

## **Noye's Fludde – Shaldon Festival 2013**

### **Reflections with children involved**

Noye's Fludde was written by Britten in 1957 and first performed at the Aldeburgh Festival the following year. It was intended for adult professionals to prepare and perform with children from local schools, at a time where music teaching was much more traditional and many more people would have been familiar with the traditional hymn tunes which the audience and children sing as part of the performance.

Quite a challenge then, for the Shaldon Festival 55 years later. For a start, it was not easy to find 10 schoolchildren able to take on the solo roles of Noye's sons, their wives and Mrs Noye's Gossips. Those came from 3 different schools. The amateur orchestral players came from 4 schools, and ranged in age from 9 up to 16. The professional players came from Chetham's Music School in Manchester. The children playing and singing the parts of the animals came from 2 schools, and were aged 8 to 9. The lead vocal parts were taken by local professionals. All these people came together and met for the first time 3 days before the final performance. It was a massive co-ordination job, and an equally massive challenge to pull it together as a musical performance by the musical director - Stephen Threlfall and the overall director - Tony Lidington.

The result was a resounding success. Those who heard it were moved and delighted, and those who took part had an amazing experience. Their responses in review centred around four areas – what they enjoyed, what was challenging, what they learnt and what they will remember. They are summarized below.

#### **ENJOYMENT**

Many enjoyed the collaborative aspect, and made new friends in other schools, relationships which they are still keen to maintain. "I liked it when we met all the cast and everybody came" "I thought it was lovely because it was local and public and loads of us made new friends". Some enjoyed more specific aspects – "I liked the piano; when the rainbow came up; how we did the music; when we made the ark and the headdresses; when the rainbow came up; when we were the animals;" "I enjoyed being part of a professional orchestra" "I liked meeting all the actors and watching the musicians".

#### **CHALLENGES**

Most had been nervous, especially the players, many of whom had to exceed their knowledge of their instruments by a long way and practise very hard. These were very conscious of their responsibility in not letting everyone else down. Some were more technical concerns:

"It was challenging when we had to learn all the songs." "When we did the round at the end, I thought it was quite difficult because we had to keep a look-out for Tony and Kip to know when we had to sing" "I found it hard that we had to stay as animals" "It was challenging trying to reach the high notes" ".....working with different peoples' abilities

Playing in front of an audience was daunting for many:

"The music looked hard and we had to play in front of a big audience"

"I was nervous, but I faced it, and felt pleased that I had done it." Sums up the feeling.

## LEARNING

The points here were varied and very interesting.

I learnt:

"How you don't have to be scared when loads of people are there" "how to put on a production, and that's really hard." "to be an actress" "some new notes, and how to play in a play" "no matter who's doing what, always concentrate on what your job is." "I learnt some new notes and higher ones. My counting is better and I can play faster"

## MEMORIES

The children mentioned so many good memories. Here are a few:

"The costumes (wearing high heeled shoes!) The directors and their enthusiasm, and the girl on the double bass who was kind." "I will remember all the people who were in it" "I'll remember when I see an actor, how hard they put into it" "Just to have that opportunity to put on a brilliant play and I loved every second of it". "I'll remember because we have the headresses. I'll remember the play cos I'll be looking at my children and saying 'Look, that's me in the Noye's Ark story". "Everything about it, and being given the chance to be part of such a good production run by experienced people".

The students from Chetham's school, already highly competent musicians, might have been forgiven for feeling a little reluctant about playing with a large group of young children, many of whom were near beginners, but far from it. They were totally supportive of the youngsters, (who were greatly impressed by them) encouraging and helping them. One young man was delighted that he thought he had persuaded 3 to take up the organ. Another said that he had initially felt doubtful about the project but had greatly enjoyed seeing the youngsters develop and learn so much, and completely changed his mind.

All the children are still full of great enthusiasm, and fond memories, nearly a month later. They were clearly challenged and stretched way beyond their previous abilities, and loved it. Being far out of the comfort zone, with an unfamiliar musical style, and having to practise for long periods at a time, was clearly not beyond them, and they relished the opportunity. Nearly all said they would like to be involved in something similar again, were grateful for the opportunity they had, and felt very proud of their achievements. We couldn't have asked for more.

Kate Hill-Art

July 2013