

## Community Music in Prisons

*Passing the time, keeping busy, letting off steam, - the clichés fail to do justice to the complexity of the processes, and issues involved in working with prisoners. As this is a growing area of interest (and*

*activity) for community musicians we look at two contrasting approaches...first, Ian Tait describes his experiences as a regular sessional worker, then Katie Tearle describes Glyndebourne's project-based approach.....*

My first experience of prison work (and prisons) was in 1990 at HMP Frankland - a maximum security prison on the outskirts of Durham, although I had worked on a probation project two years earlier. I replied to an advert for qualified and experienced teachers (I was none of these) to make an input to a six week summer school programme. They had had very little music provision in the past and said they would contact me if they were unable to fill their quota of qualified staff, which is what eventually happened. At the induction session in June, I mentioned an interest in Adult Basic Education. Two weeks later I was asked to cover three weeks sick leave for a Basic

This approach of 'equality as human beings' was confirmed time and again as the music summer school came and went successfully and I was asked to set up evening, then daytime classes for music. I extended my experience by working with Rule 43 prisoners - those on voluntary segregation because of their inability to cope with life in prison and some of whom have committed crimes against women and children - and found the same basic principle held firm.

During this period, I also ran an afternoon class at HMP Durham, the local 'normal' prison, but found a huge difference in the attitudes of the men. This was mainly due to having no continuity from one

# JAILHOUSE ROCK

Ian Tait

Education teacher - in at the deep end!

For those three weeks, I lived, breathed and slept (occasionally!) nothing but prison, for the simple reason that I was a nervous wreck. However, towards the end, I realised that I had established many friendships, some of which continued for the next year and a half. I also realised that the main reason for this was my responding to my gut feelings - that people in prison, by and large, are no different to anyone else; they've just been in the wrong circumstances at the wrong time, and that many of them have failed to have their needs met by the statutory education system.

week to the next and being presented with up to 20 men drawn from convicted prisoners, those on remand and young offenders, some of whom were only in the group because they had nothing else to do and then became disruptive. Although this can be dealt with by the staff, it makes it difficult to resume any kind of creative atmosphere. In contrast, the men in Frankland were long-term prisoners, many of them on life sentences, and so were a much more stable and eager group. In addition, the music work was wholly optional and was therefore only attended by those with some degree of commitment.

By the end of my time at Frankland, the music provision had been extended to include a guitar

class with Jim Hornsby, who has since become a musician in residence for a probation project, and further work with Rule 43s with Kim Jameson, who was also a Project Leader of NACRO. The summer school week (mornings only) consisted of two days of percussion workshops, followed by one day of music games and warm-ups, then two days of playing and composing using music technology, with equipment borrowed from the local FE college.

When the evening class was set up, I persuaded Northern Arts to match-fund the Education Department's investment in equipment, which was then spent on keyboards, drum machines, a bass guitar and a 4-track recorder. This, supplemented by my own equipment, was sufficient to facilitate a group of 8-10 working as individuals with headphones, with me spending time with each of them on a 1:1 basis. The group included a number of guitarists which eventually justified the setting up of a separate guitar class.

***"having no continuity from one week to the next and being presented with up to 20 men .. some of whom were only in the group because they had nothing else to do ..."***

There were occasions when general concepts were best learned as a group, but I tried to avoid 'chalk and talk' and instead build up a rapport with each individual. Towards the end of the first year, some of the group worked together and since then, have gone from strength to strength in performance, composition, and for those who wished it, formal grade exams.

Leaving Frankland to move to Lincolnshire was one of the saddest and hardest decisions I've ever had to make. For the past two

years I have been based in South Lincs as Music Development Worker for South Holland District Council, but because there is no prison in the area, I have been unable to continue my work. However, a chance meeting earlier this year led to freelancing another summer school week at HMP Stocken, near Stamford.

This followed a similar format to Frankland, although it was five full days - quite exhausting! - not least of all because although I was aware of not having worked in prison for two years, I'd forgotten that I was starting again from scratch in terms of establishing relationships and building up trust. The week also differed in the inclusion of songwriting, something that had been successful in the earlier probation project, but was never quite got around to in Frankland.

