

# Voices Now 24-27 March 2011 Evaluation



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Festival Producer  
April 2011



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# 1. Executive Summary

## Introduction

Voices Now brought together some of the world's leading vocal groups with singers of all backgrounds and abilities at a new celebration of ensemble singing in the heart of London. Over four days in March 2011 at the Roundhouse, Voices Now featured performances and broadcasts from leading UK and international choirs, community choirs and youth choirs, offering a vibrant representation of some of the best singing in the world today.

## Strategic Context

The Voices Now festival built on the groundswell of interest in ensemble singing in the UK in recent years, generated by increased media profile and national campaigns. Projects such as Sing Up! have dramatically improved the quality of provision for singing in UK primary schools; TV programmes including Gareth Malone's 'The Choir' have presented singing as a way to bring communities together, and have inspired new groups. There has never been a more exciting time for singing, but many people involved in singing feel that collaboration between a wide range of singers only exists in small and unconnected pockets of activity across the UK.

## A New Platform

Voices Now was conceived as a huge celebration of ensemble singing on a scale and ambition not seen before. Building on the groundswell of interest in singing with a rich artistic mix delivering the best choirs in the world and numerous opportunities for participation, the aim was to create a bold legacy: develop new audiences and make singing even stronger.

## Aims and Objectives

Voices Now stated the following Aims and Objectives for the festival in its first year. In all cases expectations were met or exceeded, or additional events ensured that equivalent results were gained, with full details in section 2.

- *Access to Excellence* – seven of the world's best vocal ensembles appeared at the festival;
- *Opportunities to Participate* – over 2,000 adults and young people took part in performances or workshops;
- *Developing New Audiences* – more than 5,000 people saw performances at Voices Now, with additional audiences via live broadcasts on the Roundhouse website and BBC Radio 3.

## Evaluation

Throughout the weekend, Voices Now undertook an audience evaluation exercise. Volunteers conducted short interviews with audience members and participants, gathering both quantitative and qualitative feedback. The questions used in these interviews both generated the comments used throughout this evaluation report and the results reported in section 3.

## Conclusion

Overall, Voices Now was perceived by audiences, performers and partner organisations as a success. Specific elements, the Latvian Radio Choir performances, the Schools projects with Sing Up and the BBC Singers, the Come and Sing *Spem in Alium* event, the Making Music Open Stage and the BBC Radio 3 broadcasts were felt to be particularly successful. Audience feedback was very positive, and Voices Now was successful in bringing new audiences

and participants to choirs. More than 250 people who attended the Come and Sing with Gareth Malone event had never sung in a choir as an adult, and over half of those attending the festival who took part in an audience evaluation were new to singing.

There were various elements of the festival which could be improved in future years. While the Roundhouse main space has excellent acoustics for ensemble singing, the layout of the audience areas meant that there was often a large empty area between audience and performers (conversely this large open space proved ideal for larger participation events in that space). The marketing and communications campaign also only started in late December 2010 – far later than had been anticipated – due to late confirmation of funding. Over 10% of audience members who took part in audience evaluation commented on this, and additional time to generate momentum for the festival would likely have resulted in even greater levels of attendance.

One element of the festival which was particularly well received was the sheer diversity of choirs taking part, and the mixture of professional and amateur groups, as evidenced by the following feedback:

*"The number of choirs here makes it different – the mix, the buzz!"* Audience member

*Has Voices Now inspired you to get more involved in singing?*

*"Yes – it inspires you to sing as well as the professional choirs."* Performer at Making Music Open Stage

Financially, the festival broke even on a total (including in-kind donations) budget of c£150,000 and a cash budget of c£75,000.

In conclusion, the first Voices Now festival was a very successful foundation on which to build Voices Now. Expectations established before the festival were met and the quality of both performances and participatory sessions was very high. From an organisational perspective, Voices Now is in the process of being established as an independent organisation. Voices Now is well set for future festivals – which will happen biennially from March 2013 – and also a wide variety of events in between those festivals, working in partnership with the Roundhouse, BBC Radio 3 and Making Music.

