

CHELTENHAM FESTIVALS

**MUSIC15**

# GOING FOR A SONG

A music and song-writing project  
led by Michael Betteridge.



**Music is magic, helps us to connect**  
**Music is magic, it's fun, and helps us to learn**

Lyric by St Thomas More Catholic Primary School

# 1. PROJECT OVERVIEW

*Going for a Song* is a site-specific music and song-writing project that took place between April and July in St Thomas More Primary School in Hester's Way, and the Living Room, a drop-in community centre run by Community Organisers and volunteers in Rowanfield. It was the first phase of a larger community project due to launch in Hester's Way in Autumn 2015.

The term 'site-specific' describes an approach whereby the music and songs are inspired by, created for, and performed in a space or spaces unique and special to those who created the work. It instils a marked sense of ownership amongst participants.

*Going for a Song* was led by young composer and vocal leader Michael Betteridge, who achieves impressive results using this collaborative and inclusive process.

The participants performed the songs they had written in two spaces in Hester's Way on Friday 10<sup>th</sup> July, and also performed together at the Music Festival's family day in Imperial Gardens on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> July.

## 2. AIMS AND OUTCOMES

The **OVERALL AIM** of the project was to engage groups of different ages, in both formal and informal settings, in site-specific song-writing and performance.

The **INTENDED OUTCOMES** were:

- To develop participants' musicality and improve their self-confidence through collaborative song-writing and performance
- To improve the capacity and confidence of non-specialist primary teachers to teach music
- To enable two different communities in Hester's Way to work towards a common goal and achieve an enhanced sense of community through a shared experience
- To develop further partnerships with community organisations in order to extend the reach of Cheltenham Festivals in Hester's Way

# 3. ACTIVITIES

## 3.1 PLANNING

### **PRIOR TO THE PROJECT STARTING**

- Pip and Michael had planning conversations via telephone and email
- Michael came to Cheltenham for a day to visit Hester's Way, which included planning meetings with Maria Miles, Head Teacher at the school, and Community Organisers Penny Liddicote, Tanya Harrison and Georgina Balfour.

### **ONCE THE PROJECT HAD BEGUN**

- Each visit began with an early-morning meeting (Pip and Michael) to review, and agree any adjustments to, the project plan for the day.
- Every school visit included a meeting with Maria Miles to review progress, discuss developments, raise any concerns, and agree next steps.
- Because the Living Room is an informal setting, planning was less structured; formal planning related largely to the logistics around the rehearsal and performance days.

### 3.2 WRITING THE SONGS

Michael visited both settings eight times. He worked with Years 4 and 5 in St Thomas More Catholic Primary School during school hours, and then with the Living Room group from 4 – 6pm.

Both groups wrote lyrics inspired by their immediate environment and/or their neighbourhood, and also collaborated in the compositional process. Michael then incorporated the lyrics with the groups' ideas and suggestions for the compositions, and created a wonderful collection of songs.



The two groups also collaborated on a song. The Living Room group considered what advice they would pass on to young people today, and the pupils thought about what they would ask of the adults in their community. The lyrics were thoughtful and honest, and the resulting Finale Song was truly beautiful:

**THE LIVING ROOM**

People say good things come to those who wait  
But really you have to work hard to get what  
you want in life  
Celebrate who you are, celebrate with us  
And never give up on your dreams  
Stay positive, stay focused, stay bright

**ST THOMAS MORE**

Keep the community bright, and don't let people  
destroy the community (x2)  
Teach us resilience, can you encourage us, help us  
to carry on  
Teach us resilience, can you encourage us, help us  
to carry on, make us the best we can be

**3.3 SHARING THE SONGS**

**ST THOMAS MORE**

From day 1 every visit from Michael culminated in a short assembly for other pupils and parents where the singing group shared what they had created.

**THE LIVING ROOM**

The group gave an impromptu performance outside the Living Room to local residents and shopkeepers.



### 3.4 SINGING MASTERCLASS

In addition to the regular workshops in school, Michael delivered a mini masterclass on 12th June for six exceptional singers from years 4 and 5. They gave up playing at lunchtime in order to learn the second verse of the bridge of 'The Sunbathing Song'; to focus on singing well, and develop technique; and to learn about the upper register in order to model it to the other pupils.

### 3.5 PRACTICE

Both groups practised in between Michael's visits using the recordings he put on Sound Cloud and their song sheets. Michael's final three visits focused on performance technique, and practising and fine-tuning the songs in preparation for the performances. On the morning of the performances in Hester's Way, the 2 groups came together for the first time to practise the Finale Song as one group.



