

'The power within' on the interim results (2018)

*All experimental projects of the EO-LAB II partner orchestras have in common that selected **orchestra musicians** are empowered to be project leaders (with strategic responsibility and funded resources) in targeted communities, collaborating with community ambassadors to bring orchestras closer to society. Consequently, **orchestra managers** are exposed to new ways to collaborate with their musicians and audiences. First qualitative assessments of the completed projects (as per October 2018) clearly show a higher number of nontraditional concertgoers attending the specially co-designed musical events.*

Apart from the scientific audience research report, to be published after the 3-year cooperation period (October 2019), the best thinkable outcome of all experimental projects would be a toolkit describing exactly 'how to build new audiences through inverting orchestra management models'. We already now can conclude that this will not be possible: the content and target groups of all projects are far too diverse, as are the historical, cultural and managerial differences between the partner orchestras. However, it can be maintained that all projects (so far) have in common a fair number of results and learnings.

Please find below an article written by EOLAB's artistic leader Richard Wigley, describing more in depth the creative constructs, challenges and benefits of the EO-LAB II' projects.

Releasing untapped energy in orchestras

In uncertain times it is critical that we have a full, honest debate about how we can strengthen the resilience and relevance of our orchestras. As there is no one identikit for orchestras so the issues raised here will be stark for some and not so much for others. Equally, not all of our musicians will feel the urge to expand beyond the rather wonderful traditional symphonic world of high level concert giving. This is all fine, but there are musicians who have a lot more to offer to their organisations and will do so if offered appropriate opportunities.

I am privileged to have a broad perspective on orchestras from my time as a professional orchestral musician through to the leadership of two UK orchestras in transition. In between I've been a manager of orchestral education and then of artistic planning; I've worked in a conservatoire; I've been consulted on change by a number of orchestras; I lead the mentoring programme for UK orchestras; and I oversee the Creative Europe EO-LAB II project which seeks to build leadership among our musicians.

I have a deep concern about a long-standing issue for many orchestras: when musicians enter orchestras with all their passion, creativity and talent they are too often diverted into a programme of activity that risks limiting personal creativity, is repetitive and prone to fluctuating musical leadership. There is an understandable requirement for orchestral musicians to largely give up on individual expression to satisfy corporate performance needs. I acknowledge that many musicians in orchestras are satisfied with this approach and the phenomenal repertoire that comes with it; not everyone is championing at the bit to have broader opportunities.

However, I note a cynicism this restriction on personal expression can generate, which manifests itself as a pervasive schism between musicians and their managements, and can be resolved only if the management secure enough income and artistic leadership to keep musicians 'not unhappy'. To mix the pot even more, the complex traditional hierarchies within orchestras can also suppress personal contribution. It feels overdue for there to be supported opportunities for our musicians to re-engage with their own creativity and leadership for the benefit of their orchestra.

Contributing to societal need

I have seen a number of substantial changes in my 30 plus years in the profession. Education and Diversity have become, rightly, drivers for change at the same time as we experienced reduced central funding. It seemed that Education and Diversity were introduced (or received) as necessities to secure on-going funding. This, to my mind, delayed discussion about the real need and benefit of them; which is to be more reflective of, relevant to, and contributory to, societal need. You only have to look at the recent mini-explosion of well-being related programming to see how much time we have lost in the last two decades. I hope that this document prompts debate ahead of another major shift in our profession, that of creative leadership from our musicians and that we head straight for delivery of its benefits rather than tramping tiredly through the usual litany of why-nots. The benefit is found in releasing vitality and purpose from within our orchestras.

It's a straightforward observation that players routinely ask colleagues to be involved in some event or other that they are organising and can make it happen simply. If, as a manager, I were to ask the same people whether they would do a similar project I'm more than likely to be met with questions about mileage, who's being paid what and what time is the meal break. I understand where these questions come from but they are exhausting. A paradigm of Transactional Analysis (TA) is occurring and repeating endlessly. TA shows that the parent/child relationship that can persist between musicians and managers constantly irritates itself and can only be ended with a

prolonged period of trust-building adult to adult engagement. If you are a reader of Kahnemann's internationally recognised research in *Thinking, Fast and Slow* then you'll recognise his definition of fast (instinctive) and slow (rational); he discusses the constant shift in our minds between these states. The instinctive is easy to engage (parent/child) and the rational is effortful (adult to adult). This article proposes that orchestras should spend more time in slow, rational, effortful engagement to release more creative energy in their organisations. (A clue here; a committee structure isn't likely to be the answer to this issue.....it isn't a natural place for most musicians to express themselves).

EO-LAB II: fresh thinking, new audiences

Three years ago, with colleagues in the Netherlands and with six European orchestras, we sought to bring fresh thinking and new audiences to each of the partner orchestras. The rather clunky sounding project, European Orchestra Laboratory II (EO-LAB II), is the resulting three-year programme supported by Creative Europe. When I subsequently joined the Ulster Orchestra we added them to the list.