## **Thanks**

I would like to express my thanks and gratitude to the many organisations and individuals who made Voices Now possible, particularly: Stephen Layton, the festival's Artistic Director; Anna Kydd and the SHM Foundation; Sarah Buchan, Sophie Cohen, Clare Edwards and Emma Reynolds; Marcus Davey, Dave Gaydon, and all at the Roundhouse; Making Music; Stephen Ashley-King, Michael Emery, Garth McArthur and the BBC Singers; Chris Taylor at BBC Radio 3; Kaspars Putnins, the Latvian Radio Choir; all the performers who took part in the festival – the Roundhouse Choirs, The Clerks and Edward Wickham, Gareth Malone, Simon Wookey, the South Oxhey Community Choir, the Holst Singers, The Magnets, Juice, the London Symphony Chorus and Mbawula; Martin Brophy; Phoenix Martins; the Latvian Embassy in London; Sing Up; Arts Council England; the Paul Hamlyn Foundation; Michelle Wright and Cause4; our many individual supporters; and Voices Now's new directors and trustees – Maurice Biriotti, Oliver Kluczewski, Sara Mohr-Pietsch, Nick Mumby and Robin Osterley.

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## 2. Overall Impressions

Feedback from audience, performers, participants and delivery partners at Voices Now suggests the festival was perceived to be a success. Specifically, the results from audience questionnaires at the festival and overall attendance numbers (in excess of 7,000) suggest that there is a demand for Voices Now, and that it was successful in bringing new audiences to choirs with audience evaluation suggesting that over half those attending the festival were new to choral singing.

### Highlights

The undoubted highlights of the festival were the performances given by the Latvian Radio Choir, the Sing Up and Go Sing events, the Come and Sing *Spem in Alium* session, the Making Music Open Stage and the BBC Radio 3 broadcasts.

The **Latvian Radio Choir** performed music little known in the UK to an incredibly high standard, using techniques that even accomplished professional singers from the UK in attendance were previously unaware of. Audiences – including pupils from Sing Up schools who described the choir's performance as "*exciting, amazing, heavenly singing*" – and critics (see Aims and Objectives section below) were unanimous in their positive response to their concert in the main space. The Latvian Radio Choir also gave a lecture concert which focused on Baltic singing, from traditional folk songs and festivals to new music from the region – which was well-attended, and broadcast live on BBC Radio 3 on two separate occasions.

Both the **Sing Up Platinum Schools** and **Go Sing** (BBC Singers) performances were extremely well received by the pupils taking part and audiences.

*"An amazing experience, I still get goosebumps when I think about it. When all the choirs sang 'This is Our World' together it was breathtaking."*  
Sing Up School parent

Over 450 pupils took part across the two events – which represented two programmes at opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of developing singing in schools. The five Sing Up Platinum Schools which took part have all reached a level where singing is embedded in their school's life, and activity is delivered to a very high standard. In contrast, one of the reasons why the BBC Singers selected Harrow as a borough to work in is because in many secondary schools there was no singing provision at all.

Feedback from the schools suggests that as well as the thrill of performing in such huge numbers, many of the pupils were inspired by the "*prestigious venue*" with many of the pupils aware of the Roundhouse's position as a leading rock venue.

Over 200 people took part in the **Come and Sing *Spem in Alium*** event, alongside 40 members of the Holst Singers. The event was staged as a way of enabling experienced amateur singers to perform a piece which is often to logistically complex – requiring 40 individual parts – for even very capable amateur groups. The number of participants (with an informal show of hands in the session suggesting that as many as 25% of participants had travelled in excess of 50 miles to take part) and their feedback indicated that this premise was correct and that there is significant appetite for future events on the same premise, with participants commenting:

*"If I tell you that it has been my ambition for 30 years to participate in a performance of Spem in Alium, and I had no hope whatsoever of realizing that ambition, you will understand what a wonderful morning I had! It was fantastic."*

*"Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to (sing in) that amazing piece of music. It's something that was on my dream list of to do's but didn't think it would be possible."*

What was striking was the very high quality of singing in the session. Participants had been instructed, when buying tickets, that they were expected to learn their voice parts before the day (with practice scores provided on-line). This was to ensure that participants 'self-selected' (and other events in the festival catered for less experienced or novice singers), and resulted in a highly accomplished performance of the piece led by Simon Wookey, given by over 250 singers in the Roundhouse's Main Space.

