



“The choir group every Friday afternoon has had quite a transformational affect on my wellbeing. I was struggling to deal with depression. The choir has boosted my self-esteem and self confidence.” [WD]

Music in the Ville

Choir Project 2019

An overview

The Music in the Ville Choir Project was a series of weekly workshops for prisoners which took place in HMP Pentonville between 3 March and 25 July 2019. It was the third event organised at Pentonville by Emma Dogliani, a professional musician and founder of ELMO, a community music charity. Emma's grandparents were penal reformers in the 1930s and it was partly because of this that she became an OPV (Official Prison Visitor)* at HMPP in 2017. It was through this voluntary work visiting prisoners that the idea of Music in the Ville began.

The previous two events consisted of professional musicians coming into the prison to perform to a prisoner audience with a couple of prisoners also performing.

They were received enthusiastically by attending prisoners (see Appendix 2).

“Coming to choir has been an absolute breath of fresh air. Soothing and calming!” [AK]

The Music in the Ville Choir Project, however, was the first time that prisoners were fully involved from the start, taking part not just as audience, but in making music themselves and in developing their own musical skills.

The project consisted of nine afternoon sessions of two-and-a-half hours, all held in the Chapel of HMP Pentonville.

The project was sponsored by the Hilden Charitable Fund and a private donation from Jane Wynne Willson. It was also made possible by volunteer support from other OPVs at the prison, many extra hours of admin worked in kind by Emma, and two free sessions donated from tutors when the concert had to be rescheduled at short notice.

“It is really good for expressing yourself... it is my time to shine.” [MR]

“It has been a Godsend to me on a personal note, as well as for the other men who attend.” [HJ]

* For further information about the OPV scheme, please see Appendix 1

The choir has helped me, as since I have gone to choir I have been more calm and more happy, and more polite to the staff on my wing. Emma has been the reason why I have been able to be the true me which I am so grateful for the choir to be here in Pentonville. Please keep the choir going as it will help others not just me as I have said at the beginning of this piece of writing that you are reading right now. So I ask you again to please keep the choir running. The choir has not only helped me it has helped the others that come to the choir on Friday when muslim prayers are going on, plus it has helped me build my confidence up more as I have not got a lot of confidence's. I have got Anxiety and the choir has made me less Anxious in groups.

Inclusivity

The choir was open to any prisoner to join, unless a particular security issue arose, up to a limit of 20 prisoners per session. The final session also involved an extra 20 prisoners and 20 visitors from outside who combined to form the audience. Some of the prisoners were transferred to other prisons during the project and some joined late. In total 50 prisoners were involved, either as participants or as audience for the final concert.

Recruitment

This took place in several ways. Being an OPV (see Appendix 1) meant that Emma was meeting prisoners weekly on all wings of the prison. She took any opportunity to mention the idea of a choir and music workshop and many prisoners either showed interest themselves or mentioned a fellow prisoner who they felt might be interested. There was no requirement to have any experience or special interest in music. The sessions were presented as “an escape from the usual routine” and “quality biscuits” were provided as an incentive.

What did we do?

Each session was led by Emma Dogliani and two professional music tutors. For more details of our tutors, see Appendix 3. On the first and last session we had three tutors present. After detailed weekly planning between Emma and Kate Shortt (the lead tutor), the sessions generally took roughly the following shape:

Introduction and welcome

from Emma, outlining the plan for the day or anything that had come up since the previous week.

Warm-up games [30-45 minutes]

These became a hugely important part of the sessions. Many of the prisoners and volunteers at the beginning were impatient to start learning music straight away. However these varied games and exercises proved absolutely vital in the extremely successful bonding, integration and confidence building which gradually happened over the course of the project. Most prisoners were uneasy on arrival and prisoners joining at different stages during the nine sessions also had to be accommodated. The exercises

provided a relaxed and fun atmosphere in which important work could start informally on building skills such as concentration, breathing, vocal production, rhythm, pitching and singing in basic harmony.

Learning new repertoire [45 minutes]

The music worked on was a combination of suggestions from tutors and prisoners themselves. The prisoners were encouraged to work on music that was broadly familiar to them already, but also keep an open mind and to try out unfamiliar music.

Tea Break [30 minutes]

This provided time for prisoners not only to chat amongst themselves but also with all the tutors and any additional volunteers attending, thus providing invaluable social interaction and contact with the outside world.

Performance [15 minutes]

At all sessions (except the last one when the group was too busy rehearsing), there was a performance after the tea break, either from one of the tutors or from one of the prisoners who wanted to present new songs they had written. The opportunity for the participants to hear professional performances close up of a huge range of music including jazz vocals, opera solos, classical and jazz cello, was hugely valued, generated discussion and also respect and inspiration. Likewise the level of performance from one of the most able and hugely talented prisoners was very much appreciated by all involved and lifted the group's mood greatly.

More group singing [15 minutes]

This culminated with a jamming session with one prisoner on drums, one on guitar and anyone else who wanted to, improvising. Some prisoners also danced and we ended on a high each week.

Benefits to Prisoners

Mental Health

The general benefits of participation in a shared live musical experience are widely accepted. Singing in particular has physical benefits, but even more important is the positive impact it has on mental health.