Practising with the Living Room

### 3.6 PERFORMANCES

Two site-specific performances took place in Hester's Way on Friday 10<sup>th</sup> July in Hester's Way Public Library and Monkscroft, a residential care home nearby. In addition the Living Room group performed at Rowanfield Rocks, the community summer fête, held at the local primary school on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> July.



### 3.7 EVALUATION

#### ST THOMAS MORE

- We carried out a baseline evaluation measuring pupils' attitudes to music and singing at the start of the project
- A final evaluation measuring changes in attitude, and improvements made, was carried out on the first day back in school after the Festival performance.

#### THE LIVING ROOM

- The group contributed to a shared reflection at the end of the project
- They also recorded qualitative and quantitative feedback on an evaluation form



# OUTPUTS

- A project overview with timeline
- A project plan for each visit
- Seven music and song-writing workshops led by Michael in St Thomas More Primary and the Living Room
- Two visits by Michael to lead performances
- An additional singing workshop for gifted and talented singers in the school
- Sound files of all the songs made easily available (on Michael's Sound Cloud) so that participants in both settings could continue to practise and improve in between Michael's visits
- Lyric sheet for the Living Room
- Four performances: one in Rowanfield, two in Hester's Way, and one at the Music Festival Family Fun Day
- 11 songs comprising 5 from each setting plus one collaboration:

## **ST THOMAS MORE**

Music is magic  
Greece is the Word  
The Sunbathing Song  
The Football Song  
The School Song

## **THE LIVING ROOM**

Opening Song  
Green Green Rowanfield  
Our Living Room  
Songs for Stimulation  
Locality High

## **BOTH GROUPS**

The Finale Song

## OUTCOMES: were they achieved?

- To develop participants' musicality and improve their self-confidence through collaborative song-writing and performance

### ST THOMAS MORE

Michael introduced the pupils to compositional parameters such as *dynamics*, *pitch* and *tempo* from the offset. As the project developed they were increasingly able to recognise these parameters in music they listened to, and employ them in their own compositions and performances.

*'It's been fun using compositional peramiters [sic]'*, said a Y4 pupil who was notably unengaged at the beginning of the project. After declaring that she didn't like singing or music in the first evaluation, she was one of the six soloists who took part in the singing masterclass, and gave every aspect of the project top marks in the final evaluation.

Performance technique was another intrinsic part of the project, with every visit culminating in a short showcase. The pupils' confidence improved markedly as the project progressed, and it was clear that they enjoyed the opportunities to perform their songs as much as the song-writing process.

Here are some of their responses to: What have you enjoyed about this project?

*'Working together and singing.'*

*'Singing to the whole school.'*

*'Going on trips to perform all our songs to the people.'*

*'I have enjoyed making songs and singing with Michael.'*

*'That we were allowed to do our own song.'* [ie The School Song]

*'Writing songs then learning the music to them.'*

The Y4 class teacher said:

*'The children were so encouraged by Michael each time he visited that they were really keen to participate, and became more confident singers. It really helped bond the class as a group as well.'*

She had also noticed an increase in their sense of value and worth, self-confidence, and enjoyment of music and performing.

The Y5 teacher said:

*'The children in my class were allowed to take ownership of the music and composing. They learnt lots of musical terminology, and were completely engaged with the project. They are all aware that they have played a part in composing one or more of the songs, and this has boosted all of their confidence.'*

## THE LIVING ROOM

100% said they had benefited.

When asked in what ways, here are some of their responses:

*'It has helped to feel a part of the community, and enjoyed the benefits of friendships, and confidence, also memory and rhythm.'*

*'My confidence has been improved because I sang in public, which I haven't done since I was a child.'*

*'It has helped to feel a part of the community, and enjoyed the benefits of friendships, and confidence, also memory and rhythm.'*

100% enjoyed the project.

When asked what they had enjoyed, here are some of their responses:

*'Singing with other people; the interaction with other people, and getting out of the flat for a few hours to sing with other people.'*

*'I have enjoyed taking part, being a part of a group, the experience of singing in public.'*

*'Finding my singing voice.'*

*'It was excellent and very beneficial. Helped with G's dementia.'*

*'Brilliant. Fantastic. Could not be better. 5 star!'*

Both groups appreciated each other's songs as much as they enjoyed singing and performing together.



- **To improve the capacity and confidence of non-specialist primary teachers to teach music**

This was clearly important to the school. The Head Teacher was in touch with the project the whole way through, and the teachers and TAs took part in every session with Michael and clearly got a lot out of the project. They were, without exception, hugely inspired by Michael and by the site-specific nature of the project.