The **Making Music Open Stage** saw a hugely diverse range of choirs – far more diverse than was anticipated – perform in the Roundhouse foyers. Participating ensembles ranged from newly formed open access community groups (Croydon Community Choir) and LGBT ensembles (Diversity) auditioned chamber choirs performing complex a cappella music (Finchley Chamber Choir), and from beatboxing (the Few), punk choirs (Hackney Secular Singers), world (SOAS World Choir and the Wing-It Singers) and Afro-Cuban groups (London Lucumi Choir) to Barbershop (Vocal Dimension) and English choral music (Felicitas).

A number of the choirs who took part commented on this diversity of backgrounds, abilities and genres, and indicated that they felt the opportunity to meet new and different groups was beneficial. One performer commented:

*"I liked the interaction and diversity – it was great to get the chance to meet other choirs and to listen to them."*

An estimated audience of over 400 people on both the Saturday and Sunday watched the choirs perform, and performing groups were also keen to support each other's performances – particularly where an established choir with very high performance standards was able to encourage new singers. A conductor from one of the open access community choir commented that:

*"Some (of our members) were too scared to sing last time we did a performance and this was a lovely space for them to begin trying this experience."*

There were issues with one of the performance areas (one of the Roundhouse bars) which suffered from poor acoustics – commented on by 11% of audience members – but this area did benefit from an excellent atmosphere in terms of audience interaction. One choir leader commented:

*"I thought the atmosphere was incredibly supportive and it was wonderful getting positive comments from fellow singers. So nice not to be competing, which is often a danger in these sort of events."*

The other area used for the Making Music Open Stage – a walkway/bridge adjacent to the above bar – was felt to be an excellent space in which to perform and also worked well in terms of attracting audiences:

*"We considered it a great privilege and enjoyed ourselves tremendously! That bridge was an excellent platform from which to sing - the acoustics were great - and it was gratifying that so many people were watching and listening to us."*

The Making Music Open Stage also provided a platform for other arts delivery organisations to become involved in Voices Now, with groups established by Aldeburgh Music (Group A), Trinity Laban (Trinity Laban World Choir), Cecil Sharp House Community Choir and the Wigmore Hall (All Sing! Harrow Road Community Choir).

There was a great deal of positive anecdotal feedback from the **BBC Radio 3 broadcasts** from Voices Now (BBC Singers and Latvian Radio Choir on Friday 25 March and The Choir on Sunday 27 March), and informal feedback given by BBC staff at the festival who commented that the audience atmosphere at the performances came across well on the broadcasts, and the acoustics proved excellent for professional choirs. Additionally, it was important that Voices Now benefited from a major national platform in its first year, and the strong support of the BBC.

Comparisons with other venues and festivals were also positive. Voices Now was seen as a new and exciting event, and one which would have support in the future. Audience comments included:

*"Very positive – we sing in a choir in Michigan (USA) and having nothing quite like this!"*

*Have you ever been to an event like this before?*

*"Not a festival with lots of choirs. It's a great opportunity to share how great it is to be part of a choir with other people."*

*"Similar things at the Southbank – there's more diversity of choirs and genres at the Roundhouse."*

*"Yes – Royal Festival Hall. Voices Now is ... more intimate, better acoustics, more friendly."*

*"Make sure you do it (Voices Now) again!"*

Overall audience numbers also suggested that there is an appetite for what Voices Now is aiming to achieve with over 5,000 people attending performances and more than 2,000 participating. A high number of audience members attended because they wanted to find out about singers (11%), to participate (23%) or because of an existing interest in choirs (16%). Voices Now's social media and internet marketing activity also suggested that there is a demand for an event like Voices Now. Advertisements for Voices Now on the Spotify music streaming platform resulted in a click through rate over 25% above the average level for that platform. There were over 95,000 views of the Voices Now website in March 2011 alone, and Facebook generated more than three times the volume of traffic to the site than any other source.