W's story

W was a patient in daycare who had shown an interest one day when Emma was in the department talking about the choir. On the morning of the first session, Emma went around the cells of all the prisoners who had put their names down to remind them again that the choir was meeting that afternoon. On looking for W she finally found out that he was currently an inpatient in the hospital unit reserved for the 20 or so most unwell men in the prison. A nurse took her to talk to W through the door and from his bed he said "I don't feel up to coming". After a bit of a chat they agreed that Emma would phone through later in the day, and a nurse agreed to bring him over to the prison if he changed his mind. W did arrive for the session, sweating profusely with nerves. Very gradually he joined in with the warm-up games, and by the end of the session he had volunteered to sing a solo. He attended two more sessions before moving on.

J's story

J was a prisoner recovering from a serious suicide attempt which had left him in a coma for three days, hospitalised for a month, traumatised and suffering memory problems. He was still struggling with depression and anxiety while awaiting his trial. Emma had been visiting him for several weeks and started to mention the choir. J was spending most of his time in his cell, isolated and not talking to other prisoners. Eventually he agreed to come along and listen at the back of the group. One week, it took Katie, one of the other OPV volunteers, half an hour of gentle persuasion and accompanying him there herself to get him to come along. On his third visit he began to join in, and the week after we saw him smiling, laughing and taking part in the singing. He continued to attend until he left HMPP and it was certainly a positive step in his starting to take part in other activities in the chapel and mixing more with others.

Working as a group and breaking down barriers

“I learnt new skills while bonding with my group. [CK]

“The music brought everybody together, no matter age, nationality, religion, background...” [AP] [visitor feedback]

HJ's story

HJ has a history of gang involvement. When submitting his feedback he pointed out that the word affiliations referred to rival gang affiliations, and that membership of the choir had included men with different gang loyalties who despite this, whilst not becoming friends, had worked together successfully.

“Men from all backgrounds and affiliations come together as a whole and create something beautiful to be proud of.” [HJ]

TA's story

On the day of the concert, while the choir were completing their final rehearsal, An officer came into the chapel and told Emma that a transgender prisoner TA wanted to come along and join the audience. The officer had suggested this to TA as she was feeling very low and had been self-harming that day. Two of the prisoners heard this and complained strongly, expressing transphobic comments and threatening to leave if TA was invited. Then followed a conversation between these two prisoners, Emma, another tutor, and two other prisoners who took a more inclusive approach. The two complaining prisoners were told that if they couldn't accept TA coming, they would have to leave themselves. Eventually both were persuaded to stay and take part. TA arrived and very much enjoyed the concert. She said it gave her a great lift that day. A week later it emerged that after the project was finished, one of the previously transphobic prisoners who had observed the tutors welcoming TA, started talking to her himself and now they are on reasonably good terms.

Individual skills

Three already highly able prisoners had an opportunity to share their skills with the rest of the group. This inspired others and also boosted the confidence and morale of the three prisoners concerned. The opportunity to perform solo numbers in the concert gave them a goal to work towards. They were observed practising together and working towards this goal from early on right up to the day of the show.

Confidence building

Many prisoners mentioned how the sessions contributed to them gaining confidence and feelings of self worth. This was clear to see developing over the nine sessions.

“I have anxiety and since coming to choir I have been able to go to all groups with people and stay to the end of the group.” [SN]

“At first I found it very sort of hard as I get shy but once I got to know the group I found it highly enjoyable and got into it. I’ve been told I have a good voice.” [RP]

“The best thing about it was not being judged or looked down on and being in a pleasant and happy environment.” [AK]

Better behaviour

“Since I have gone to choir, I have been more calm and more happy and more polite to staff on the wing.” [SN]

Prisoners reported how their mood remained lifted for some time after a session. Some were seen to be rehearsing many times during the week between sessions, some in daycare (the mental health unit), others in their cells, both together and individually. Many reported looking forward to the next session and being happy when Friday came around during the project.

“When the guys come back from the choir they are always in a great mood and easier to manage.”
[Officer, D wing]

Volunteer involvement

Volunteer staff in the prison – colleagues of Emma’s who work as OPVs – were essential to making this project happen, as were two of the prison Chaplains. As well as helping to get the prisoners to the chapel on the project days, they were on hand to encourage prisoners and to join in the sessions at times. An additional benefit was that quite a few prisoners found out about the OPV service and signed up to regular visits.

These volunteers followed the process and were equally enthusiastic...

Bill Miller

[Humanist Chaplain, HMPP]

This singing group was a great success, especially as I don’t think it’s been attempted at HMPP before. The prisoners were engaged, enthusiastic, enjoyed it and improved their abilities, not just singing and concentration, but group work. I was really impressed to see the guys calmly lined up for the start of the performance with an audience. I think group work with prisoners

brings on good things: improved behaviour, personal responsibility, paying attention, being reliable, and being brave in trying something new. Also, it is well known the action of singing is good for wellbeing. The teachers coming from outside did well for a new environment and handled the group with confidence. And most of all, Emma Dogliani has been an inspiration for making a new venture work, involving Chaplaincy and of course security, enlisting the help when available from Officers along with other Chaplaincy volunteers. It was great to see the Chapel used, it is such a pleasant space.

