



MEET ME @ MAHOGANY: Open Call Opera

Wednesday 13th November 2024

Captioners: *Karen Pritchard, Louisa McDaid*

Speakers: *Toria Banks, Frederic Wake-Walker, Rylan Gleave, Ty Bouque, Mathilde López, Katarzyna Kowalik*

[START]

MARC DUNLEAVY: This is the Open Call Opera, we have become known for our approach to recruitment, and we thought this would be interesting to interrogate. Handing over to Toria.

TORIA: Hi everyone, my name is Toria, I can see many I know in the room and some I don't. I am a middle-aged white woman with blonde bobbed hair wearing a sky-blue jumper sat against a white wall. I am a writer and producer and I co-lead HERA with the singer Lynda Hurst. I have worked in two different ways with Mahogany Opera which is why I think they have come to me to start this discussion - when we were a very new company we applied for Various Stages, for composers and other maker teams to receive developer support. I remember coming in for an interview on election date 2019 and it felt fraught and dramatic, and it became more so because we didn't do the sharing - it was to share work in March 2020.

We applied to work with the composer [name] on an event about work and pensions, this made it through the open call, and we had three workshop days on zoom with Ian Freddie in a room in Crystal Palace library. It got the work going and gave us real confidence in the project, which I think would not have otherwise gone forward. that was pivotal at the early stages of a project and company.

It was the start of an artistic relationship and conversation that led to co production, a very different way of working together. We made a show called Out Of Her Mouth which was the staging of baroque by the composer Élisabeth Jaquet de la Guerre and we ran an open call for the directors and a musician and Mathilde and Katarzyna became involved in the show. we will come back to them later.

Firstly a quick chat with Freddie about some of the key themes and issues around the idea of open call that seemed useful to pick up on through the evening and we would like everyone's thoughts about that. The first one is what Mahogany gets out of it was a company, this process that uses up time and money and effort, why it's a good thing from the company point of view.

FREDDIE: A question to me? [YES]

FREDDIE: Hi everyone, Great to see you all here and thank you very much for joining us. Also great to see lots of friendly faces, some I know and some I don't. I am the artistic director of Mahogany Opera, a white man in his early 40s with strawberry blonde hair and blue eyes, wearing a blue jumper with my books behind me to give me confidence and perceived intelligence to the conversation! I am really excited about talking about open calls because it's something we have done more and more of and got a bit addicted.

There are a number of reasons we do open calls. One of which is about wanting to extend horizons and to discover new people and ideas and things - very much in the spirit of Mahogany. We hugely value repeat working with people and building ongoing relationships and continually renew and extend ourselves.

I think of Mahogany as a meeting place. I get really excited about bringing people together and seeing what

happens when they meet, what creative sparks take place when you bring different constellations together. I think our open call process feeds into that. I think it's an amazing way of finding out who is out there, what people are up to and what they are thinking, getting a sense of the zeitgeist and seeing what trends are developing.

Something we will talk more about later - we have a philosophy of working generally, that is about taking real care, being compassionate and transparent about the way we bring people together and make work. It makes sense to me to do this in the rehearsal room and the process leading up to that. The way we engage people and bring them into the process needs the same intentionality and care to it. What we do at the moment is never perfect and we are trying to hone what we do because every process is different and individual.

I would like to interrogate further with you, how the process of open call feeds into the process further down the line. In some ways, something that isn't about how it benefits Mahogany - but more about my observations across the industry, a lot of the way that people are selected and engaged isn't fair or caring. There is a desire to right that and show it doesn't have to be like that. It can be different. There are ways of making it fairer for everyone. Consequently, more open and transparent and diverse. So that was an opening splurge.

TORIA BANKS: Thank-you. That all sounds wonderful and thoughtful, so I am going to challenge you a little, with something that feels may come up during the evening and which I know we have both thought about in the process - when you put out an Open Call, the level of response is enormous. Before we had over 100 singers apply for one role and over 80 directors apply for a directing job.

I suppose my question is - what do you feel our responsibilities are - with those people, most people won't go from that process, into working with you as a company - whereby putting the invitation out there - all those people spend time putting in an application. The work that is involved when you go about recruitment in this way.