## Considerations for Future Festivals

Issues that arose from the first festival included how to use the Roundhouse's main space to best effect, and a lack of available time for a communications campaign.

The Roundhouse proved to be an excellent venue for Voices Now on many levels – the variety of spaces available – and also the atmosphere and acoustics of the venue for a variety of events.

*"Latvians (Latvian Radio Choir) were amazing, acoustics were amazing..."* Audience member.

*"Great venue ... singing together is a great tonic. When you hear the sound it resonates ... magical."* Come and Sing with Gareth Malone Participant.

The layout of the Roundhouse main space, however, did result in the majority of audiences members being separated from the performers by a large empty area. This was due to the fact that the main space was configured to allow for a large standing area adjacent to the stage which proved invaluable in large scale Come and Sing events (Gareth Malone, Spem in Alium). Standing tickets were then sold for this area for performances. Unfortunately, standing ticket sales for a number of events including the BBC Singers and Latvian Radio Choir concert were lower than expected resulting in what appeared to be a large, unoccupied area immediately in front of the stage. In other events this area was well utilised – the Magnets and the London Symphony Chorus performances – but thought needs to be given to how to avoid this problem in future years. One solution is free-standing seating which can be put into place in a short space of time between events, or installing a temporary stage further towards the semi-permanent seating.

A number of audience members commented on a perceived lack of awareness of the festival. This was most likely due to the lack of time available to run a full communications campaign caused by final project funding not being confirmed until December 2010 – a situation undoubtedly caused in some part by the economic downturn in the UK at the time, and concerns over possible cuts in public sector funding for the arts.

This meant the full campaign could not begin until January 2011 (with some 'save the date' notices being sent in December 2010), giving around two and half months for a full campaign. This would be a short amount of time for any festival – but particularly one which was new, and sought to attract keen amateur singers, many of whom are incredibly busy with their own singing activity and often plan their diaries more than 12 months in advance.

These time constraints were far from ideal, but it is testament to the expertise and determination of individuals in the marketing teams at the Roundhouse and Making Music – who designed and executed the majority of the marketing campaign – that Voices Now still met audience targets. Social media and online figures (see above) also demonstrate the success of the marketing campaign, which made extensive use of these platforms.

Another success of the marketing campaign was the way in which it generated word of mouth referrals, and utilised existing networks of choirs and singers. Over 22% of the audience stated word of mouth as the medium through which they heard about the festival, with a further 18% hearing about Voices Now from their choir leader, and 28% from a performer in the festival (*"I know a choir member and was encouraged to attend – it's great!"* Audience member at Making Music Open Stage). Media coverage was another area which Voices Now had anticipated generating more activity: the reasons for this are covered in the Media Coverage Report in Appendix II.

Voices Now 2013 should benefit from an earlier planning period, resulting in earlier fundraising and subsequent confirmation which will allow for a considerably longer marketing and media campaign. In addition, awareness generated by the first festival will significantly benefit future events.

Other considerations for future marketing campaigns are the Roundhouse as a venue, and the habits of experienced and very involved amateur singers.

