

Evaluation – ‘Re-Awakenings’ by Litha Efthymiou and Martin Scheuregger

The project ‘Re-Awakenings’ involved the creation of a new multidisciplinary work entitled ‘I Only Know I Am’, by composers Litha Efthymiou and Martin Scheuregger. The performance of this work took place at the Blue Room on 26th September by members of the Bristol Ensemble (violin, cello, harp and clarinet), soprano Susan Parkes, and actor Ian Harris.

The composers took an interdisciplinary approach to the creation of this piece; working with Dr Katherine Fennelly (a researcher from the School of History and Heritage at the University of Lincoln), who has written extensively on the subject of asylums in England and Ireland, as well as artists from the fields of music and theatre, named above. Dr Fennelly’s input was particularly valuable. During consultations with her the composers learned about the various ways in which silence was created in the Lincoln asylum, and found novel ways of translating this into music composition. Consequently, Fennelly’s research helped to shape the musical process and enable the discovery of new structuring devices in music composition. Working with actor Ian Harris was also fruitful. His input led to the exploration of the poetry of John Clare, who wrote a number of his works while committed to an asylum during the period in which the Lincoln asylum began to be reformed. John Clare’s poetry was immensely influential and, along with actor Ian Harris, the composers found a way to use one of his pieces ‘I Only Know I Am’ to form the backbone of the music.

The various collaborative partnerships at work in the creation of this piece led to a rich and robust development phase, which culminated in a successful performance to a full audience at the Lincoln asylum.

All artistic and strategic aims were met:

The project brought a slice of irrevocably lost Lincoln history to life for a modern audience through the performance of the piece, as well as through the post show discussion, in which the artistic team was able to elaborate further on the themes and stories being explored. Through music, drama, and poetry, the piece was able to stimulate immediate emotional responses from audience members that raised new questions about the asylum (as demonstrated in the post-show discussion).

A meaningful dialogue was fostered between the academic (historical) community based in Lincoln and the musical community. This dialogue occurred in two ways: first, through communication between the composers and Dr Fennelly; and second, through the post show discussion between artists, academics and music/theatre goers.

A conversation about mental health in Lincoln was stimulated through this work. Again, this occurred in two ways: first, at a local level between the immediate collaborators during the creation of the work; and, secondly, on a national scale, through the interest of the BBC, who

filmed a 2 minute documentary about the piece, contributing meaningfully to the wider debate on mental health in the UK and beyond.

By bringing together critically acclaimed artists to perform the piece, this project helped to cement the Blue Room as a music venue in the heart of the city. The project also received further support from Wild Plum Arts and the Britten Peers Foundation, two organisations that are at the forefront of the promotion of new music. Through their support for the project, these prestigious organisations are now aware of the Blue Room as an up and coming music venue in the heart of Lincoln.

This project could not have been possible without support from St Hugh's, to whom we are extremely grateful.