FREDERIC WAKE-WALKER: Definitely. I mean it is difficult, I found with all our Open Calls, going through the long lists, there is more than one moment when you think, Oh God, so many people and where are the opportunities for these wonderful people and you see the imbalance between the talent and passion and enthusiasm and the opportunities.

One thing we are always quite - or talk about, how specific do we want the Open Call to be, and my way is to make it open as possible, which means more people apply and more people who don't fit into what we are looking for but I am keen for the Open Call to have an element of - well, we don't know what we are looking for - that is also the point of it, it is up to you to tell us who you are and what you do.

Sometimes I see other call outs, being too specific about what type of person - my response as an artist is slightly put off by that - I don't want to be channelled, want to be given trust to come forward and say who I am and what I want to do. So want to offer genuine openness, tell us who you are and what you want to do.

TORIA BANKS: Thank-you, a really interesting balance, between openness and an awareness of - to be it bluntly - not to waste people's time. We have talked about structuring and wording an open call, that ask for a limited amount of work at the other end, in terms of saying hi and showing us who you are, so that burden of time is equally fairly distributed, I would be interested to hear from other people about how we did with that and how their experiences with other processes have been with that.

FREDERIC WAKE-WALKER: with the director's process we were clear and keen not to ask the directors to present a concept, not at the Open Call stage, but the interview stage, we didn't ask them to do that kind of work.

MATHILDE LOPEZ-NORTON: As a director, it is so rare to ask to pitch, you are asked to apply to be artistic director and the rest of the time - events project - I make myself [...] project, in my head - for no one at all. I welcome the exercise and the outside demand, because as a free-lance director, I generate the demand and

make the thing happen, nobody is asking me anything, so as a director it is nice to be asked something.

As an artist, not a director. you are a manager more than anything else. I enjoyed the exercise and didn't feel it was a burden. I feel we could do this more - then singers and performers can audition this way - I wouldn't mind this system.

FREDERIC WAKE-WALKER: This is a question I have for everyone here, when I have applied for something and not got it, I find that process a useful one, in terms of when you are asked to reflect where you are in your career and where you were at, and when you don't get it, you learn something about yourself. I would be interested to know if that is hard, or me just living in an overly positive lifestyle.

TORIA BANKS: and interesting general question, what does a good recruitment process for a job you don't get look like. Because obviously, we tend to think of recruitment processes for a job we DO get, as a good process.

But part of our responsibility if we are producing a project, is to think about that process, particularly as you talked about the effort to work from a place of kindness, and once you get to the making process, feels like this shouldn't just be a charmed circle for the people who get selected - with a charmed [...] of the world. It is not easy to go up for stuff and not get it. So interesting to see what others say about that.

Along the same lines, I wanted to bring up what you think the connection is between an Open Call as a technical thing, that people can apply to - and having a more accessible and inclusive recruitment process. Which in turn, the accessible and inclusivity, leads to a more diverse set of artists and what you think that link is. I think there is a link.

But I am aware, this process, and how we connected, coming to you as a disabled artist with a disabled led project, it was hard to get initial support for - early stage project support for - so I know that helped us and in terms of wording call outs, for Out of her Mouth, and other projects, I am constantly learning how to frame a call out - in a way that avoids creating barriers. So tell me a little what the link has been between those two things, being accessible and diverse and running open calls.

FREDERIC WAKE-WALKER: the thing that struck me, remembering that open call we did that you applied for - we got, as ever lots of people - lots of applications from disabled artists and it was not something that we felt particularly experienced in actually, so it threw up a big question for us, saying, how do we now support these artists and process - or take the process forward in a way. it led us to doing some training with Drake - and, working with you Toria and working with at least one other disabled artist in that group as well.

So, for me, it was about learning, not saying we are doing this Open Call, because it will lead to accessibility, it was genuinely open from our point of view in what we discovered and what we have subsequently learned. This is what I mean, in terms of openness in learning about stuff, with every Open Call, it is thrown up something that we are excited by but don't know enough about - and it has helped us learn. Does that answer your question.

