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News
Release

27 June 2017

Audience study set to boost contemporary arts in the UK

- Researchers collaborate with arts organisations to help them attract new audiences
- Study investigating the attitudes and experiences of current arts audiences at crucial time for the arts in the UK
- Project developing free handbook with practical advice on implementing audience development strategies

A handbook to help contemporary arts organisations expand their audiences is being developed by researchers as part of a new project launched by the University of Sheffield.

The project, led by Professor Stephanie Pitts from Sheffield's Department of Music, is working with arts organisations across the UK to develop and test audience development strategies.

It is now looking for additional contemporary arts organisations to join the study, which could help them attract new audiences.

Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the research is investigating what value the contemporary arts have to the people who engage with them. It will look to define contemporary arts audiences and the challenges organisations face in encouraging people to engage with new or experimental art works.

The study, by the Sheffield Performer and Audience Research Centre in collaboration with Newcastle University, aims to help arts organisations develop new strategies to recruit and retain new audience members.

Professor Stephanie Pitts, Head of the University of Sheffield's Department of Music, said: "The launch of this project comes at an important time for the arts in the UK. Arts Council England are announcing this week their National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) funding - the stream

through which they distribute £409 million of their £622 million funding per year. With many local councils cutting funding and contributions through the National Lottery in the UK down by around £55 million last year, supporting arts organisations to recruit and retain their audiences is a timely concern to which we're glad to be able to contribute through our research.

“As part of NPO applications, arts organisations are under pressure to grow and diversify their audiences. This research project brings much-needed understanding of contemporary arts audiences and tests strategies for audience development which will be of use to a wide range of arts organisations.”

The study will culminate in the production of a handbook, which will be freely shared with arts organisations across the country, with practical advice on implementing the findings in their own marketing, programming and audience development strategies.

Stephanie added: “Our project is looking to help contemporary artists in two ways: The first phase of the study will investigate the attitudes and experiences of existing and potential audiences at contemporary arts venues. The second phase will put these findings into action by working with arts organisations to help them attract new audiences.”

As part of the project, the Sheffield-led research team will be working with lead partners in the arts to recruit a large number of arts organisations in order to gain a detailed insight into their audiences and build a network of contemporary arts organisations across the country. Chosen to cover a diversity of cities, organisations and art forms, lead partners in the project are:

- Birmingham Contemporary Music Group
- Bush Theatre (London)
- Bluecoat (Liverpool)
- Spike Island (Bristol)

Briefing sessions will be held within the next few months to launch the project in each city. Contemporary arts organisations that are interested in attending a launch event or contributing to the study can contact the research team via: sparc@sheffield.ac.uk

For more information on the Sheffield Performer and Audience Research Centre at the University of Sheffield, please visit: <http://sparc.dept.shef.ac.uk/>

Media contact: Sean Barton, Junior Public Relations Officer, on 0114 2229852 or email s.barton@sheffield.ac.uk

Notes to editors:

The University of Sheffield

With almost 27,000 of the brightest students from over 140 countries, learning alongside over 1,200 of the best academics from across the globe, the University of Sheffield is one of the world's leading universities.

A member of the UK's prestigious Russell Group of leading research-led institutions, Sheffield offers world-class teaching and research excellence across a wide range of disciplines.

Unified by the power of discovery and understanding, staff and students at the university are committed to finding new ways to transform the world we live in.

Sheffield is the only university to feature in The Sunday Times 100 Best Not-For-Profit Organisations to Work For 2017 and was voted number one university in the UK for Student Satisfaction by Times Higher Education in 2014. In the last decade it has won four Queen's Anniversary Prizes in recognition of the outstanding contribution to the United Kingdom's intellectual, economic, cultural and social life.

Sheffield has six Nobel Prize winners among former staff and students and its alumni go on to hold positions of great responsibility and influence all over the world, making significant contributions in their chosen fields.

Global research partners and clients include Boeing, Rolls-Royce, Unilever, AstraZeneca, Glaxo SmithKline, Siemens and Airbus, as well as many UK and overseas government agencies and charitable foundations.

Birmingham Contemporary Music Group

Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, one of the world's foremost new music ensembles, celebrates its thirtieth anniversary in the 2017/18 season. Over three decades, BCMG has developed the music of today for the audiences of tomorrow. The ensemble has commissioned over 170 pieces of music from the world's finest composers and emerging international talent. BCMG was founded by musicians from the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra in 1987, with Sir Simon Rattle as Founding Patron. Since then, BCMG has reached over 10 million people in concert and through broadcasts. The Group performs regularly at CBSO Centre, Symphony Hall and Town Hall Birmingham, Wigmore Hall in London and at the BBC Proms and Aldeburgh Festival.

<http://www.bcmg.org.uk/>

Bush Theatre

The Bush Theatre is a world-famous home for new plays and an internationally renowned champion of playwrights in Shepherd's Bush, West London. We discover, nurture and produce the best new playwrights from the widest range of backgrounds, and present their work to the highest possible standards. We look for exciting new voices that tell contemporary stories with

wit, style and passion and we champion work that is both provocative and entertaining. The Bush Theatre has produced hundreds of ground-breaking premieres since its inception in 1972, many of them Bush Theatre commissions, and hosted guest productions by leading companies and artists from across the world.

<https://www.bushtheatre.co.uk/>

Bluecoat

Bluecoat is Liverpool's centre for the contemporary arts, supporting and presenting visual art, music, dance, live art and literature, as well as practices that fall in between these categories. In the past few years its gallery programme has shown some of the best UK and international artists and at the same time Bluecoat engages with audiences from the most vulnerable communities. Bluecoat celebrates its 300th anniversary throughout 2017, with 300 days of special programming comprising exhibitions, performances of music, dance and live art, literature events, commissions, a sociologist in residence, and a major heritage participation project, *My Bluecoat*.

<http://www.thebluecoat.org.uk/>

Spike Island

Spike Island is an international centre for the development of contemporary art and design, based in Bristol's historic harbour area. It is a place where artists and the public can meet, enabling audiences to engage with artists' research and production. Within the 80,000 square foot building, Spike Island offers visitors a year-round programme of exhibitions, events and activities in the central gallery spaces, as well as providing working space for artists, designers and creative businesses.

www.spikeisland.org.uk

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