Richard Miller [OPV HMPP]

I attended three early rehearsals for the concert/performance as helper and observer but none in the four weeks prior to the concert itself. What struck me most forcefully on 26 July at the warm-up session/rehearsal before the concert was how cohesive and purposeful the group had become since I had last seen it in action. Once the usual difficulties of getting all the prisoners from their wings/cells had been overcome, the group settled down immediately to rehearsing. There were no signs of the restlessness that had characterised earlier rehearsals. Everyone seems to have a good idea of what was expected of them.

The performance of a varied repertoire was energetic, disciplined and very entertaining. Above all the prisoners taking part seemed to really enjoy what they were doing and bent on giving the audience something worth listening to. It was astonishing to see how, over quite a short time period, the group had come together and acquired a sense of common purpose. There were some talented musicians in the group clearly, including Rob, Kate and Emma but not limited to the teachers/organisers, but the main characteristic was the combined enthusiasm of all the prisoners taking part, a sense of teamwork which communicated itself quickly to the audience who responded in kind. It was great also to see how the prisoners supported each other during the performance. Everyone seemed happy to have been there and to have taken part. In fact, it was astonishing how much had been achieved in a relatively short time and sometimes, seemingly, against the odds. All credit to the instructors/teachers but above all to Emma for making it happen. This is clearly an achievement that should be built upon as soon as possible. It is a project that has been valuable to everyone involved, especially the prisoners who took part, and it would be a shame if the progress made could not be followed through in some way.

Officer participation and appreciation

Officers contributed and appreciated the project in several ways. Two officers actually dropped in and joined in on two occasions. Officer Michael Barton joined in for part of one session on his guitar. Officer Rose Hammond came and sang along although she had laryngitis at the time! This was great to see and if the staffing levels improve and the staff have the time, it would be wonderful to develop this environment of officers and prisoners making music together. On another session, two officers danced along during the final jamming session and there was a real party atmosphere for the last 20 minutes. Officers commented on how much easier the men were to manage after the sessions.

Prison Management Support

The prison Governors have given us their support in difficult circumstances and we are grateful for it. We will be meeting members of the senior management team to discuss strategies to take the project forward in a way that causes the least difficulty logistically for the prison management and to create maximum benefits for prisoners and staff alike.

“Thank you for bringing hope and joy to these men... I hope we are able to facilitate more arts and creative activity in the future...”

[Darren Hughes, Governor]

“Creative activities are a fantastic opportunity and the choir impact has been excellent... Where I have staff I can assure you I will assist to run this activity.”

[Stephen Dixey, Deputy Governor]

“I thought your last concert was received with much positivity from both the prisoners and the staff... I believe these events add much to the lives in Pentonville and as a security team we are happy to support them... we need to promote events such as this which help with calming the establishment down.”

[Ruth Hipwell, Head of Security]

Artistic Development for professional musicians involved

All four tutors who took part over the nine sessions were extremely enthusiastic about the whole experience. They all found it one of the most interesting and rewarding projects they had been involved in. Here is feedback from three tutors involved.*

Kate Shortt [cellist, vocalist, workshop leader and educator]

From May to July I was one of the vocal workshop leaders at Pentonville prison. I can honestly say that this experience was one of the more intense of my teaching career. No two weeks were the same. I watched the men develop in confidence, performance, vocal technique, and participation. The participants' uncertainty, caution and brave dipping in of toes soon blossomed into something quite special at times throughout the period. Some of them went from singing inconspicuously to spontaneously singing solos when they realised it was a safe space to let go. We discovered some truly talented performers. Then finally the unthinkable happened for them, a full one hour concert in the chapel of all the material we'd worked on to an audience of inmates and outsiders. The atmosphere was buzzing. One of those outsiders spent the whole concert with tears streaming down her face afterwards, claiming that in all her years of concert going she'd never seen anything quite like it.

I believe this work has all to gain in many respects. Congratulations to Emma for having this vision and enabling it to happen.

Hannah Brine [vocalist and community choir leader]

I have so enjoyed working with the men of Pentonville with the choir project. It has been amazing to see the growth in confidence and ability to focus and gain ownership as the weeks progressed. They have engaged so well musically, asking musical questions and learning some basic choral techniques including singing in harmony. More importantly the progression has been socially how they interacted with each other, the amount of respect shown to each other and to us, and encouraging each other and working as an ensemble. It was one of the highlights of this year for me, truly. I basically LOVED it!

* For more information on the music team, see Appendix 3

Rob Gildon [opera singer and
community music group leader]

*For me, it was a hugely positive
experience and I don't think
I'm speaking out of turn when*

*I say that feeling was shared by everyone involved - inmates,
tutors and volunteers. It helped that we were led by Emma, who
was so dedicated, enthusiastic and never lost heart despite some
logistical issues and frustrations.*

*We managed to access a large number of inmates
(numbers were consistently high), with a range of musical abilities,
cultures and social skills, and created a united company of singers
and performers who ended up performing to an outside audience
and to their peers. No mean feat in such a challenging environment
and in a relatively short time. The process of getting there
worked because a real sense of camaraderie developed over the
weeks between the guys. They supported each other, cajoled each
other if there was some disruption and I think they really valued
the opportunity to be free to be heard and to express themselves.
There was a great rapport and ease between the tutors and the
inmates and also a great rapport and sense of support between the
tutors, which I think the inmates acknowledged and witnessed. I
loved how each tutor brought different skills and different styles
to the group. We sang opera for goodness sake! - we explored
characters, how to tell a story and the group performed the Carmen
number with the same passion and vigour they performed their rock,
jazz, rap numbers. I found that utterly thrilling.*