TORIA BANKS: I think, sort of, not sure there is a straightforward answer. It is important to hear about that connection or what the possible connections are between those things.

FREDERIC WAKE-WALKER: Bridget has her hand up, which means I have forgotten to say something.

BRIDGET: We haven't set out to have a specific person, but we think of the language of the call to make it clear that we do endeavour to be as inclusive and as accessible as possible and we will budget for access provision in the recruitment process, or needed for interviews or auditions and if selected - to work with us. I think my impression from talking to people, that is picked up on, therefore, not surprised if there is a link there - between getting a more diverse range of applicants, by considering the language of the calls, and we look at this time and again to improve it.

Nice comments in chat. Someone asked about extending reach - we try and reach new networks and people. And how do you know who you aren't reaching. we ask people to fill in a diversity monitoring survey and we compared the statistics - in some cases, we were engaging a more diverse range of people when doing an open call. So that is for us to unpick to see where we aren't reaching people. Interesting feed-back from people who don't get it as well.

Someone says it can be soul crushing - I know this is true.

Someone else says, you can remember your skills and remember sister companies. Something we try and do - recommending people I have seen to other colleagues in the sector. Sorry, stopping talking now.

TORIA BANKS: Not at all, all that is great, working with Hera I would say, part of it is weird, I have access needs as a disabled artist, but only through considering how that is expressed to others, has made me more honest with myself about what I find off putting or difficult to deal with in making an application, so it helped to connect my personal experience of being on one side of a call out process, to putting things in place hopefully - whether that is just putting your commitment to being accessible at the top of a call out, and not making it sound copy and paste language, and you know some of these things might cost money and that is okay.

So... Just before we get to - we should talk to some of the artists we have here - but a final thing to bring up with Freddie, is the question of - the second part of the funnel - if you are really open in the first stage of recruitment, then you get down to a shortlist of people to meet, or interview or audition, what do you then do differently at that stage. is there a sense that that can be more open, in terms of an audition process?

FREDERIC WAKE-WALKER: I don't think of that stage as being open as such, but about being - creating an environment, where the people, the applicants - can show themselves, who they really are and give their best, whatever that means - for a singer, this may mean something different to an actor or director - but creating an environment where people can give of their best and feel comfortable and welcomed. I think, a lot of experiences of singers in other environments, are - you walk in, stand on the spot, sing your aria and walk out - and that's it. Or as Mathilde says you don't get that chance. How do you get that first show or whatever it is. So for me, it is about creating that caring environment that is key.

I want to pick up on Kelan's point about feed-back. I think that is good and think we could improve - about - giving feed-back - I am not sure, to be honest, if I am scared to give feed-back that is potentially negative. it is about capacity actually, in order to give careful and thoughtful feed-back to so many people - would take a very long time and after a process of emotions and going through the applications and living with everyone and imagining what it would be like to work with that person, I am wrung out, to be honest. but that is me saying I would like to improve on that and work out a way of doing it.

It is hard if you don't know the person already. I won't say any more excuses, but thank-you for making that point, which is a good one.

MATHILDE: That is great, I have learnt a lot, by giving feed-back, you realise how bad you must have been before, the level of complication you didn't welcome, but only when you sit on a panel, you understand those things. As a young director, I would have learned quicker, if I had a chance to see 100 directors talking about projects, to try and write what is being said.

FREDDIE: Thank you. An interesting idea.

TORIA: So just a little bit aware of time ticking away and I will ask Freddie to say a little bit about Mahogany's latest project, Sky in a Small Cage which I am sure many in the room if not everyone saw it and introduce the singers from the project so we can hear from them.

FREDDIE: SIASC is an opera by Rob Hind and performed in Copenhagen and the Barbican this summer. We had 4 principal singers and an ensemble group of 6 singers with an open call for the 6 roles. We had wonderful and extraordinary people applying for that. The audition process there, we invited groups of 6 people and did a working session with those 6 people so there was a chance to see people individually and how they interact and work as a group. Because that ensemble is such an ensemble. From that we got 6 wonderful people two of whom are here today, Rylan and TY to share their experience of the project and process.

