

# Music on the Ground

## Play: Manchester Camerata



### **Manchester Camerata on using music to build community in areas with high levels of poverty and deprivation.**

Manchester Camerata orchestra is a registered charity, working and performing in Manchester and worldwide since 1972, and renowned for dynamic performances, innovative collaborations and our pioneering community programme. Our purpose is to 'make music that matters; make music for change'.

The orchestra pops up in all sorts of places and collaborates with a spectrum of artists attracting over 150,000 people every year to its concerts under the leadership of world-renowned conductor Gábor Takacs-Nagy. Our Manchester concert season (September–May) is complemented by residencies throughout the North West, which provide international quality music-making in areas with little or no live orchestral music.

Our community programme is at the heart of the orchestra's activity. By working in partnership with our long-term strategic partner, Orchestras Live, this has helped us to make more impact with this work. The programme began over 20 years ago with the aim of using music as a tool to improve people's lives, and our music-therapy-based work for people with dementia has been developed over the last 10 years through partnership and research with Professor John Keady at

the University of Manchester. New music is created by putting the participants at the centre of the creative process. Whether it is young people in schools or youth clubs, or people with dementia and their carers, all compositions and improvised pieces are created 'in the moment' by the participants, in conjunction with our world-class, professional musicians. These projects take place in schools, housing schemes, care homes and community settings across the North of England. Our work operates within cultural education and health and social care, and is especially focussed on areas of economic/social deprivation.

Our strategic priorities and overall aims for both our older and younger members of the community are centred around creative music-making and its benefits, with inbuilt continuing professional development for teachers, professional musicians and healthcare professionals alike, in order to improve health and wellbeing. We moved into The Monastery, Manchester (in Gorton) in November 2020, and are continuing our aim of long-term intergenerational activity to positively impact a community with high levels of poverty and deprivation but with great pride in the area in which they live.



# Sing: Farmers' Choir



## Karen Diamond, music therapist, on boosting the wellbeing of farmers in Northern Ireland.

Following the success of other singing for wellbeing projects in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT) the Farmers' Choir began as a six-week pilot. The NHSCT had been working

with the Ulster Farmers' Union exploring what strategies could be put in place for farmers and farming families to address the issues of social isolation and the poor mental health and emotional wellbeing of farmers which had been highlighted in 2019 by Malcolm Downey, Principal Inspector Health & Safety Executive Northern Ireland when he stated: "What we really need

now is action! UK farmers are renowned for the attention they give to their livestock, crops and machinery, but what we need to remind them is that looking after their own physical and mental wellbeing should always be the priority'.

*"Sometimes I came along and was in awful form but singing with others from a farming background was uplifting and relaxing at the same time... even though in the programme Derry Girls they claimed that "Protestants hate ABBA" you got us and the First Minister singing Super Trouper. A sight and sound I will never forget!"*

The UFU invited members from their Mid and West Antrim area to come along to a taster session in Autumn 2018. They publicised it through newsletters and sent text reminders each week. The Northern Health and Social Care Trust funded my input, provided a rehearsal space and refreshments each week.

The choir had to meet in the evening after milking! So, a rehearsal time of 8pm was set. We thought we might have eight people at most but 12 arrived at the first session and by week six we had 30 people aged between 40-80+.

The group were naturally concerned about singing in a group and in particular that a music therapist was the facilitator. It required some explanation that this wasn't therapy but singing for its health benefits. There was some initial reluctance around the use of breathing exercises and warmups but when I explained why I was using these techniques everyone joined in and it was

*"When you said we were going to sing harmonies I thought you were asking too much and we couldn't do it – but I was wrong. This pushed me in a good way and I loved it!"*

really encouraging to see just how relaxed the farmers were as the sessions progressed.

*"Who would believe a group of farmers could sound like this?"*

# Dance: Dementia Disco



## **Dementia Disco on using music and dance to boost mood and give care home residents, families, and carers a “proper night out”.**

We run monthly discos, where our members choose the music they want to listen to and we encourage them to talk about their choices with us, other members, and their families and/or carers. In this way, the music becomes a way for them to access memories.

We also encourage our members to get up and dance, although they do not have to. This can provide carers with a short break or, more typically, the opportunity to spend some relaxed and fun time on the dancefloor, which some of them do not often get.

The discos are always incredibly positive, happy events, with some people describing them as the highlight of their month. The timing of the discos (5-7pm) is deliberate, as is the choice of venue – people have commented that they feel as if they have had a “proper night out”, which seems to be really positive for them. The music acts as a gateway to memories of positive experiences and memories of past events, which we then encourage our members to talk about and share.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, we also organised a coach trip to the Tower Ballroom in Blackpool, which was a wonderful opportunity for many of our members to get out and visit somewhere some of them had not been for many years. We had a fantastic time, dancing on the Strictly dancefloor.

The power of music is a vehicle which allows people to connect with themselves and others. It enables our members to interact and engage with others in positive ways, allowing us to access memories and emotions which are sometimes hard to express. Research shows that brain activity and memory are enhanced by listening to music. The direct, emotional connection music can make with people is equally important.

We have found it easy enough to harness community spirit and enterprise - if more people just asked and acted so much more could be done. It is not about being a good citizen, more about being an active citizen. For your own benefit, and for others.

## Care: MHA



### **MHA on putting music at the heart of the care it provides for its residents.**

As one of the largest employers of music therapists in dementia care, weekly individual and group music therapy sessions are provided to care home residents. But it is not just the music therapists making the music happen, care staff are trained and supported in delivering music sessions alongside the music therapists and other musicians.

Music therapy has been proven to ameliorate symptoms of dementia, such as anxiety, apathy, depression and agitation. Music therapy plays a significant role at MHA as music therapists are able to observe any changes to a resident's health and wellbeing and care use this information to inform care staff of changing needs, helping to enhance staff care planning and delivery.

MHA is passionate about seeing people for who they are beyond their diagnosis and in music therapy, music therapists are able to identify a resident's abilities. They use this knowledge to advise staff on tailoring daily activities to stimulate and exercise these remaining abilities and skills.

MHA is the first care provider to develop a music strategy for all its services. In the future, music therapists will have an advisory role to help staff embed playlists, singing and other musical activities in the everyday life of its service users across all of its services – truly embedding music in dementia care.

Barbara was choosing to spend every day in her room watching TV alone since her husband passed away last year. The activity coordinator hoped music therapy would encourage her to participate in something. Barbara had never played a piano before. However, in her one-on-one music therapy sessions, Barbara really enjoyed playing a Casio keyboard with lighted keys which automatically indicate the right keys to play. This was a big change for her and Barbara herself said how much she enjoyed the sessions. Since attending music therapy and using the Casio keyboard, she also began attending the open music group, which was unlike her. Her engagement in playing the keyboard, and the benefits of this on her mood and her cognitive abilities has significantly increased her quality of life.

To us at MHA, the power of music signifies music's potential to 'unlock' something inside us.