*It was important that the group were able to
perform their own rep and had the opportunity to improvise – it
can be a scary/exposing experience, but they embraced it. There
were also lots of opportunities for standouts, which were widely
distributed and open to all in the group. There were some amazing
break-throughs. SN for instance, who was much too anxious to join
in at first and by the final concert, supported by the others, was
able to sing a solo and speak at the end about his experience with
the choir and his high anxiety.*

*I was only involved in four sessions – two full
workshops, one aborted concert (cancelled due to plumbing crisis)
and one real concert, so I was not a witness to all sessions. On a
personal note I found my trip round the prison (on the cancelled
concert date when we went around to break the news to the men) a
real eye-opener – something I will never forget.*

*There were some extraordinary world-class
performers in the prison – HJ (rapper and songwriter) and AH
(amazing singer/drummer). I learnt from watching them – it really
was a two-way process. Can we do it again?!*

The Prisoner Audience

Despite considerable difficulties with low staffing levels and practical problems in the prison, staff were able to get 20 prisoners to us on the last day, to come and watch the performance. On arrival they were a boisterous group and there was a lot of giggling. The prospect of them sitting and listening seemed a bit slim. After the first few minutes though, they gradually became progressively more engaged and soon became absolutely riveted. They clapped, they joined in, they cheered, and at the end were shouting for more and giving a standing ovation. In the days that followed the concert, many of them approached Emma and again said how much they had enjoyed it and asked if they could join any future choir workshops.

“The reaction of their peers in the audience was really emotional, especially when they ended up singing along to one of prisoner’s original song.”

[AP, visitor audience]

“At the end of the performance, it was heartening to see the appreciation of the entire audience, prisoners and others alike, and the obvious pleasure the singers/musicians took from that applause.” [RM, visitor audience]

“This has been a revelation, I literally felt transported and for that brief time I forgot that I was incarcerated and simply felt elated and overjoyed with laughter and happiness emphatically. The performances encouraged the audience members to join in and it was just a mass success. The audience was mixed inmates and members of the public and workers alike and it gave me a taste of normality as we shared laughs, applause as a group. It really broke down barriers and transported me, it didn’t feel like Pentonville.” [PJ, prisoner audience]

Visitor feedback

Fifteen visitors attended the concert, many of whom had never visited a prison before. They all had a chance to meet the prisoners before, after and during the coffee break. This was beneficial in itself as it meant extra contact for the prisoners with the outside world, but it also greatly changed any preconceived ideas the visitors might have had about what to expect when meeting prisoners.

“Meeting people from outside who were strangers to me, that was good.” [CK]

Zaki Emiliano [charity worker] *It was an unbelievable day and one of the most memorable concerts I’ve ever been to; certainly the most unique and inspirational. I realise how much work went into it – from musicians, visitors and prisoners - and I was so glad to see how this paid off. The way the prisoners supported each other, including shouting encouragement to performers who were less confident, was incredible. They really seemed to bond and build positive relationships with each other as well as develop their self-belief and express themselves through music. The gig shows exactly what’s possible even over a short period of time and it would be great to have more events like this in the future.*

Alessia Piermarini [freelance musician] *I was overwhelmed with emotion and amazed by the amount of talent in the room. Despite what the men are going through and the fact the whole thing happened in a prison, straight after they started singing I forgot where we were. They seemed like they were being taken elsewhere. I was really impressed with their original compositions. Music brought everybody together, no matter age, nationality, religion, background...*

I saw the men helping and encouraging each other hugely, especially when some of them were on the edge of not being able to sing a solo, because of fear or anxiety. It was a real privilege to be able to attend the concert: it’s amazing to see what an incredible outcome you guys achieved in just a few weeks of hard work, you and the other musicians have done a fantastic job. I’m sure that this experience was life-changing for the people involved. Actually I would call it that just for us visitors.

Silvia Rampton

[Howard League member]

I recently attended the choir project at HMPP and I am so glad I got to witness such a wonderful project come to fruition. I was humbled by their genuine joy whilst singing and support they gave each other during the performance. They also showed such impressive talent, and it was evident that they were excited at being able to share their talent.

Hearing them speak afterwards about how important the project is to them and their choir mates is what made the performance so much more special. The project seems to have created a safe space for many of the prisoners and a community which otherwise would not have formed. One choir member also said how being part of the choir had helped him with his anxiety, which was very touching, and is just a small demonstration of how effective the choir project has been. I hope to be back for many more choir performances!

Charles and Lizzie Roddeck

[trustees,

Hilden Charitable Trust]

We found the event inspiring and very moving. The performances were enthusiastic, joyful, even impassioned. Mixing with the prisoners afterwards was fascinating and they all said it was a wonderful opportunity, helpful in confidence-building, encouraged cooperation and interpersonal relationships.

We are full of admiration for the hard work and dedication of you and your team. It seems to us clear that this initiative is beneficial for prisoners and that more of this kind of activity would help them improve their lives.