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Many people in all walks of life - but especially in prison - have private jottings, writings, poems etc. which, if they are willing to share them with you, can usually be set to music. Also, some people who already have music skills may have written their own accompaniment; then it is just a case of helping them arrange and possibly record their work. All of this happened in Stocken and once again, the enthusiasm was such that the prison have asked me to set up an evening class.

This time it is to be less structured and geared more towards developing group skills, but still with the opportunity for individual work if required. This is mainly possible because of a greater number of rooms and more equipment being available, although I hope more equipment will be purchased in due course (eg: 4-track recorder, sequencer, PA system etc.) The prison is also

hosting workshops and a performance in December from Delta Sly, a Leicester-based rock band, courtesy of Live Music Now!

My most recent experience of prison work has been at HMP North Sea Camp, an open prison near Boston. This was actually in setting up a performance for a local amateur drama group and running a discussion afterwards, but I am hoping to establish some music input in the near future. If all goes well with funding applications, I am also hoping to set up a larger scale project with several prisons in the Eastern region, probably next year.

***"Contracts have been awarded to a mixture of private companies and FE colleges, but the common objectives appear to be the increasing of efficiency and cutting of expenditure."***

On 1st September 1993, prison education provision was privatised. Contracts have been awarded to a mixture of private companies and FE colleges, but the common objectives appear to be the increasing of efficiency and cutting of expenditure. This may not bode well for freelance workers in prisons, but, given the current problems of over-crowding and the recommendations of several reports, there should still be many opportunities for music projects, either as part of the formal education system or in collaborating with other agencies (RABs, trusts etc) in setting up residencies and/or longer term projects. ◆

In 1990 Glyndebourne Touring Opera staged Beethoven's *Fidelio* and commissioned Stephen Plaice, writer in residence at HMP Lewes, to write an article for the programme book. In it Stephen described the men in the segregation unit, the Rule 43s, the sex-offenders and the grasses, listening to the opera. Their reaction was understandably harsh. Stephen went on to say,

"So opera means little to these men, because its language is incomprehensible and the music is not their music. It is the music that conventionally belongs to the class of owners and magistrates and officials who have put them inside. The story of *Fidelio* rings false in here...."

article for the programme book and it is with his permission I quote a huge chunk of it:

"Harmony is rare in prison, group dynamics are difficult, but slowly, through sharing new rhythms and chants, a true polyphony began to emerge. The barriers between inmate and artist, student and teacher, culture and culture began to break down. The atmosphere of an ancient chorus began to come through in the circle, and within this, individual contributors stepped forward. Sean and John fed in their songs. Farouk from Pakistan soon had us circling his drum. Emboldened, three Yoruba drummers suddenly manifested themselves in three previously

scepticism had gone, everyone was pleased to see Glyndebourne arrive. For some of the young men, this project may well have been their first positive educational experience. It was certainly the first time that many of them realised the musical culture of other lands and peoples. Everyone knew they were participating in something special, a collective emotional release achieved through music, a liberation in the last place you would expect. Every time we sang 'Shosholoza' you could feel the crankshafts of the heavy engine of the jailhouse slowly start to turn. Change is coming, the talking drum said, in both our houses".

# A CAPTIVE AUDIENCE?

## Katie Tearle

*Head of Education and Community Projects at Glyndebourne Touring Opera on the lessons to be learned from prison education projects.....*

I suppose we in the Education Department saw this as a challenge, our work had begun to break down these barriers. By taking composers, artists, directors and singers into institutions and the community, we give people the opportunity to create their own Music Theatre. Working with Stephen Plaice and the Education Department in HMP Lewes, which is our local prison, we arranged a project with a mixture of remand and convicted men for the summer of 1991. The composer Nigel Osborne led a team of director, Robin Tebbutt, singer, Kathy Steffan and musicians, Eugene Skeef and Sara Lee, who with the men went on a musical balloon journey around the globe in a place where you can't walk more than fifty yards in a straight line. That year Stephen Plaice wrote another



Photos: Glyndebourne's Ford Prison Project 1992

modest Nigerians. And just as suddenly, in Her Majesty's Prison, their tribal dance began.