RYLAN: Lovely to meet you, I was singing the tenor role in Sky in a Small Cage and it's really interesting to hear that Mahogany Opera's approach is so different to other companies. This was the first call I had ever applied to as a singer, I work in a composition background, and I felt I was at the point of taking on a new challenge. It's really funny to hear about very still audition processes, I think I came in and sat round a campfire and we were singing songs to each other, and we were running around the room. That audition process felt like a game with a sense of [...] with the group, we got on really well and it felt quite wholesome and a holistic process. I think it was similar for TY though we were in different groups.

TY: Hi, I am from Chicago. The in-person audition was a lovely change from the singer standing alone and hearing, thanks, we will call you - don't call us!

The part of the process I found most [...] I guess what drew me to the project and in hindsight has been most affirming about it, was the open call online part of it. As a singer you participate in workshops and roles you don't get - that environment is very familiar.

The sense of a platformed open call where the artist is given a chance to interface with the company and ethics of the production is rare. usually you are tailoring it for your best guess about what the company is after.

The transparency up front about ethical content and project content and modes of collaboration, allows you to not feel you are tailoring a version of yourself for an invisible other. Especially for those of us, in communities who have grown up code switching and attempting to fit a bill, to let the guard down and knowing the production cares about that first. The financial resources to bring me over for a production like this would have been ridiculous. I assume that was part of the intention, to offer up front what you hope to get from your constituents.

FREDDIE: Glad we are recording this. What he said.

TORIA: Thank you. Very beautiful what both of you said. Does anyone else want to respond to that from your experiences of other projects?

TY: If you don't mind me throwing a question back to the room more specifically, in the States right now, the question of ethics and identity and equity, ideally when you invite an open call you are able to pick through and decide, people who are tailor fit for what to do. But that is also its own form of exclusion, right? It's its own form of drawing hard boundaries for what we are after. I have been on productions where the team has been handpicked and then people who don't feel the same vibe get excluded and that lacks the same equity. So where are we in the fragile contingency between ethical open-source equal access space and still having to make decisions at the end of yes/no?

TORIA: I will name that as a moderately profound silence after that question rather than just a gap! I certainly don't have a straightforward answer. I do think there is a situation both in the UK and I can imagine, it feels very strong as an imperative in the States at the moment, we need to be explicit about our values.

There is a tendency to think a diversity chat has been normalised in the UK arts and is therefore the norm and a bit cringe and embarrassing - that diversity stuff. and yet the lived experience of minority groups in life and the arts suggests otherwise!

I certainly value and hope to replicate for others an explicit commitment that goes beyond that policy consensus. That after all is likely to be challenge politically in the coming years, in the UK as well as the States. That therefore doing things in an equitable way because that is where we have got to now, is not something we can rely on and need to do it for explicit commitments that goes with that.

As a self-describe intersectional feminist company that is a thing we want to say because it's a thing we want to live up to. There are for example trans exclusive feminists in the UK who would align with us if we don't make explicit what our views are. It's important to have those views but there is a strange thing around the arts and charitable funding that you should be neutral on these things, and you can't be neutral on these things. That is my personal response, and I am sure others have had a bit of thinking time now.

TY: To put you on the spot a little Rylan, a positive example of this inclusive sort of co model is Rylan's background outside of the classical voice. Where Sky in a Small Cage was still a project that required a barrier to entry, you had to be able to sing quarter tones and there were technical barriers you had to pass and ethical modes of engagement. Rylan's would not have been the standard choice because as a composer you don't expect to see that, and we would not ask you for that. But equity of access can look at intellectual backgrounds, Rylan is a singer with abilities but not trained as a classical singer and that still has a place on multiple levels.

RYLAN: Thank you. I wondered if this was going to come up, within the ensemble were people with additional jobs rather than being singer singers. I was worried about being the only not singer and because I over prepared for the show, it stood me in good stead. It was a technically demanding opera with vocal agility and the flexibility in the room combined with Freddie's stage.