A full report of a visitor attending the final concert

Although a Londoner I had somehow managed to avoid ever properly seeing Pentonville. My first sight of it was therefore quite a shock: I was unprepared for its massive and intimidating frontage – even as a visitor pretty terrifying – never mind for a prisoner being brought in for the first time. No doubt at all about the purpose of this building. This was not a scenic Nordic establishment (I had seen a programme about Finnish prisoners the week before I came.) The headlines around the time of the concert were no more reassuring: self-harm, assaults on staff and inmates, and suicides.

As the first planned date for the concert had had to be abandoned owing to a water problem, the week before the concert we were taken on a brief trip to the wing – and this increased the extraordinary impact of the prison. That men were actually locked up in these tiny cells – maybe even 2 to a cell, often for large parts of the day – carries an extraordinary effect when you actually see it, however much you know that this is the situation. And of course as one of the guards said to me after the concert, “We are not dealing with little angels here.”

Much of what we saw on the day of the concert came as an enormous surprise to me. In contrast to the peeling walls of the outside, the inside was impeccably clean, the courtyard’s flower planters beautiful and well cared-for, and the chapel where the concert took place was totally orderly and well-furnished. Even with the cuts in funding, this seemed a respectful venue for anyone using it, as did the cleanliness of the wings and the landings that we as visitors had seen. This did not diminish the fact that at every point we were aware of the function of the place we were visiting.

The concert itself was extraordinary. It took a while to get started, as we were waiting for more prisoners to arrive to form the audience - though I gathered that staff shortages on a Friday afternoon had perhaps affected this. Tension was therefore building for the 15 or so guys who formed the choir, and who had to wait for maybe 30 minutes on the stage for things to begin. One young man in particular began to get visibly more and more anxious, and as it turned out it he was to start the first piece, *Higher and Higher*. When it came to it he simply couldn’t overcome his nerves, and put his head in his hands and couldn’t sing at all. His neighbours in the line-up put their arms round him, patted him on the back and reassured him – such an empathic reaction was the last thing one might have expected from the stereotype of the “hard men” in a prison. And this for me really symbolised what this choir had managed to achieve – an atmosphere of caring, sympathy and support, possibly for people who had experienced very little or none of this in their past. Ridicule of weakness was absolutely absent. I imagine that none of this was explicit in the work of the choir, but it came from the encouraging and positive work of the people who had come in to work musically with the prisoners who wished to take part.

The other tremendously striking aspect was the way the singers totally participated and identified with the music. They moved with

it completely – in a way I am sure had not been taught – expressing it bodily, all of them semi-dancing. This was not ‘moves’ like you see in many popular choirs – it came from people who have very little to distract them in the ordinary day, and who felt and expressed the music at a very deep level – whether it was the popular music or the classical operatic music in the programme.

One singer simply danced – not on the spot, like the other singers, but as a performance in its own right – a really beautiful controlled expression of what the music meant to him. In another social world he could have been a Wayne Sleep or a career dancer. His talent was striking. There were extraordinary solos and communal/choral part singing – songs that had been written by the inmates, or had been taught as part-songs.

And at the end, after the beginning nerves had been swept away by the achievement of the actual performances, different singers seized the mike and spoke with great intensity of what the choir had meant to them: how much hope and sense of achievement it had given them; what it had felt like to collaborate with each other and experience what a choir can be – a whole support system, even if you feel overcome by nerves, like the young man at the beginning. Amazingly he spoke to the whole audience about what had stopped him in his tracks – his anxiety and nerves, from which he had always suffered, and which hopefully the choir had helped him overcome.

The young man who was the dancer very directly emphasised how important the choir was during the week for people who like him are banged up for sometimes 23 out of 24 hours a day. It had given them hope. I do not think it is too much to say that the choir and the other creative musical projects in the prison must have saved people’s lives. As an outsider I have no idea how the prisoners cope at all. The choir and the music – and the other elements that are on offer to help people get through their sentences – provide another way of being, different from the desperate and deviant and violent ways of coping they may have met in their previous lives, and can maybe facilitate rehabilitation.

If the prison choir can be a part of such a positive experience, then it is vital that it continues to be funded. The anxiety that this might NOT happen was repeatedly expressed by the prisoners when we talked after the concert.

[Judith Nesbit, ELMO trustee]

Dear, to whom it may Concerned,

I'm just writing this to say that the choir practices on Friday afternoon in the chapel, have been a god's send to me on a personal note, as well as the other men who attend. Thanks to Emma and all who help her facilitate the most relaxing environment men could have during their time in prison.

I have recently lost my Nephew to Murder and a great help to me during the grieving process was being able to offload my pain and anguish appropriately. Thank you.

However this is something that us men serving sentences can benefit from, as music is such a universal (legal) stimulant that encourages us men from all cultures and backgrounds/affiliations to come together as a whole and create something beautiful to be proud of, which leads to positive attitudes and behaviours on the landings/wings on a daily basis.

Thanks to Emma and
all concerned - including
governor.

