

## **The way forward; a personal view by Sian Edwards**

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“I have become involved with Milton Keynes City Orchestra over the last four years, and during this time have been impressed by the wide range of work of the Orchestra. String quartets playing in the local hospital, wind quintets playing for the Open University, large-scale children’s concerts, symphony concerts, choral concerts – these have all contributed to a lively and diverse provision of live classical music in and around Milton Keynes.

As the new Principal Conductor, starting in September 2007, my primary aim is to build on this valuable work to reach a wider and more diverse audience and, in the process, to build a broader support base for the Orchestra. I am currently working with the Board and management team of the Orchestra to develop this strategy and to create a two-year artistic plan, which will be implemented from September 2007.

One of the main aims of the strategy is to develop the small-scale activities of the Orchestra to become interactive community projects. Some of these projects can then link into the full-scale symphony concerts that form the Orchestra’s season of cornerstone concerts at Milton Keynes Theatre. We have already completed one such project which was in collaboration with English Pocket Opera Company (EPOC). In the summer term of 2006 EPOC collaborated with the Orchestra’s musicians and together they presented interactive opera workshops with five local school groups. These children then participated in a performance of Mozart’s “Magic Flute”, with professional singers and musicians, in a fully staged performance at Stantonbury Campus. This production then transferred to Milton Keynes Theatre, where it was presented to the public - with and alongside Milton Keynes City Orchestra - in a gala performance in which two of the participating schools performed alongside the Orchestra and EPOC. Many of the children’s families attended, which brought a wonderful atmosphere to the evening and introduced many of them to Milton Keynes City Orchestra for the first time.

In the 2006/07 season, as well as two large-scale children’s concerts in Milton Keynes Theatre of Zambezi Tales which involved the active participation of the schools taking part, Stravinsky’s “Soldier’s Tale” was presented at Stantonbury Campus as a collaboration between the Orchestra and local drama students. Further plans for collaborations include:

- children's 'bird music' workshops based on 'Cantus Arcticus' by the Finnish composer Rautavaara, the results of which will then be presented as part of a Milton Keynes City Orchestra symphony concert of Finnish music at Milton Keynes Theatre in 2008.
- Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition" in the Howarth arrangement for brass as part of an audio/visual children's project in conjunction with Milton Keynes Gallery, which will lead to a presentation of the outcomes of the project at a full-orchestra performance of 'Pictures' in the Milton Keynes Theatre season.

As well as Stantonbury Campus Theatre and Milton Keynes Theatre there are many other venues in the area where the Orchestra could perform and I am eager to form a network of local partnerships where the work of the Orchestra can be presented. I am developing a series of concerts that include Christmas concerts with children's choirs and a major Haydn project for schools linked with a series of concerts of Haydn by the Orchestra. The Haydn project would also be ideal for The Stables at Wavendon.

I am well aware that most of the above projects are for children and young people but I would also like to address the possibility of projects for older people, and also projects for ethnic communities in the area. In 2009, for example, it will be 70 years since the outbreak of World War II (WWII), which might be the opportunity to mount a community project involving those in care homes, which would culminate in a concert of WWII music by the Orchestra at Milton Keynes Theatre. Similarly, I have proposals for a Bollywood concert that may be part of a much bigger outreach programme involving people from local communities from the Sub-Continent.

I see all this work as central to Milton Keynes City Orchestra's continuing dedication to sharing classical music of the highest professional quality with as wide a range of people as possible."