The Roundhouse marketing team felt that the venue had both positive and negative effects on audience numbers at Voices Now. It was felt that more traditional audiences for choirs – who are perhaps more used to attending venues such as St Martin-in-the-Fields (Trafalgar Square) or St John’s Smith Square (Westminster) – are potentially discouraged by pre-existing perceptions of the Roundhouse as a rock venue and Camden as somewhere that is potentially dangerous to go at night. To counteract this they suggest emphasising the venue’s proximity to Primrose Hill and Chalk Farm (both of which the Roundhouse is closer to than the centre of Camden) and the Roundhouse’s heritage of hosting orchestras and the Royal Shakespeare Company. From a positive perspective the venue undoubtedly helped to draw a younger and more diverse audience who may feel uncomfortable about attending a ‘traditional’ venue. It should be possible to emphasise both sides of the Roundhouse and encourage greater attendance from both these constituencies.

Both the Roundhouse marketing team and Kaspars Putnins, director of the Latvian Radio Choir, raised the phenomenon of very experienced and capable amateur singers not attending concerts given by professional groups. Audience feedback suggests that there is some evidence for this – 18% of the respondents to the question “Has Voices Now inspired you to get involved / more involved in singing?” stated that they were already heavily involved in singing. Our conclusion is that a large number of amateur singers feel that performances by other leading amateur groups and professional ensembles have ‘nothing to offer’ them, or that they feel they are too busy with their own singing to attend. There is a need to persuade singers at all levels, but particularly very capable amateur singers, of the benefits and sheer pleasure to be gained from attending performances by leading professional groups, such as the Latvian Radio Choir.

## **Strategic Partnerships**

Voices Now benefited immeasurably from its strategic partnerships, and it is intended that these will continue to flourish, and others to develop, as it becomes an independent organisation. All of our strategic partners provided much expertise and advice in addition to the practical support they provided.

- Making Music provided legal, charitable and financial governance, access to its unrivalled network of amateur musicians and ensembles.
- BBC Singers and BBC Radio 3 provided broadcast opportunities, performances and a school project involving more than 250 young people.
- The Roundhouse provided a unique venue, marketing services and office facilities.
- The SHM Foundation provided research and development support and ongoing consultancy.

Other important partners included all the Voices Now performers, Sing Up, the Latvian Embassy in London, Arts Council England, the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

### 3. Audience and Participant Numbers and Feedback

Over 7,000 people attended Voices Now across four days with an audience of c900 for the Making Music Stage alone. Attendance figures for selected events (against their projected ticket sales) are below:

- Roundhouse Choirs – 87 (100)
- Gareth Malone – 532 (500)
- Latvian Radio Choir Baltic Music Lecture – 59 (50)
- Holst Singers – 331 (400)
- The Magnets – 1,001 (1,000)
- Camden Township Choir – 66 (50)
- The Choir – 505 (500)

120 audience members and participants were interviewed as part of our evaluation exercise throughout the weekend, with the following results.

#### **How did you hear about Voices Now?**

- From their choir leader / conductor – 18%
- Word of mouth – 22%
- Making Music email – 4%
- Roundhouse website / email – 9%
- Through a performer in the festival – 28%
- Time Out – 3%
- Internet / online (not defined) – 10%
- Voices Now website – 2%
- Voices Now leaflet – 3%

#### **Which event(s) did you attend?**

- Making Music Open Stage – 42%
- Camden Township Choir – 4%
- Gareth Malone – 23%
- Holst Singers – 5%
- Sing Up – 5%
- BBC Singers / Latvian Radio Choir – 8%
- The Clerks – 3%
- The Magnets – 10%
- London Symphony Chorus – 7%

- Roundhouse Choirs – 3%
- Spem in Alium – 3%
- Go Sing (BBC Singers / Harrow Schools) – 3%
- Baltic Music Lecture, Juice, Driving lessons for choirs, Where Now? – less than 1%

**What attracted you about the events you attended?**

- The opportunity to participate – 23%
- Specific repertoire – 7%
- Gareth Malone – 11%
- Exploring different styles of singing – 4%
- Specific performer – 11%
- Strong interest in choirs – 16%
- To see family/friend performing – 28%
- “Because it’s free” – 3%
- Friend’s recommendation – 3%
- To find out about singing – 11%