I messaged Rolf when I saw the call and said, hi it's been 5-6 years, I wanted to know if the roles are for contemporary classical singers, and they said, I hadn't thought about it, whatever. The loose-ness and lack of prescriptive-ness was encouragement to go ahead. I submitted a Scott Walker song from the Drift, quite experimental, to say I am not from this background, I am from this background and have a specific sound that might not be what you are looking for, but if it is, I am open for this new challenge! It's given me the confidence if I do see a different open call that is a bit more avante garde and forward thinking I now have the basis to think I could go and do that and is quite confidence building.

TY: We were lucky to work with a director willing to tailor things to bodies in the room and not bodies in the head. You don't get that with every rehearsal process. What changes when you have the six in front of you Freddie?

FREDDIE: I suppose the ideas in the head are more conceptual rather than specific and there isn't that tension where you are thinking one thing and then have to change it because you have these bodies in the room. It's more about coming with frameworks that not only help ME to articulate what I want to express but create a framework for the performers in the space, to give them support to be creative.

As I said with the Open Call, I want everyone to be giving their best and expressing who they are. It was beautiful what you said Rylan, it relates to the question - about what I would consider a good pitch when looking for a composer. I would say, really be yourself and express yourself and if it is the right fit, and show yourself to be the right person, or a good person for that role, that is great and if it is not right, it wasn't meant to be. Don't try and second guess. You said Theory - what part of myself should I present for this thing. Don't present part of yourself, but your whole self.

When on the panel, you see that clearly. This is a question I always have - one of the main questions when looking at applications is what is this person's voice, what do they want to say and are they really able to say it.

TY BOUQUE: If I could jump off that, then come back Toria.

TORIA BANKS: I was about to say, the boring thing - that it is due a break. That is all you are bouncing back to.

TY BOUQUE: In the States, you get out of blue email requests, saying we have something for you - the strange ones, are the ones are the ones who say - what are you looking for - something fun, or dark. We don't know. And if you are so kind of malleable to anything, what core identity are you presenting to us, is it something we can stand on? If you are tailoring it for the job/money, that isn't good, because the motives are transparent. But if they say I want to write this piece with masks and robes, we might say go for it. So the initial presentation is part and parcel in how we are willing to engage with the material.

[BREAK]

[VIDEO PLAYS - Sky In A Small Cage]

[VIDEO PLAYS - Out Of Her Mouth]

TORIA BANKS: Hello. I think I am welcoming people back - I need to go on a view where I can see everybody, so that I know people are back.

For some reason, I am just seeing Marc! And he is not even here!

There we are. Hello everybody, welcome back. I hope you had - whatever you needed in your break. I have tea, which is marvellous.

For those who saw it, I hope you enjoyed the video - highlights of both - nice for me to see a little of our project from last year Out of her Mouth. I will hand over to Mathilde and Katarzyna, who were involved in that project. Involved is the wrong word, they were central to that project. I will introduce that a little. As some of you saw, what we did in conjunction with Mahogany Opera and [...], which was in itself, unusual as a small company - this was dear to me and retrospectively pitched to Freddie - described excitedly more like - I got excited about a thing and then realised I had pitched it to him.

Mahogany Opera facilitated the connection with [...] and they had a relationship with the two companies. As a co-production structure this was unusual and this connects with the openness of the recruitment process, that fed through the project hopefully. Because I already felt like something quite serendipitous had happened in it coming into being.

We had three pieces with [...] baroque pieces, monologues about women in the Old Testament. I wanted to illuminate how extraordinary they were, by performing them in English. We held an open call for a director, while I went about making a translating. And for one of the players, we didn't know was going to be a harpsichordist, but that wasn't part of the process. The rest of the group would have been formed around the person. And also for the singer to play Rachel.

Each of the three co-producing companies took a bit of pastoral and professional responsibility for one of the people recruited through the open call. Linda and I developed a relationship with Alice and that included professional development support - we will hear a little about this - a relationship with Katarzyna and Mathilde from Mahogany Opera. So I will stop talking now - we put it out in the world and lots of people applied to be part of the project, which was validating for me, because it had started as a mad idea in my brain - then it became a mad idea in Mathilde's brain. Perhaps she can tell us about this.