Summary

These relatively modest weekly sessions create an enormous amount of positivity in a difficult and often depressing environment. Having a weekly choir/music workshop at HMP Pentonville, despite its current difficulties, is achievable and gives prisoners something to look forward to. Since the end of July when this project ended, prisoners have frequently stopped me on the wings and to ask “when is choir back on?” Three weeks after we stopped, one of the choir members seriously assaulted an officer and has since been kept in segregation for two weeks and is likely to have time added to his sentence. He is quoted in this document saying how choir was helping him with his behaviour. We do not know for sure, but I suspect had choir been running, his general frame of mind would have been better and this incident would have been less likely to have happened.

HMPP is a challenging environment, but these achievable weekly sessions are not unrealistic. They work well for prisoners passing through who are only in the prison for a short time, and also bring stability for those who are at HMPP for longer.

What Next

My current ambition is to make the choir a weekly event for the foreseeable future. This would be achievable by training one of my volunteers or tutors to help run it, so that it is not entirely dependant on my being there. With more staff available to help, there is scope to extend to two sessions a week so that double the numbers of men can take part. I would also like to look at running song-writing workshops and other small performances of a busking style, employing the choir tutors, and also some of the choir members around the prison, to break up the monotony of the routine and to reach more prisoners and staff. I have already identified areas in the prison that would work for this, such as the Healthcare Department, the Library, the Centre, and maybe bringing live music onto some wings. These are all achievable ideas, would not be expensive, and would bring a lot of much-needed positivity and morale boosting to prisoners and staff alike during challenging times.

[Emma Dogliani, project leader]

Appendix 1

The OPV scheme

The OPV scheme traces its origins back to 1901, when prison visiting was first officially recognised. In 2003 the Association became a registered charity and “Official” was inserted into the title.

OPVs are voluntary members of the public who go in to prisons to visit prisoners. They provide support, friendship and continuity to prisoners by turning up weekly and visiting. They do not just visit prisoners who are isolated and do not have family visits, it is often useful for prisoners to chat to someone outside their own family, but not a member of prison staff.

The OPVs are managed under the Chaplaincy (although they are not connected to any religion.)

At Pentonville currently there are 12 OPVs and it is a growing team. They visit the prisoners on the wings and are key holders. This means that they are able to help with recruiting and reminding prisoners to come to Music in the Ville events. Another advantage has been that by attending the groups, OPVs have made contacts with new prisoners to visit. This visiting has continued since the music project ended.

At a time when officers are extremely stretched, the OPVs’ help has been invaluable for the project to work, particularly in helping to collect and return the prisoners on the days of the sessions. It would be important to continue this link for future projects.

“Prison visiting is to do with friendship. It creates an informal friendly relationship which is concerned primarily with neither prisoners nor problems but with persons. Not only do Prison Visitors want to extend to those imprisoned something of the emotional and intellectual enrichment experienced through friends. They particularly try to encourage the development of a constructive use of a prison sentence whereby (inmates) gain both a sense of belonging to the community and the realisation that they themselves have the ability to contribute to society’s wellbeing. The contact between the ‘outside’ and the ‘inside’ enables both to understand each other better.”

[S.R. Lochhead, *A Study of Prison Visiting*, 1993]

“...No praise can be too high for the work of the voluntary National Association of Official Prison Visitors attached to every prison.”

[General Sir David Ramsbotham, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 1995-2001, in his book *Prisongate*, The Free Press, 2003]

Prisoner quotations from the NAOPV website:

“It is like having a member of my family come and see me every week. It just, you know, helps me through.”

“Thanks for the visit. You have really helped me through a bad time. Having a visitor means a lot. It means that someone from the outside is bothered enough about me to come and visit.”

“I always thought it was a bit naff to have a Prison Visitor until I met you on the wing. Now I can’t wait for your visits. I think all the lads should have an OPV. If it was up to me I’d make it, like, you had to have one.”

“I know what I’ve done. I’m not happy about it, but I know now that I’m not forgotten or ignored. Your visits prove that.”

“Yeah, I’m back! I’m sorry. I feel I’ve sort of let YOU down.”

“Thanks for your visits, they’ve really helped me get through the sentence. You have made me determined that I’m not coming in here again, NOT EVER. I know that there is a better way to do things. Thanks again.”

More Information about the OPV scheme is at
<http://www.naopv.com>

Appendix 2

Feedback from the two previous Music in the Ville events November 2018 and February 2019

Prisoners were asked:

What did you think about the performance?

What did you like or not like?

How was the length?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>“Awesome, I loved every bit of it. I love classical music and this is my first live performance of it. It was emotional and I love the classical part of it the most (opera, I think) and the instruments.” [Bonsu]</p> | <p>“I thought the performances were great. I liked everything and the descriptions of the songs before performing I thought were good.” [Anon]</p> |
| <p>“It was absolutely beautiful. I liked everything, the length of the gig was wonderful and there was nothing I did not like.” [Sam]</p> | <p>“Fantastic! The music was very well played. The length was just right.” [Derrick]</p> |
| <p>“Like an angel dancing in my eardrums. I liked the classical players and the man from ENO.” [Frank]</p> | <p>“No suggestions – just more of the same.” [J]</p> |
| <p>“It was very good, the level of professionalism was amazing and I enjoyed the performance, the quality of the music and violin solos.” [Anon]</p> | <p>“The performance was amazing and very different. I love the tone of the violin and the singer’s voice.” [Adnan]</p> |
| <p>“I thought it was very relaxing and unique. I liked the whole lot but loved the upbeat violin performance. I would say it was the right length.” [Anthony]</p> | <p>“Excellent, I liked everything.” [Aneel]</p> |
| <p>“Excellent I also liked our fellow inmates’ contribution.” [René]</p> | <p>“It wasn’t what I was expecting but it was very entertaining. I really enjoyed it. I liked everything. The violin is my favourite instrument and so is the keyboard. I really didn’t think I would like the singing but she was of professional quality! The time span on the gig was just right... Maybe bring some more strings and some brass – I love orchestral music. We must live every day with gratitude and thank God for giving us this priceless experience.” [Jerome]</p> |
| <p>“So far I am finding the performance interesting, unusual and captivating. I enjoyed the fact that I wouldn’t usually get the opportunity to listen to or experience opera or classical performances of this type. Something I would like to try again. I would have liked to listen and experience more, but what we had was great.” [Ian]</p> | <p>“Excellent. I loved all performances especially <i>Czardas</i> by Johannes Strauss. There should be more regular performances.” [Amir]</p> |