The buzz went right round the walls, and at the Gate, the litmus-test for new initiatives, the

While working on this project we found out that the relationship between Glyndebourne and HMP Lewes had in fact begun in the late fifties when recitals were arranged for the men. Stephen Plaice was right there, 'change

was coming, in both our houses'. I personally found the experience of the project in Lewes the most powerful and enlightening in my career as a musician and more especially as Education Organizer for Glyndebourne.

The relationship with HMP Lewes has continued with short-term creative projects, although the changes in their house; the privatisation of the Prison Education System and the Home

Office's move towards creating a Community Prison, has meant that plans for a longer project, ideally a Community Opera involving men, officers and workers at the prison has been put on hold. However this year we ran a pilot project with the West Sussex Probation Service, who work with people who have been given non-custodial sentences, or community service and those recently released from prison and people on parole as a development of our work with prisons. And we did work with men who had taken part in projects while inside.

In 1992 we presented a creative project in an open prison - HMP Ford. This experience was completely different. Composer, Jonathan Dove and director/writer, Ali Campbell spent the best part of 1992 workshopping a huge Community piece "Dreamdragons" in Ashford, Kent which was performed in March this year. In July 1992 they spent one week with designers Ali Allen and Marise Rose, singer Tim Yealland and twenty men in the Education Department of HMP Ford. The men had all responded to the following notice pinned up on the Department's notice board, 'Come and join a professional team from Glyndebourne Opera - writer, composer, singer and 2 designers - for a week of games, workshops, creativity, exploration and fun. The week will lead up to an informal performance of Friday afternoon. No experience needed. Come prepared for anything: it'll probably happen.'



Ali Campbell wrote extensively about this project, his first experience in prison. The skills he brought to the project are those of Forum Theatre and the work of Augusto Boal and his many years with BREAKOUT, the TIE company founded in 1984.

" Vivid first impressions still remain from those opening sessions. Firstly, the enormous social diversity within the group, who were a microcosm of society 'outside' such as I cannot imagine encountering in any other institution. There were three men with public school and university education on the one hand, and one or two whom I couldn't assume could read or write on the other, and yet this was group who had one overriding experience in common: they had all been sentenced, 'banged up' (that is, kept in a closed prison like Brixton or Wandsworth) and all for one reason or another transferred to Ford. ... Secondly, the emotional openness and readiness to risk quite intimate contact and exposure through performance quickly became apparent".

The men were very keen to discuss the whole issue of freedom, and the difference between being in an open and closed prison. Ali led a number of 'prospective' improvisations which unlocked many emotions and stories which led into image and music work and finally a performance. It is Ali's description of the performance which I feel captures this project,

" Nothing could stop the strength of emotion and the group's pride in their work from shining through the odd technical hitch. As always, I sat where I could watch the audience, as only when I

can see their faces do I know if we have really completed a circuit through which energy and feeling are raised, shaped, and then returned to the world through art. One man sitting close to me let tears roll down his face as the final chorus about freedom began. There is nothing any of us in the arts can tell such a person: no lasting material or intellectual advantage we can impart, no real hope that we can break the pattern in which he has become trapped, wilfully or by sheer accident. We can only trust that to acknowledge his experience by empowering his peers to explore it on his behalf, is to open up the possibility to him of looking at that experience as other than the passive victim of it or the compulsive self-doomed to re-enact it".

We received letters positive letters from quite a few of the men, here is one reaction,

"I feel quite happy at the fact that I was allowed to direct some scenes. In a prison, especially, you do need to feel wanted and actually, and several people have said this to me, some of us forgot we were in prison many times last week". ◆

*If anyone would like further information about Glyndebourne's work in prisons or with the Probation Service please contact:*  
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