MATHILDE LOPEZ-NORTON: I realised, I didn't describe myself before - I am nearly 50 years old, outrageous in itself, woman with beige skin, that is the best I can do. I have black hair tied in a pompadour, which makes me look like Elvis, I will let you know how that progresses. I guess I have to say I was excited by the idea - I will use the word - devising, though it doesn't mean that, because Toria did the translation - putting 3 pieces together, in a way that hadn't been done and devising a show.

When do you have that level of luxury, devising an opera - easier than composing it, but it was exciting, you could be writing on your feet and that excited me. I love Baroque music, I didn't grow up in the classical world, but I fell in love many times, about music and I am quite interested in the sound and was about to say - God the musical terms are probably wrong - but the slippery silk aspect to it. I am sure there is a musical term for that.

I didn't know [...] at all - unsurprisingly as most women composers, and as a woman of a certain age, I had been increasingly aware of the accepted level of sexism. I guess this comes with age. All this excited me. And I was fortunate enough to get the job. We talked about Open Call before - for me, I apply out of all the Open Calls I see, because I am so happy to see them, so it is a principle for me. It breaks through the nepotism of the art world.

So I think it is a major move - and it had enormous importance. I feel funders should support this - and [...] should sustain the difficulties of going through all the applications, because what are we doing otherwise.

The 3 different pieces that Toria somehow, decided to compose - the order wasn't decided, but we had several meetings where we decided on the order - with a unifying landscape - and also there was a great imperative and challenge, to be totally accessible.

TORIA BANKS: We did captioning, built into the design as well as the audio description. And in the week of the rehearsals, it was delivered live, and I had to describe stuff that Mathilde was working on. But exciting, when you were talking about devising opera, that bit really felt...

MATHILDE LOPEZ-NORTON: I had prepped a lot of the design - the access was embodied within it, and I had drawn a lot of the scenes and had discussion with the 3 singers, talking to them - because in a way we had to pre-design and make quite a lot - because one week to organise everything and make it work. I got obsessed with watermelons; I will get to that. They are biblical stories about women being good, which hasn't changed much - and being also the source of hope and being this fertile uterus and being completely oppressed.

And we are in that weird place, where miracles happen - so thinking of food growing - and what is grown, what miraculously grows on sand and in Israel, is water melon - becoming enormous belly/ breast, full of blood and flesh - all of it felt like it was part of the desire of men, but at the same time, the aridity of the land and the beauty of it and the devouring of it. all of it felt right.

TORIA BANKS: Can I ask you something about this - back to the Open Call discussion, but also to what you are saying - which is, as a director, what you are often asked to do to get a job, is to pitch a concept, but you didn't have to do that, this came after, we had talked for week and you had time with the designer and plans for the different venues we were talking to - I wonder if you feel - how you feel about what you were asked to do, at different stages, because, it is hard to imagine feeling you are devising something, if you have to produce a product in a job interview.

MATHILDE LOPEZ-NORTON: The interview was about me and how I work and what I am interested in, so in that sense, the Open Call didn't require a lot of preparation for me. So didn't feel exploited, the whole water melon design process, came in the following weeks, once I had the job, and then I worked with the designer, and I planted the ideas, and also in conversation with the singers, because hard to do anything in a vacuum, so spent time with them on zoom. I was happy to pre work like that, that didn't feel different, as normal preparation as a director. the hard thing was the limited time we had - so I had to say, I had underestimated the amount of liquid watermelons hold. We had an instrument on stage. And we are bashing watermelons.

There is Judith decapitating the head and it didn't feel like, the level of violence we wanted and the vocabulary around it. It felt [...] instinctively better to bash his head than decapitate it. It's a really weird thing and I don't do that normally but the decapitation felt like a symbol that echoed other things and the baby with the fecundity and putting him to bed and bashing him felt like bashing your own children felt like a sort of

mutilation of oneself and the future being.

On that front symbolically the violence was more pertinent than decapitation, touching the French revolution.