“Very relaxing. It was different. I liked all of it.” [David]

“Brilliant, I loved it. I liked all together, violin, piano and singing. It was a good afternoon, relaxing and pleasant. I forgot I was in Pentonville.” [Darren]

“Very entertaining. It was all good, keep it up!” [Josiah]

“Very, very good. I liked it all. Playing in the centre is a good idea, music lessons too.” [Matt]

“It was great and inspiring. I liked the first one played, by Gioacchino Rossini, and his last one. I think it was the right amount of time. Any more would have been too much for the first time. [Lloyd]”

“Wonderful. Powerful sound, speedy up-tempo. I thought it was marvellous. I loved it, I liked everything and the length was perfect. Good job :)” [Ryan]

“Excellent. My favourite was the second song *Chère Nuit* ♥” [Brian]

“I enjoyed it very much. Brilliant afternoon. Great escape from prison. I could have sat there all day.” [Craig]

“Excellent performance. I liked everything. It was a bit long.” [Oranu]

“I liked the mix between male and female opera singers and the piano and violin.” [Tony]

“Outstanding. I liked everything, loved the acting. The length was just right.” [Anon]

Feedback from musicians and staff

“It was an absolute treat to hear the chapel filled with the wonderful sound of three fantastic musicians: soprano, violin and keyboard. What really impressed me was not just the quality by the completely professional approach. There was no dumbing-down – as Emma explained, they are classical musicians and that is what they do. She explained the provenance of some of the music and talked a little about the composers to put it in context but there was no compromise on the performance.

“One of the prisoners afterwards told me he would seek out some opera when he was released. He had enjoyed watching musicals before but had not appreciated the special qualities of an unmiked voice before and was blown away by it. There is nothing to beat hearing – and feeling – live music and

seeing the skill of the performers at close hand. The vibe in the room was incredibly positive (sitting at the front I could feel but not see it) and even those in the room for whom this music would have been completely new were clearly struck by it. They were offered a new experience which took them out of themselves for an hour but which also, for some, opened their eyes and ears to the idea of a world beyond their normal experience.”

[Kate Hobson, Humanist Chaplain, HMPP]

“I was so pleased to be able to attend the concert in Pentonville chapel a few weeks ago. The performance was of really high quality. However, what will remain with me is observing the men who attended, listening intently to the music which was being performed. Who knows whether any of them might have heard anything like it before, but they were certainly captivated and engaged. I was mindful that it was likely to have been something completely different from the norm, something exciting yet somehow peaceful. Being part of the audience reminded me yet again that live, artistic experiences are key to the wellbeing of both prisoners and staff and make the environment they live and work in so much more colourful. Opportunities like this should definitely be seized upon when offered.”

[Sara Lee, Artistic Director,
The Irene Taylor Trust]

“I have been to many performances by Emma and Kate and fellow musicians down the years but I can truthfully say that this was a gig like no other. It also happened to be my first ever visit to one of HM prisons. The effect was extraordinary from the moment that Emma started singing in the centre before the main event. The sound echoed upwards and along the wings and galleries and back and as it went on more and more prison staff appeared on every level to listen and enjoy it. At the end, the audience showed every sign of having really enjoyed the music and I was told that the thunderous banging from one or two of the wings was a sign of approval too.

“The main concert afterwards in the prison chapel was also well attended by prisoners (who I believe were locked down during the earlier performance). I talked to a number of them during the interval and they were all very positive about the music and the event. Their applause at the end of the concert said it all – it was way more than polite applause! I have been at the prison twice since the concert and on both occasions prisoners and staff have told me how much they had enjoyed the concerts or, in the case of some who hadn’t been able to be there, how positive the response had been from those who were there and how much they hoped there could be further concerts before long. Although I was only a spectator, I felt quite privileged to have been invited.”

[Richard Miller,
invited audience member]

Appendix 3

Our tutors

Emma Dogliani is an operatic soprano who has sung as a soloist for the Royal Opera Covent Garden and performed in concerts all around the UK and abroad. She graduated with First Class Honours in piano and singing at Trinity college London. She has made 3 CDs, featured on Radio 3 and has a classical band, three4. As an educator she has taught singing and piano for over twenty years, run a singing group for elderly Tower Hamlets residents and organised community opera projects in Bow Boys school and at the Hackney Empire with local schools in East London. She runs community opera company ELMO which is a registered charity.



