



Case Study

Hallé Education

Family Arts Festival 2014: Giraffes Can't Dance

Giraffes Can't Dance was a multi-arts performance piece presented as part of the 2014 [Family Arts Festival](#), aiming to introduce young children to live music and orchestral instruments. Based on a book by Giles Andreae, with music composed by Hallé Education Director, Steve Pickett, diverse repertoire, songs, narration, dance and shadow puppetry combined to create a highly engaging multi-sensory experience.

Audience participation was a central feature of the production. Attendees of all ages were invited to join in by reciting a chant, singing a song, and clapping along to the music. Each child was also given a percussive shaker and invited to play specific rhythms. The story underpinning *Giraffes Can't Dance* provides a perfect framework in this regard as it features a series of dances: a waltz, rock 'n' roll, a tango, a cha cha cha, and a Scottish reel.

914 participants attended over 6 performances.

Data gathered from 20 feedback forms (16 = parents; 4 = schools), 4 emails, 6 tweets, 2 observation visits and staff interviews indicate that the project achieved its objective of successfully engaging families in a live orchestral performance. The performance was typically described as '*fun*', '*enjoyable*' and '*inspiring*' and many attendees commented they would be coming back next year. Several people observed that this type of animated orchestral performance is as entertaining for adults as it is for children.

A prevalent theme was the quality of attention paid by even the youngest members of the audience: a number of elements contributed to this enhanced engagement - the music, the story, visual elements, dance, audience participation and interaction.

The accessibility of the venue and approachability of the Hallé musicians and Education team contributed to the success of the production: *I thought the venue was beautiful and the staff really professional and friendly*. A couple of parents also cited the relatively '*short duration*' of the performance and '*reasonable*' ticket prices. It was noted other performances of this quality are often prohibitively expensive for many families.

Parents and teachers identified a number of benefits for attending children including an introduction to high quality live music and seeing instruments and musicians close-up in a small, intimate setting.

Several respondents suggested that this type of project enables children to acquire and practise the social skills necessary for concert attendance.

A number of teachers and parents commented on how the production had left a lasting impression. One teacher said that she was delighted by the students' subsequent observations about different instruments back at school.

Writing, producing and delivering early years productions such as *Giraffes Can't Dance* continues to advance the learning of the Hallé Education team and has had an impact on the wider organisation.

More generally there is a feeling that the Hallé is developing its expertise but also building a reputation and audience for its early years work.

Hallé Education Director, Steve Pickett said there is now increased awareness across departments of the demand for and importance of this type of performance, with plans already underway for a new work in Autumn 2015. The aspiration is that by the time the three-year Esmée Fairbairn Trust funded programme ends, the Hallé will have 3 productions specifically designed for young children and their families that can be performed at Hallé St Peter's and elsewhere.

Tips for engaging families:

- make sure the venue is easily accessible to families
- Ensure that staff and artists are friendly and approachable
- consider the duration of your event in relation to your audience
- offer a quality product at an accessible ticket price

Original research by Dr Rachel Swindells