*‘Michael instilled in me a new passion for music – I will be using some of his vocal warm-up techniques and songs with new classes in the future.’* Y5 class teacher.

Teachers and TAs unanimously rated the project ‘Excellent’.

The project was also embraced by the wider school community, with the staff agreeing to adopt the School Song as their official school song:

**‘St Thomas More has definitely benefited from this project. We are going to be teaching the rest of the school the words and actions to the song that we have written. This song has already been performed at our end of year mass, and we will be performing it in many other assemblies at school.’**



- **To enable two different communities in Hester's Way to work towards a common goal and achieve an enhanced sense of community through a shared experience**

The two settings could hardly have been more different. One a formal school setting, the other an informal setting operating on a drop-in basis; one for young children up to the age of 11, many living quite challenging lives, and the other for adults of all ages, also dealing with a wide range of issues; while both are located in Hester's Way, they are in very different, and to some extent separate, areas.

Despite these differences both groups embraced the project, and relished the opportunity to learn and perform together. Key to this was the positive relationship, based on trust and respect, that they developed with Michael.

Here's what they said:

*'It has definitely been instrumental in helping to forge strong links within the local community. It has brought us all closer and stronger as a community, and included all of the community no matter what age.'*

*'I enjoyed writing songs and singing them at the Music Festival and meeting the Living Room.'*

*'The group worked well together, it was informal and fun, people enjoyed being together.'*

*'Michael was amazing to work with and write songs. This was one of the amazing things I will never forget.'*



*'In all of my life I have never enjoyed anything as much as this event and all of the people.'*



- **To develop further partnerships with community organisations in order to extend the reach of Cheltenham Festivals in Hester's Way**

As a result of this project we have strengthened an already-very-positive relationship with St Thomas More Primary School, and established a dynamic partnership with the Living Room. Because Community Organisers help to run the Living Room, and participated in *Going for a Song*, and because the CO programme in Hester's Way is particularly effective with a vibrant network, we are now able to talk to a wide range of community organisations across the area.

Making the arrangements for the groups to perform in the Library and the residential care home also gave us the opportunity to meet key contacts, and share future plans; all are keen to work with us again.

We are now well-placed to begin the second phase of our community project in Hester's Way, so extending the reach of Cheltenham Festivals.

## CASE STUDIES – ST THOMAS MORE

K was boisterous and chatty in class, and when devising and composing music, but became very withdrawn in performance. Over the course of the project she became more engaged in performance, becoming animated and communicating the music more confidently. She was included in the masterclass in which six singers were drawn from the two classes for extra singing tuition, and she rose to the challenge. She noted how performing in a smaller group helped her confidence, and she visibly became more confident as the project developed, engaging more with the audience and folding her arms less when performing.

*'At first I thought it was freaky singing and I didn't always use to be able to sing and then when you [Michael] came in I started sing better. More confident.'*

M was one of the stronger composers and performers throughout the project, yet scored his enjoyment of music and singing very low on the initial evaluation. This changed dramatically in the final evaluation. Throughout the project his understanding of music was exceptionally clear and well articulated. Michael also took part in the masterclass where he was taught to use his upper register, ie singing the higher notes, more effectively and healthily to great success.

*'Going in the care home was really fun because of singing to old people which I've never actually done before.'*

*'Me and Joe wrote 'Keep the community...''*

*'Before you was here I was singing like quiet and low.'*

J often had issues working in pairs or in groups throughout the project, and sometimes did not join in with the singing during performances. However, his contribution as a composer throughout the process produced some of the best and most refined material, and he was very clear about what he contributed to the songs overall. He obviously gained a lot from the project as a composer, despite not feeling a confident performer. Having a discussion during the evaluation process with him he was very clear and knowledgeable about his contribution to the project, including understanding the use of graphic score notation and compositional parameters.

*'My favourite song was Greece is the Word because I like the actions at the end.'*  
*'At the start I didn't really know what to sing so my singing was a bit low, and then when I practised more and more my singing got high like dynamics.'*  
*'You've always got to get the right tune. We was like drawing our tunes [reference to graphic score work] so it could like fit in so we could get the right tune for it.'*

E was very shy and didn't contribute much throughout the project, often overshadowed by the louder individuals in her class. Yet one week, entirely out of character, she performed a solo in front of the class. This was something she volunteered for, which staff noted was unusual (in the positive sense) behaviour. Discussing the project with Emily afterwards during the evaluation she was still rather shy, but evidently knowledgeable about all the different compositional parameters explored during the process.

*"[My favourite song was] the community one because we got other people like the Living Room that made it fun."*