

## Introducing Music in Passion Plays

### The Benefits of music

Music has been shown to be highly beneficial for well-being and self-realisation. By virtue of the wide range of cognitive, emotional and social skills that it engages across a spectrum of individual and social contexts, music can change people's lives. It plays an important role in identity-construction for young people and performs important mnemonic functions that have a significant impact on the well-being of the elderly. Singing in particular has marked positive effects on wellbeing and self-realisation, as demonstrated both by large-scale surveys, and also qualitative research.

While passive listening can play an important part in cognitive engagement, research demonstrates that active engagement in music is more effective in changing quality of life for the better. Two research projects using MIT's 'Hyperscore' composition software demonstrated in both a school and a hospital context the benefits of active musical engagement for participants' quality of life, bringing social and physical benefits and improving community life. Besides all this music has the abilities to touch people's hearts and emotions and to convey the in unspeakable in a unique way.

#### *Further Reading:*

MacDonald, Hargreaves & Miell (2002) (Eds) *Musical Identities*, OUP.  
Clift, Hancox, Morrison, Hess, Stewart & Kreutz (2008) *Choral singing, wellbeing and health: summary of findings from a cross-national survey*. Canterbury: Canterbury Christ Church University.  
Bailey & Davidson (2005) Effects of group singing and performance for marginalized and middle-class singers. *Psychology of Music*, **33**, 269-303.  
Pascual-Leone (2003) The Brain that makes music is changed by it. In Peretz & Zatorre (Eds) *The Cognitive Neuroscience of Music*, OUP.  
Machover (2004) Shaping minds musically. *BT Technology Journal* **22**, 171-179.

Are you thinking about having music in your passion play? Here are some issues to think about:

### Type and style of music

Music making in a Passion Play can be from using musical instruments, and from singing, either as soloist or in a choir. The music itself can be a new commission from a composer just for your Passion Play or you can choose pieces from the huge heritage of Christian music, depending on which style attracts you most. The article Music and the Passion will help you on that.

### The function of music

You will need to decide how much music and singing you want to include in your Passion play and what will be its function. Will it be sung throughout or just

sections? For example will you add songs to better express a certain feeling or to narrate? Do you want to have a choir? Will this choir take the role of the crowd, or the commentator?

### **Introducing a choir**

Throughout history choral music has played a crucial role in Passion plays. It is an excellent way of involving lots of people in your performance.

One issue to consider is what kind of choir you want to use. This may depend on what is available to you. It can be a professional choir or amateur choir. It could be an adult choir, a children's choir, youth choir, senior choir or any cross generational combination, contributing to building bridges between generations.

### **Community of educational choral projects**

You may use a local choir which is available, but you may want to have a choir just for your passion play. You could start a community choir, or do an education project with a school, a conservatoire, or a social centre.

If you decide to do a community project, you may be engaging people with none or little singing. For the educational work you can partner with a school, a social center and their own staff and music teachers could help you rehearsing with the singers throughout the year. They probably need to start rehearsing a year before, and then join the Passion Play rehearsals having well learnt their music.

The results of such project have proved to be really transformational

Some very successful educational projects combine both a community choir with a more experienced choir, with all singers joining together for the final rehearsals and for the performance. This not only guarantees a great quality of performance, but also works as an stimulus for the less experienced singers.

### **Choral conductor**

You will need to find a leader, a choral conductor and depending on what kind of choir you decide he will need to audition the voices. The choir rehearsal schedule will depend on the level of your singers, and how much rehearsal time they require. Whether can read music or not, etc. Your choral conductor will help you making interpretative decisions.

### **Performance decisions**

You will need to decide if your choir will remain static in one part of the stage throughout the whole play or if there will be acting, or dancing. Consequently you will need to think about their costumes. Costumes should not prevent good breathing.

### **Legal issues**

If you are working with children or vulnerable adults you must ensure that all artists have Disclosure (Standard or Enhanced) from the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). Disclosure must be processed through an organization registered with the CRB. If working with children's choir, devise a Child Protection Policy, and remember parenthood permission for use pictures or images, their name etc.

## **Performing rights**

Depending on the choice of music you may need to pay performing rights. In the UK a piece of music is usually in copyright for 70 years from the end of the calendar year in which the composer dies. So if the composer is still alive, or it is 70 years or less since they died, it will be in copyright and royalties will be due. It does not just apply to composers. It also applies to arrangers, collectors of songs, editors, authors and translators of words of music. For more information visit:  
<https://www.prsformusic.com/Pages/default.aspx>

## **Web resources that can help you:**

<http://www.totalchoirresources.com> has several articles with useful information for choral conductors, with sections such starting up a choir, managing your choir, choosing music, choir warm ups, etc.

BBC Step by step guide to learning how to sing:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/sing/learning/>

<http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/tv/thechoir/basics-of-singing.pdf>

About singing in a choir:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/vYZNjZBSddh5brR8360jT5/singing-in-a-choir>

About setting up a choir:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/4TnMw8yMb2Fhf0bT6Z6hH5X/setting-up-a-workplace-choir>