, as one participant with dementia said: 'It's something to get dressed up for and put on lipstick!'

Many musicians find working with older people so rich and rewarding.

In somewhere like Cuba, music is everywhere. In a western approach of music, we see ourselves as a musician or not a musician. This is not an easy culture to create the sense of music being everywhere, but this is what is needed.

The question that arises is of dementia as a downward life experience. How can music be an opportunity for that perceived downward trajectory include an opportunity for progression?

There needs to be agency and choice and richer tapestry of opportunity, even a level of provision in each town or area and a recognition of the difference between urban and rural and the inequities that go with this.

When we begin to specialise by condition do we exclude people in an activity where everyone could benefit? It depends on intentionality of the programme and expectation of what that might be. What do participants want to achieve, who might best deliver that? What support is needed for each person to be a part of that?

There is work to do there on helping funders understand the value of music to alleviate social isolation and loneliness in older age.

We often talk about the challenges of ageing, but those challenges are not just health related, they concern class and power. Let's not forget there is resilience and richness in later life that needs celebrating.

If we imagine our own lives in older age creativity, connection and choice are often crucial elements to what it means to live a good life.

Outcomes/Conclusion

Our three key areas of focus in this ThinkTank were on knowledge, principles of practice and reach. There is a great deal of evidence as to the impact and efficacy of music in later life. We need to build resources on sustainable, scalable and replicable approaches, training and skills. We need to find better ways of measuring impact and demonstrating the value of music. Funders, commissioners and policy makers can benefit from not only speaking to people who are in receipt of this work, but also those who deliver it. Creative arts are often reticent to be seen in a utilitarian way, but tangible health benefits can be measured as a result of participation. Music enables connection, creativity and choice in later life. It brings benefits to participants and carers. We need to develop an infrastructure that supports broader reach so that we can all lead creative and nourishing later lives.

Angie Lee-Foster, April 2023