TONIA: I don't want to cut you off at the point where you talking about bashing children because that is maybe not the right idea to leave in people's mind but to answer the chat, yes it's the same painting as in the painting by Artemesia, she painted it several times and it is a story that resonates with female artists. Katarzyna, can you tell us about the process of coming into the project through the open call and what made you want to apply and what were you expecting and what weren't you expecting?

KATARZYNA: I am a Polish British woman in my early 40s wearing cat shaped glasses and a flowery jumper. What drew me to the project? When it was announced it seemed like a perfect project for me, really! Everything from the project description was calling me to apply because I am into female composers and French baroque music, and I was familiar with Elisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre's music before, and it felt natural to approach this call. And also it was advertised as happening in Scotland so what is not to like about it?

But the expectations went beyond because it turned out to be an extraordinary production and definitely changed my relationship with watermelons for good. We had the challenge of protecting [name] and other precious instruments such as the violin and the cello. So a brilliant idea to bring on the curtain to protect the instruments from whatever was being bashed with the baseball bat. But the challenge arose when the bat carried the juice over the curtain.

TONIA: The musicians were very on stage and part of the staged performance. Whether that was something new for you, and whether that was appealing or frightening?

KATARZYNA: Absolutely. It wasn't really known or specified in open call it would be like that, and I hadn't expected that. It was a great experience to be part of the performance with all the musicians on stage. I like being challenged in the physical sense because musicians are used to being there and playing the music, but this required us to be more involved with it. I love that the show evolved in a way.

We were very lucky to have five shows, and each was evolving and much different. It was great what Mathilde told us to do because we had a five-star review in the Times and you could have thought, great. But we still wanted to improve it, and I was challenged to stand up and look at the table and the mess and go back to the harpsichord and my energy contributed to that. That was ingenious. Those skills, we don't have many opportunities to practice this sort of performance skills as musicians. I find it really interesting and inspiring. so thanks for that lesson, Mathilde.

TONIA: Thank you very much both of you. We would love to chat to you more and hopefully we will. But in terms of this evening's event I would like to open up to any questions or comments from everyone in the room about the things we have been talking about. There are a couple of things I would like to get to in the Chat. You can literally raise a hand or there is a raise a hand button on zoom if anyone would like to chip in?

RYLAN: I am really interested by the question about budget for access needs if you don't necessarily know what is involved in the project. For any company starting up, Eilidh raises a good point about the flexibility of the project.

BRIDGET RENNIE: It's a really good question because you don't know exactly what people's needs are going to be if you don't know who you are working with, but over time we have learned to make an estimate of what different access provisions might cost. That is a line, and I have put that in Arts Council England applications and other funders, and I will explain, putting a line for say 1000 pounds and say, artists to be confirmed. Sometimes you might not spend it all and sometimes you might need more, that is how it goes, and you juggle as necessary. Funders increasingly expect to see that, and it's not been questioned in the funding applications I put in.

TONIA: For a different company we put in a contingency application and that was separate to the contingency - and it wasn't questioned. Dominic?

DOMINIC MCGONIGAL: I wanted to say how refreshing it is you are even thinking about this co it's so soul destroying putting in a bid as a composer or artist. And it feels like an exam where you send something in and it's a 99 out of 100 rejections. The open call you did recently felt different. Thank you for that.

TONIA: Sarah, then Theresa?

SARAH LLEWELLYN: Hi. It's going back to the open call; I am also a composer. What you were saying earlier about whether you value the process in actually doing these things - I think there is a real value. And something Dominic said in the Chat, that I really agree with. Some are really popular and lots of people apply but the ones where you have to put in a lot of creative days to create the music and then you don't get it. Your call didn't require a huge amount and was really accessible so to be able to share what we have at that stage of the open call is really good.

Another thing about the open calls is often you discover a new company and what works and creative people within the company. So even if you don't get the job it can lead to new relationships and exploring new work. It's been a really interesting journey for me to discover Mahogany Opera and you weren't on my radar before but are very much now. I have been really impressed with the catalogue of work. There should be more companies making this and taking the steps. Open Hire is another good place to find these calls, I don't know if you put your open call on there.

MATHILDE: That is where I found it.