Emma's grandparents were penal reformers. They visited prisons around the world, reported to the British government and wrote books about the prison system and capital punishment including *Capital Punishment in the 20th Century* (1927) and *The Lawbreaker* (1933).

In 2016 when rehearsing near HMP Pentonville, Emma was drawn to find out more about the world inside and, knowing about the OPV scheme (her grandfather was also an OPV), she volunteered. Since getting more familiar with life “inside” she has been greatly motivated to help prisoners and staff and to improve life quality in the prison for all. As music is her trade and such an uplifting force, it seemed the obvious thing to bring live music inside the walls. Having the opportunity to work with men serving sentences in Pentonville, many of whom have had no previous encounter with live classical music, has been an enormous privilege and she would love to continue and reach many more of them.

Kate Shortt trained in cello/singing and workshop leading at the Guildhall School of music and drama. She has since worked both as a freelance musician and educational co-ordinator. This work includes being assistant co-ordinator and conductor in the Hackney Junior singing festival; consultant for Hackney Music service; assistant workshop leader for the London Symphony Orchestra Education Programme *Make Music* and inset trainer for vocal workshops in London and Austria. Her album of songs *Something To Tell You* was released in 2006 and



has been described by *Musician* magazine as songs “wrapped in thoughtful harmonies and seductive strings... with McCartney-like effectiveness and emotional richness.” Kate also performs her own one woman comedy show with cello/voice/piano. She has performed throughout London and in many major festivals including Edinburgh, Brighton and Covent Garden. Radio includes LBC, London Live and Amnesty International. Her freelance cello work has covered a variety of idioms including pop classical and jazz, touring the UK with the singer, Christine Tobin and guitarist Phil Robson. Recent performances include work with composer Jocelyn Pook and singer songwriter Estelle Kokot.

Dominic Stichbury is a singer, choir leader and group singing advocate. Since 2009 he’s been encouraging people to sing together in village halls, offices, prisons, schools and building new communities through this health boosting activity. A focus of his is getting men into singing communities. In 2013 he founded Chaps Choir, an alternative male singing gang and since then has been encouraging more men to get singing. Dominic has delivered workshops and programmes for The Southbank Centre, Wigmore Hall, Sadler’s Wells, Wilderness Festival, Spitalfields Music, The Orpheus Centre and has toured Europe and beyond as a member of both The London Vocal Project and the idiosyncratic Spooky Men’s Chorale. He currently runs a choir at HMP Maidstone for Beating Time.



Hannah Brine is a freelance choral conductor and singer in London. She founded and conducts 3 London community choirs and fixes choirs for TV and recording projects. She is part of the singing faculty at Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts and is studying on the second year of the Estill Master Trainer (EMT) programme. She founded her first choir, Fosse Singers, in Leicester in 2007 and then trained with ABCD on their intermediate and advanced weekend courses. Through ABCD she gained an LRSM distinction in musical direction. She leads a variety of choral projects including conducting ITV Voices.



As a session singer she has appeared on various dance tracks and credits include Disney and a soon-to-be-released computer game, scored by award winning composer Richard Jacques (*James Bond* score etc.). Her community choir, Victoria Park Singers,

together with the Crouch End Festival Chorus, will be representing East in a performance of John Luther Adams' *In The Name of the Earth* as part of this year's BBC Proms at the Royal Albert Hall on 8 September. In 2015 the BBC named her as one of the inaugural BBC Music Day Unsung Heroes for launching the Victoria Park Singers in Hackney (who were described by BBC Head of Music James Stirling as "stunning").

Rob Gildon is an operatic baritone and educator who studied singing at Manhattan School of Music, New York, the Tanglewood Music Center, Aspen Music Festival (performing lead role in John Casken's *Golem*) and the Britten Pears School. He has performed widely as a soloist for most British Opera companies. He was a recipient of the Garsington Opera Prize. Robert has a passion for educational work and regularly leads workshops for Streetwise Opera (visiting Japan twice in collaboration with the British Council), Wonderful Beast and Snape Maltings. In addition he has worked as a singer on educational projects for the Royal Opera House, English National Opera, Garsington Opera, Grange Festival, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Classical Opera Company, Opera North, Pimlico Opera Prison Project and Aldeburgh Young Musicians.



"A friend whispered to me, 'these lot know their shit, man'. The team were very knowledgeable and professional and this made me think I could learn from them." [WD]

YOUR GIFT

I was very fortunate to take the opportunity presented by Emma. I had no belief in my ability to perform in front of others. If I did sing to anyone, it was to make them laugh. My anxiety about seriously trying to sing disappeared without me noticing. I started to feel that it would be a waste, if I didn't ask for advice. The whole team were extremely supportive and made me feel part of something special. A friend whispered to me, "these lot know their shit man". The team were very knowledgeable and professional, this made me think that I could learn from them.

I learned so much and saw others motivated to soak up what was offered freely. Inter-personal skills, moral and ethical awareness, teamwork, self esteem/worth, pride and building confidence are just a few rewards attributed to Emma's process. The process created an atmosphere which was positive, spiritually comforting and a rare feeling not recognised in prisons... love.