**Have you ever been to an event like this before?**

- Yes – 24%
- No – 76%

**Has Voices Now inspired you to get involved / more involved in singing?**

- Yes – 40%
- No – 16% \*
- Get more involved – 26%
- Already heavily involved – 18%

**What else would you have like to have seen as part of Voices Now?**

- No suggestions – 45%
- Better seating / use of main space – 3%
- Get the marketing / publicity out earlier – 13%
- More space for the Making Music Open Stage – 11%
- Encourage more new singers – 2%

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\* The majority of interviewees who responded ‘no’ stated the reason for this was that they believed they couldn’t sing. There is perhaps a need for an awareness campaign in future Voices Now events persuading non-singers to set aside concerns/beliefs they may have about their perceived inability, and attend a session for new singers.

- More pop / beatboxing groups – 4%
- More participation sessions – 12%
- Other suggestions include more: traditional folk music, gospel choirs, classical choirs, groups from outside London, Baltic music, school choirs, amateur choirs

### **Cultural Identity**

Audiences were asked to self-define their cultural / ethnic identity.

- White British – 68%
- Eastern European – 8%
- Dual Heritage – 4%
- Black British – 4%
- British Asian – 3%
- Not stated – 8%
- Other (including Irish, Black African, White American, Jewish) – 5%

## 4. Aims and Objectives

Voices Now stated the following Aims and Objectives for the festival in its first year:

- *Access to Excellence*
- *Opportunities to Participate*
- *Developing New Audiences*

**Access to Excellence:** bringing together new singers from all backgrounds and abilities with the world's best singers, composers and vocal groups to develop their experience of ensemble singing.

An opportunity to experience seven of the world's best choirs – BBC Singers, The Latvian Radio Choir, Holst Singers, The Clerks, Polyphony, the Magnets and the London Symphony Chorus.

Over ten performances with leading performers supported by innovative presentation and affordable pricing.

Over 200 of the world's leading choral conductors, singers & educators in a festival accessible and open to all.

Six of these groups appeared throughout the festival giving multiple performances and participatory sessions. In addition, the all-female vocal trio Juice took part in the festival.

Voices Now featured 11 ticketed performances – ticket prices ranged from £5 to £20 with an average price of less than £10. In addition more than 20 amateur and community groups performed on the Making Music Open Stage, and there were seven participatory, workshops and discussion events which attracted more than 800 people.

Over 250 leading singers, conductors and educators took part in the festival, generating positive audience feedback and critical acclaim:

*"...their (Latvian Radio Choir) physical and imaginative virtuosity was cheered to the rafters in Mouyayoum by Swedish composer Anders Hillborg: a wordless and extraordinary vocal re-creation, it seemed, of nothing less than the music of the spheres."*  
The Times, Tuesday 29 March 2011.

**Opportunities to Participate:** a platform for a diverse range of ensembles to engage with the best vocal practitioners through specially created partnerships, workshops, come and sing events, and digital resources.

Providing a platform for over 1,000 individuals from amateur, community and education choirs to participate.

Creating new singing ensembles in community and education settings – including a focus (Go Sing!) on 500 key stage 3 secondary school students and 40 teachers from Harrow secondary schools resources.

Ongoing resources including digital teaching and conducting aids and guides and signposting to opportunities to develop new and existing ensembles.

More than 1,300 singers from amateur, community and schools groups took part in Voices Now. Specifically, more than 600 people sang on the Making Music Open Stage with choirs ranging from a capella 'punk' groups and new community based groups to classical chamber choirs and a choir singing Yoruba praise songs. In addition over 500 people attended the Come and Sing with Gareth Malone session, over half of whom had never sung in a choir as an adult.

The BBC Singers worked with a large number of teachers and pupils in Harrow secondary schools, with over 250 young people performing at the Roundhouse during Voices Now. This work will continue for the remainder of the current academic year and beyond.

*"The concert at the Roundhouse yesterday was nothing short of amazing! What a fantastic experience for all those young people AND the staff involved. You have done more to raise the profile of singing in Harrow schools than any programme has ever done."*

Head of Harrow Music Service

In addition, over 200 pupils from Sing Up Platinum Schools performed at Voices Now.