The guiding principle for EO-LAB II is engage the leadership capabilities of musicians to seek new audiences through connections with community ambassadors (or gatekeepers in current parlance). The various projects across the seven orchestras include:

- Working with Čavorenge, a choir of Roma children that seeks to positively and proudly engage with their history and culture (Czech Philharmonic)
- Engagement with Romanians who are still part of institutionalised orphanages (Romanian National Symphony Orchestra)
- A series of projects in Austria that place the orchestral musicians in unusual contexts from clubs to mountaintops (Tonkünstler Orchestra)
- Engagement with school-age children in Barcelona to input into the orchestra's programming (Barcelona Symphony Orchestra)
- A major choral initiative in Manchester to engage the business community with the orchestra (Hallé)
- Programmes in the Netherlands that re-engage an orchestra with towns and cities where the orchestra has lost its historic connections (Netherlands Symphony Orchestra)
- A community-inspired programme of engagement in Derry, Northern Ireland that looks at local identity and seeks to help express feelings in a post-Troubles society (Ulster Orchestra)

Each of these projects has a depth of learning that would benefit any orchestra that chooses to better understand EO-LAB II's issues, successes and failures. Let me list some of the challenges faced:

- Recognising and understanding the source of misunderstandings between musicians and managers and having the patience and confidence to continue
- Navigating the existing formal and informal hierarchies within each body of musicians
- Finding ways to accommodate the varied projects within the contractual agreements between musicians and managers
- Expectations of equal time and pay across the orchestra for this kind of work. For example, a tutti musician who leads EO-LAB II-type projects will rightly expect to be fairly recognised for this
- Getting (eventual) buy-in from those who are unconvinced in each organisation. Substantial additional time needs to be invested agreeing why a particular project is of value, and even then full buy-in is often withheld until after the project is successfully delivered
- Creating a one-size-fits-all training programme for musician leaders who have individual needs and expectations isn't likely to succeed; far better to individualise the training and opportunities

The benefits

The project is over half-way through and has had its share of successes and failures; however, some themes are emerging around its benefits:

- Engaged creative people will give and give beyond expectations
- Shared ideas and thinking across different orchestras and countries that gives confidence to new thinking
- New, fresh ideas that can inform strategic direction for each orchestra
- More income can be sourced by broadening reach and impact
- Reduced frustration and friction in the workplace
- Increased quality of orchestral performance, particularly among those who feel re-engaged with their lost creativity and who receive personal recognition
- Common purpose from within the organisation

- Continual refreshing of the core programme to match societal changes and expectations

Arguably, orchestral projects can be broadly divided (or combined) into four categories: Core; Profile; Commercial; and Experimental. EO-LAB II is designed to be proudly Experimental, and Creative Europe has kindly supported us with the resources to be ambitious and to risk failure in the drive for new thinking. We should look to move successful Experimental projects up to being Core, and to drop unsuccessful ones.

From risky projects to core business

I will give an example from the Ulster Orchestra where we have a goal to be 'of' Northern Ireland (to shadow BBC language). Although it is a vital if singular role for us to be the Berlin-Philharmonic-on-the-Lagan by playing the great repertoire to the highest standards, crucially we also need to differentiate our creative content to make it truly of our place. We recently collaborated with Tony Doherty, an author whose father was killed on Bloody Sunday in Derry~Londonderry. Tony has written about his experiences growing up and the sudden loss of his father at a young age. One of our musicians, Philip Walton, created a beautiful score for six musicians that underpins the author speaking from his book and the resulting performances are a powerfully emotive and challenging narrative about the Troubles from one perspective. It is now one of a range of core projects that feature narratives distinctive to these parts. It has moved from a risky experimental proposition, not least politically, to a core project that has had a range of performances in differing contexts. I could also have listed a few projects that didn't make it out of the experimental box.....

However, if we continue with developing player-led content in this way, and we will, then something from our core programme will have to fall out. This will be painful but it isn't really that difficult to spot regular programming that isn't successful any longer.

EO-LAB II can demonstrate other projects that have already begun the move from Experimental towards Core. For example, the learning from our colleagues in Barcelona after observing the EO-LAB II project in Manchester led to a wildly successful choral programme; wildly successful because they were looking to recruit 400 singers and had applications from 3000! This left the enviable 'problem' of how to cater for over-success. Boy do we need more of that kind of problem.

EO-LAB II gave some space to the need to spend time with musicians and managers outlining and clearly agreeing why any project is of value. I imagine we all recognise the issue of too much company time and energy spent stuck in a circular discussion of the What, How, Who and When that predictably drags the conversation into the negative ('We can't do that because') and pulls us quickly away from the more important discussion of a project's value. Let the vision precede the logistics because it is extraordinary what an organisation can achieve if it believes. The sheer joy that the musicians of the Czech Philharmonic share with the Roma children's choir, Čhavorenge, is enough to challenge any negative preconceptions of that project's relevance and value. The vision that my good friend Petr Kadlec of the Czech Phil has shown, and the sheer bloody-mindedness to make it happen, is inspirational in itself.

Next steps

Rather than offer some kind of flow chart approach to copying each project, we want you to contact the EO-LAB II partner orchestras and get a personal account of how and why the various projects were important and successful or otherwise. We want to spread the ways you can use the sounding board of the EO-LAB II leaders to help identify the steps you could take to reap the benefits listed above.

Lastly from me, please don't get frustrated at the first steps or at the siren voices ('we tried that and it didn't work.....') We are now, after two years of the EO-LAB II programme, seeing how the benefits can lift partner orchestras. Patience and constant reminders of the benefits are fundamentally important for the sector we all love so much. I have been lucky to have been given creative leadership opportunities as a musician that have enriched my life and, I trust, the orchestras that have employed me. Others also deserve those opportunities.

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