

## Essential Techniques for Curating Concerts for Diverse Audiences

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Four techniques we have developed to curate successful concerts for children and their families:

### Introduction

For many people, the concert hall, theatre and orchestra present intangible barriers that unknowingly deter people from engaging in wonderful Arts events (Dobson and Pitts 2011). For potential new and younger audiences, being unsure of etiquette and unspoken 'rules' of being an audience, having no or limited prior experience, or a lack of cultural capital frequently elicit responses such as "that isn't for me" and "I don't belong there" (Reeves 2015, Winterson 1998). From this position, the Toowoomba Concert Orchestra over 7 years has developed specialty concerts for 0-5 year olds and their families in conjunction with local arts organisations, regional libraries and literacy initiatives. This poster reports the practices that they have honed to a fine art informed through research and analysing their own and audience experiences.

### Our Orchestra

Established in 1975, Toowoomba Concert Orchestra is a community group of amateur musicians. They play a variety of concerts including traditional symphonic focussed concerts, concerts with well known Australian artists and musicians, and series of 'education' concerts for young children and families. In recent years our artistic work has been heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and yet within this time the orchestra has continued to grow as a collective and initiate new outreach projects including a tour to smaller towns within our region.

Through this work our orchestra has had to shift our perception of what 'education' in the concert hall looks like particularly around the ideas of 'teaching' and seeing the audience as 'people who need to be taught'. In response to this, our orchestra has shifted its focus towards a model of 'curating learning experiences'.



### Format

Our concerts run for no longer than 40 minutes and include:

- ✓ Welcome song and acknowledgement of country
- ✓ Introduction to the orchestra and pre-listening to repertoire included in the concert with explicit guidance to listen for musical concepts (e.g. dynamics, tempo, mood)
- ✓ An audience warm up action song
- ✓ An interactive reading of a children's storybook – this is presented by an animateur who usually plays the main character in the book. The story is complemented with orchestral excerpts to enhance the story
- ✓ Playing, singing and dancing to well known children's nursery songs
- ✓ Farewell song
- ✓ Meet the orchestra and instrument demonstrations after the concert



### Repertoire Selection

We approach repertoire selection based on the theme of the storybook, providing opportunities to hear music the audience may be familiar with, choosing music that 'opens the ear' to new music, and music that will accommodate the instrumentation available of the community orchestra.

Our approach to pre-listening and providing 'listening posts' in the foyer also help our audience build familiarity with the repertoire before coming to the concert. The artistic team that puts the concert together are firm believers that with support, all listeners can access and make meaning from listening to the full spectrum of the orchestral repertoire. Within the concerts, the titles and composers of the works are shown visually via projection with pictures from the storybook. We also provide a 'listening list' in the concert program with a listening recommendations guide – 'if you liked... you might also like...'



### Our audiences are essential parts of music making

As an arts organisation we view audiences as active participants in the 'musicking' (Small, 1998) of our concerts. We have a relaxed approach to concerts that break down many of the barriers commonly associated with 'sit down and be silent' orchestral concerts. The audience helps us make the music, rather than being seen as passive observers.

Audience members are encouraged and free to get up and dance, clap along and sing. The animateur explains this at the beginning of the concert and facilitates this active participation throughout the concert. We also purposefully choose to sit close to our audience and provide opportunities for children to meet our musicians and their instruments up close and personal.

In recent years, we have also included an Australian Sign Language (AUSLAN) interpreter for deaf and hard of hearing audience members and we have plans to provide a 'chill out' space for neurodiverse audience members.



### 'Curating' experience rather than 'teaching' listening

A major shift we have undergone in creating 'education concerts' is moving from thinking of ourselves as teachers and the audience as receivers of understanding.

Basing our work on Dewey's (1963) ideas on experiential learning, we see ourselves as 'curators' who facilitate environments and experiences in which meaning can be made.



**References:** Dobson, M. C., & Pitts, S. E. (2011). Classical Cult or Learning Community? Exploring social and musical responses to first-time concert attendance. *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 20(3), 353-383. • Reeves, A. (2015). Neither Class nor Status: Arts participation and the social strata. 49(4), 624-642. doi:10.1177/0038038514547897 • Winterson, J. M. (1998). *The Community Education Work of Orchestras and Opera Companies: Principles, practice and problems*. (PhD). University of York. • Small, C. (1998). *Musicking: The meanings of performing and listening*. Hanover: University Press of New England. • Dewey, J. (1980). *Art as Experience*. New York: Perigee Books.