Making Music staff maintained a strong presence throughout the festival, ensuring that audience or participants new to singing were made aware of how to find and join a choir which suited their needs and aspirations. Beyond the festival, [www.voicesnow.org.uk](http://www.voicesnow.org.uk) has been designed as a hub for online resources from organisations including Sing Up, the BBC, Gareth Malone and Making Music – directing individuals who became interested in singing through the festival to existing, high quality resources.

**Developing New Audiences** for ensemble singing and new music in the UK.

Attracting an audience of over 5,000 from London, the South East, and nationally.

National / international reach through BBC Radio 3 broadcasts and live relays from the Roundhouse website.

Approximately 5,200 people attended Voices Now as audience members. Informal feedback at some participatory events suggested that although the majority of the audience came from London and the South East, people had travelled from across the UK for specific events. Audience feedback suggested that around 56% of those attending Voices Now were new to singing.

BBC Radio 3 made two live broadcasts from Voices Now – Performance on 3 with the BBC Singers and Latvian Radio Choir, and a live edition of The Choir featuring five choirs including the Roundhouse Choir. The Roundhouse also live streamed five concerts from the festival which attracted a national and international audience.

# Appendix I: Images from the Festival



Thursday 24 March and Friday 25 March – clockwise from top left: Roundhouse Choirs; with Osnat Schmoor, Director; Go Sing; all Go Sing performers with Rebecca Lodge, project leader; Sing Up; Camden Schools; Sing Up; BBC Singers; BBC Singers and Latvian Radio Choir. All photos by Katura Jensen.





Saturday 26 March – left to right from top row: participants at Come and Sing with Gareth Malone; Gareth Malone and the South Oxhey Community Choir; Making Music Open Stage; Pushing Boundaries workshop with Juice & Andy Frost (The Magnets); audiences on Saturday evening; The Magnets; with the Roundhouse Choir; Baltic Music Lecture (Latvian Radio Choir); Juice; Holst Singers and Stephen Layton. All photos by Katura Jensen.



Sunday 27 March – left to right from top row: Come and Sing Spem in Alium (first three images); London Symphony Chorus (LSC); Camden Township Choir (& performing in foyers); Making Music Open Stage (London Lucumi Choir, Hackney Secular Singers, audience); Driving Lessons for Choirs (with LSC); The Choir. All photos by Katura Jensen.

## Appendix II: Media Coverage Report

### Introduction

The press campaign ran from January 2011 until Voices Now in March.

### Press Releases

A general press release was sent on 13 January. Further releases included:

- Making Music Stage Call to Choirs – 2 February
- Amateur Choirs on song (about Making Music Open Stage choirs) – 4 March
- The Clerks at Voices Now – 4 March
- Come and Sing events listings release – 8 March
- Main stage performances at Voices Now – events listings release – 8 March
- News release: dramatic increase in choral singing in UK – 19 March

An additional release was sent by the BBC Singers covering their events.

Releases were sent to a broad spectrum of journalists, including classical music critics and correspondents, arts editors, arts correspondents, London press, national and local broadcast, online publications, listings editors (including to Roundhouse's listings lists) and specialist music press. Extensive follow up calls were made to selected journalists (see details below).

### Coverage

There were some excellent previews in the run up to Voices Now. These included a double page up front spread in Time Out (which both outlined the festival and gave a brilliant clarion call for people to get involved in singing). This was coupled with 'critic's choice' coverage throughout the magazine and on Time Out's widely used online site (including top ten things to do in London). Rupert Christiansen also gave an enthusiastic welcome to Voices Now in The Telegraph, and there was a very positive critic's choice comment by Richard Morrison in The Times, and a similarly upbeat review of BBC Singers/Latvian Radio Choir in The Times. Specialist coverage included a page feature on The Hours in The Tablet. There was also excellent local coverage, in the Camden New Journal and Ham & High and nationwide through the Sing Up schools and Making Music choirs. Music magazine coverage included a preview in Classical Music, with photo reports from the weekend forthcoming in Choir and Organ and Classical Music magazines.

