Birmingham OPERA company



OPERA TOGETHER

Strategic Overview

Photo: Andrew Fox

LOTTERY FUNDED

Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

BIRMINGHAM OPERA COMPANY

OPERA TOGETHER

VISION

We believe in a confident, connected and joyful city & region -

fuelled by the creativity of our people, and for our times.

MISSION

Together we make the most powerful opera anywhere -

by embracing, celebrating & growing the talent of extraordinary artists & Brummies in all their diversity.

OUR VALUES

We are **COLLABORATIVE:** we work authentically with our diverse communities, partners, artists and staff team - enabling us to hear all voices and to shape the best possible work. Through equity, we strive for climate justice.

We are **AMBITIOUS** - for our region, its people and for opera: we collaborate with extraordinary artists, we work with rigour and we embrace risk - harnessing the creativity that generated our industrial past to grow a better future.

We are **AGILE:** we move and respond to the needs and changes of the city and region, their people, and the sector - our agility is enabled by a productive approach to planning, a responsible use of resources, and a duty of care to our people.

OUR APPROACH TO OPERA

How we make our work:

WORLD CLASS OPERA, CO-CREATED IN BIRMINGHAM

TALENT DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIVERSE & LOCALLY-TRAINED ARTISTS

How we reach our communities:

CONFIDENT PARTICIPATION IN OPERA FOR ALL

OUR GROUNDBREAKING WORK & PROCESS ARE SHARED FAR & WIDE

HOW WE MAKE OUR WORK

CHALLENGE:
Opera, with its potential to gather, explore, and to speak to/for us, offers huge artistic and social reward; yet many feel unconnected and opera can feel remote from their lives.

SO:
WE MAKE WORLD CLASS OPERA, CO-CREATED IN BIRMINGHAM, the West Midlands and beyond:

- We cast inclusively - we draw both internationally renowned and the best of emerging artists to the region, often to take on new roles for the first time; and our open access opera choruses are made up of volunteers who reflect the full diversity of Birmingham communities;
- We provide training for our companies - our volunteers receive rigorous training to work with us as chorus, actors, dancers, with no prior experience required; and our artists learn how to work with our volunteers, so that our co-creative practice and diverse perspectives on opera are at the heart of the art form's future;
- Our repertoire is drawn from both the familiar and radical canon of opera; we also commission and develop new work. The repertoire is always co-curated with communities and chosen for its capacity to speak to and for us now.
- We create our work for a full range of venues, specialising in site specific/non-standard venues, and working at a range of scales from pop-ups in supermarkets to full-scale productions in disused buildings.

SO THAT:
with artists, volunteers and art revitalised by co-creative & site-specific work, we continue to re-invigorate the genre, the audience and the city, whilst along the way gaining national and international recognition for Birmingham and the cultural offer in the region.

HOW WE REACH OUR COMMUNITIES

CHALLENGE:
Access and Opportunity to make and to experience opera are often stratified along lines of wealth, education, race and place, leaving many feeling that opera and publicly funded arts are not for them.

SO:
WE CREATE THE CONDITIONS FOR CONFIDENT PARTICIPATION IN OPERA - working particularly with those least engaged with the subsidised arts sector:

- We meet people where they are, through a year-round programme of targeted workshops, events and performances in their own context, often providing first opportunities for contact; this work is often delivered through our many non-arts organisation, third sector and public service partners such as Youth and Community Centres, Shopping Centres or Transport Hubs.
- We are responsive to those we meet; we ask questions without a preconceived answer; we learn together; everyone brings expertise; prior experience of singing or performance is not required to participate; we consult on our programming, involve our volunteers in ongoing R&D, and constantly shape our work to respond and resonate;
- We ensure both breadth and depth of contact with Birmingham communities; we have a particular focus on 16-25 year olds, using connection with opera to develop their creativity, grow confidence, encourage collaboration and open up new pathways;
- We create pathways from our engagement work to facilitate participation in our productions, levelling the playing field by covering costs of travel, subsistence, interpretation, etc. and scheduling rehearsals outside of normal working hours.

SO THAT:
people who have traditionally been excluded can participate and feel part of the process of opera making, or feel welcome to attend as audiences; and as a result feel the benefits of engagement with this powerful art form.

HOW WE GROW OUR ARTISTS

CHALLENGE:
With artist development opportunities and employment centring on London, it is hard to retain talent in the region. Furthermore, the high costs of higher education and the challenges of creating a career in the arts, mean that socially and ethnically diverse young people are thinking twice before signing up to our conservatoires and training institutions.

SO:
WE CREATE TALENT DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIVERSE & LOCALLY-TRAINED ARTISTS, and play our part in the national ecology by developing artists of ambition, innovation and agility:

- We seek to see a career through the eyes of the artists, looking for opportunities and partnerships in and beyond Birmingham, which can support their development.
- We create pathways from our engagement work and productions into our talent development programmes;
- We commission new work from diverse emerging talent, providing disruption in ambition, quality and practice, and placing Birmingham at the heart of art form development;
- We contribute to the growing talent development pipeline in the West Midlands, providing opportunities at a range of scales for local artists at all stages of their careers;
- We offer mentoring to those creating new work; and work in partnership with organisations across the region and the wider sector to support the realisation of this work;
- We offer development opportunities to our staff team, permanent and freelance.

SO THAT:
we create an ecology for a new generation of diverse, socially responsible singers, directors, designers, choreographers, musicians & composers to grow and stay in the Midlands, enriching the cultural life of the city and the future of opera.

HOW WE SHARE OUR PRACTICE

CHALLENGE:
Our work often breaks the mould, goes against the grain of established approaches in the sector, and achieves widely-prized artistic and civic rewards. We know its power to transform the art form, enrich lives and create a more equitable sector, but we could do more to tell our story.

SO:
WE UNDERSTAND OUR IMPACT & RAISE THE PROFILE of our groundbreaking process - everywhere:

- We communicate clearly about our work to our artists, communities, audiences, partners, funders, collaborators and trustees in media that are relevant to them, supporting them to be advocates of our work;
- We share our programme of work so that it is seen by the widest possible audience, and by those for whom it is most resonant;
- We tell the stories of the artists, the volunteers, the audiences, whose lives have been touched by our work;
- As the first to promote world-class co-creative opera, we are resourced and equipped to offer access and insight into our authentic practice, through workshops, opinion pieces, talks and articles in the media;
- We are clear on the impact that we are measuring (led by the data associated with these priorities) and work in partnership to evidence it; we are active in advocating opera's ability to do this work; we use this to build strong funding relationships;
- We serve our artists and the people of Birmingham, and are constantly re-writing ambition to create the greatest access and impact;
- Building on our 40 years of radical practice, we are continuing to grow a BOC fit for our times, refining and articulating our values, method of delivery and creativity to include new places, partnerships and technologies.

SO THAT:
Birmingham Opera Company can grow and flourish, continuing to innovate and create positive change in the city, the sector and the world through co-creative practice in opera.

We provide opportunities for ***confident participation in opera for all****, grow the conditions for diverse local & emerging artists to flourish, and from this fertile ground, make world-class opera co-created in Birmingham…*
as well as sharing our practice in cities across the UK and the world.



Photo: Jonathan Hipkiss

Birmingham OPERA company

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