SARAH LLEWELLYN: It's been very positive to hear how you have carefully thought through the wording, it makes sense in terms of how accessible this has been. I am wittering on and will stop now.

TONIA: Thank you, Sarah. I will go to Theresa because you had your hand up before.

THERESA: I agree totally with what Sarah said, it does make a difference not having to do a vast pitch for a project you don't ever get. That is really soul destroying. This whole process of listening and meeting you and seeing the video of the work was great. Another way I did an open call was that we all went to a workshop first, nothing to do really with the project. In a way it was telling us about what the project would be, but we had to thrust ourselves forward and then apply. It was a long process, but we got a lot out of doing the workshop together.

I met someone there I ended up working with, I got that job with someone else. I worked with her subsequently. I don't know if that would work with singers, but it worked with composers and librettos. I applied with 4 different [...] for that job and got ONE of the composers. It was a really amazing experience, and somebody said to me recently, the Arts Council aren't [...] requested to put funds into opera much. I think that is really interesting because I think opera would gain a great deal from workshop processes, I have worked more in musical theatre and in music theatre we do tons of workshops. It's a really exciting process where you get to know people. Sorry!

TONIA: Don't apologise, useful to think about other ways open calls could work and that reminded me of what Freddie said about how the ensemble came together in an expanded pre application process. If anyone is burning to speak?

BILL: I had a conversation today which was nothing to do with the organisation, I am in - Tete a Tete, what happens if you make an open call, and don't get the results you want, in terms of diversity, do you edit the results.

TORIA BANKS: What do you mean - in terms of who gets the work.

BILL: So say everyone who applies, are a middle-aged man, is it okay to bring in others to skew that outcome.

TORIA BANKS: So you have to supplement the pool of people. I will cowardly throw this to Freddie and see what he says.

FREDERIC WAKE-WALKER: I think you should have a good look at yourself, not you Toria, but the person who has done this Open Call. Sorry [chuckle]

I think - if you have got that far down the line and you are in that situation - how have you done an Open Call in the first place - how have you got there? I think some self-reflection earlier down the line might need to have taken place. That is not really answering the question.

BRIDGET: Does it mean, you are supplementing the team, or you don't want any of these people, I will just pick people I know. They are different from an ethical standpoint, but if literally all old white, old Etonians, I wouldn't have an ethical problem.

MARC: Some goes back to what we discussed before, about how the opportunity is shared, ensuring you are looking at the networks you are utilising and making sure it is reaching the right people. If you don't put input into that side of things, then you run the risk of getting one set of demographics responding to that Open Call.

MATHILDE LOPEZ: the wording as well and the way it is shared and on which platform and requires a knowledge that only people of a certain class could have - there is that as well.

RYLAN GLEAVE: I wonder if there is a middle point - there is a stage, where you are looking for low voices. I hadn't seen that in a call before. If you aren't getting the applications you are looking for, are there things you could look to do as an organisation?

TORIA BANKS: I think so, you can be explicit, if you are looking for more low voices, but if you realise you aren't attracting disabled applicants, you can say so, but say it in a nice place, in a nice way, where disabled people will see you. Or for other groups you may want to reach.

FREDERIC WAKE-WALKER: Toria, I am conscious of time.

TORIA BANKS: Yes, we are meant to be wrapping up. If no one else really needs to add to that - I am going to firstly, very much thank T y and Rylan and Mathilde and Katarzyna for giving us their experiences and seem broadly to have been positive experiences, and I will thank Freddie and Marc and Bridget for that - and thank them on my behalf, and thank-you to everyone here and for coming and joining the conversation and being interested in the how we get people together to make stuff, because this is important. Yeah, then I will let Freddie say goodbye and then we are off to have some dinner, maybe.

FREDERIC WAKE-WALKER: Yes, I am hungry, so echoing what Toria said, thank-you, thank-you, thank-you to everyone. And to this idea that there are so many people applying and so few opportunities, but so important especially now, we keep working and shouting about what we do and showing how important it is. So don't give up, we are all together in this.

Good luck with everything, that everywhere we are all doing.

[END OF LIVE EVENT]