We were not far off achieving some other key pieces of coverage, with certain items falling through due to unfortunate timing and circumstance. For example, In Tune, BBC Radio 3 fell foul of a lack of artist availability on the designated date; Guardian Arts diary was due to report on dramatic increase in choral singing, but a former arts editor died and so the column chose instead to mark its respects to him. In other cases, we were the 'reserve' story – for example, Stephen Layton on Start the Week, BBC Radio 4; Matthew Swann on Robert Elms Show, BBC London. More widely, major world events meant that the mood of news coverage in the week leading up to the event changed, so that the planned news campaign for Voices Now sat uncomfortably in this changed agenda (or to quote the BBC's arts correspondent – *"I think in the current climate (Japan, Libya, budget) the story is not quite right."*)

In reality, all coverage was hard won. Where there was an existing enthusiasm for singing, the response was positive (for example, Richard Morrison/Hilary Finch on The Times; Rupert Christiansen, Telegraph who enthusiastically embraced the bringing together of amateur and professional singers). However, the overall response, particularly on national publications, was somewhat lukewarm. Three factors contributed to this:

1. A perception that singing has already been widely covered (especially with editors) – with articles on the benefits of singing appearing regularly enough to give the impression that there is little new to say. Did Voices Now offer a startling enough new vision to encourage journalists to think again?
2. Singing is clearly not for everyone and lack of personal enthusiasm amongst some key critics was a decisive factor.
3. Long-standing 'singing snobbery'. Ironically, the mix of amateur and professional music makers at Voices Now may have indirectly contributed to this (perhaps reflected in the surprisingly low level of critic's choice picks for the event and attendance of reviewers). Photographic material did little to change perceptions, with many of the choir's stock shots somewhat dull.

I make these comments against the background of extensive approaches to a broad range of media outlets. The approach was wide – with suggestions for feature/preview coverage ranging from 'where are all the tenors?' to 'confessions of a choir master' (for one journalist who also directs his own choir), trips to Latvia to investigate Baltic singing tradition (offered to three national papers) and interviews with Stephen Layton. Aside from nationals, radio and specialist music press, I targeted mini-campaigns at London press (Making Music choirs); arts correspondents (dramatic increase in choirs); online (for listings/preview coverage).

As media partner, BBC Radio 3's coverage in Performance on 3 and The Choir was excellent, with an interesting debate during the interval on Sunday, and consistent, positive mentions for Voices Now and the Roundhouse throughout.

### **Liaison**

I enjoyed working with Emma Reynolds at the Roundhouse, and with Sarah Hayward at Making Music, who was particularly helpful in terms of the Time Out feature. I also liaised with Stephen Layton, Maddie Castell (PR- BBC Singers) and Pete Flatt (PR- The Magnets) and Irene Hamiltone at the Latvian Embassy, who all offered support.

### **Conclusion**

Voices Now achieved some good quality articles in mainstream, specialist and local press, with some near misses along the way. The considerable time spent on the media campaign has highlighted a number of issues, as outlined in this report. To attract wider coverage for any similar event in the future, an artistic mix with a more populist focus would be required (along the lines of the Gareth Malone 'Come and Sing' or the involvement of more household name performers – artists who might have a special appeal to younger audiences or are well known for their work in a different context – something that might also sit well in the context of The Roundhouse as a venue). This would take the event to a different, less specialist audience and allow it to sit more comfortably in a broader range of publications. On the classical side, to sustain further interest it will be important to build on the first Voices Now, and to continue to include choirs of outstanding international reputation and more surprises in the choice of commissions.

Sophie Cohen, April 2011

## **Appendix III: Weekend Programmes**

See separate attachments:

VNProgFRI\_FINAL2

VNProgSAT\_FINAL2

VNProgSUN\_FINAL2