

## St Mary's Art Project

### First Two Years of Programming

In the first two years of operation, St Mary's will operate three hiring strands which will be discreet but will seek to be complementary: <sup>1</sup> These will make up the Arts Programme at St Mary's and comprise:

- A. A high quality music programme developed and delivered by an independent professional music promoter
- B. An arts development programme to support the local arts community
- C. Events organised by local arts groups and community organisations

#### A. Music Programme

There is a long tradition of both religious and secular music being presented at St Mary's, with a wide range of (mainly voluntary) local music organisations having performed at the Church. Most recently Ashford Borough Council's (ABC's) Arts Development Unit has venue-tested high quality professional musicians at St Mary's and Shiva Nova has presented part of its Equator programme of World Music.

The post re-ordering promoter-led programme will be operated by an independent music promoter. The promoter will build on the reputation already established by ABC's Arts Development Unit and Shiva Nova. Programming in traditional genres such as jazz and the Blues will be prioritised in the first two years in order to best match the present and developing demographics of Ashford. <sup>2</sup> Subsequent programming will develop niche audiences, especially among young people for more contemporary cutting edge music and for older people in relation to classical and chamber music.

Jazz, Soul and R&B music events appeal to a broad range of audiences regardless of social status, diversity, education and gender. BME communities that leave London for growth areas like Ashford, for example, are more likely to be from social groups A or B <sup>3</sup> and, broadly, black people are the most likely of all ethnic groups to attend Soul and R&B events. Similarly, audiences for Folk and Country tend to be status neutral but attendance peaks among the 50–59 age group. The migration of white people to growth areas close to London has mainly been from social groups C1 and C2<sup>4</sup> and socio-economic groups and the overall mean age of Ashford's population is expected to be one of the highest in the country by 2020. Overall, a mixture of Soul, R&B, Folk and Country are likely to appeal to a large sector of the community.

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<sup>1</sup> See Tranche 2 - Preface

<sup>2</sup> Appendices M and N of *St Mary's Business Planning Research* provide information on national audience data available through the ACE Taking Part initiative and present likely audience demand based on the present and likely future demographics of Ashford. Shea Debnam Associates for Ashford Borough Council, January 2009

<sup>3</sup> *Communities of choice? Making the growth areas places where people want to live and work* Institute for Public Policy Research seminar, 7 December 2005 [http://www.ippr.org.uk/uploadedFiles/research/projects/Social\\_Policy/Growth%20Areas%20Seminar%20\\_7%20Dec%202005\\_\(1\).PDF](http://www.ippr.org.uk/uploadedFiles/research/projects/Social_Policy/Growth%20Areas%20Seminar%20_7%20Dec%202005_(1).PDF)

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

Currently those over 40 make up 47% of Ashford's population, with this proportion set to grow to 53% by 2011. Classical music events are attended primarily by people over 40, with a peak in attendance of people around 60 years of age. Classical music performances are likely to be developed by the promoter in Year 2 of the St Mary's programme, alongside further development of World Music.

Performances of these genres of music are also likely to suit the nature of the re-ordering. Due to its nature, the church is unlikely to have either the staging or audience capacity to present large scale events. Performances of small to medium sized ensemble works, quartets and singer-song writers would seem appropriate for the scale and nature of the venue which is likely, for example, to be capable of hosting informal or intimate folk or world music events on ground floor either in stage or café-format.

The introduction of contemporary avant garde programming for younger audiences will be researched during the second year with a view to expanding the programme to attract younger audiences in Year 3 and beyond.

Working with an independent promoter offers the opportunity for developing a reputation for a new showing space in Kent, attracting new audiences from beyond the town of Ashford and inspiring local performing arts practitioners. Bookings through the Community strand will offer increased showing opportunities for local artists and promote arts development.

Acts are likely to be booked by the promoter around six months in advance of performance. This would leave ample time to create synergy with the arts development programme at St Mary's and ample time to publicise events within and around the church to those attending performances by community music organisations such as Ashford Brass Band, Ashford Community Choir, Kent Male Voice Choir.

Overall, the promoter-led music programme will support arts development in Ashford by establishing St Mary's as a venue with a reputation for programming high quality music events which will:

- Provide a bench mark for the standard of artistic performance within the town
- Encourage aspiring musicians to develop their practice
- Develop the critical experience of local musicians and audiences by offering talks and workshops by musicians booked through the promoter's programme
- Offer the potential for developing the technical skills of young people involved with organisations such as Ashford Youth Theatre (as a potential delivery partner)

The music programme will deliver regular, well marketed events that reach beyond the current audience and inspire and extend the range of musicians in the town.

Any experienced promoter will need to test the market for a new venue and particularly in a town where the programming of nationally and internationally known acts is in its infancy.

Given that the arts development programme will be running at within St Mary's at the same time that the promoter is organising concerts, the needs of all promoters and hirers would be best served if a synergy was struck between the two programmes. This might allow:

- Professional musicians to hold workshops and talks with local musicians at St Mary's
- The possibility of themed events across a number of Ashford venues headlined by acts at St Mary's Church

## **B. Arts Development Programme**

The use of St Mary's as a resource for knowledge sharing, demonstrations, meetings and training supports the longer-term arts development agenda in Ashford, will encourage artists to the centre of town and support retention in the Borough.

An Arts Development Programme at St Mary's offers a real opportunity to raise the profile of the venue as a creative hub for conceiving and developing new ways to engage in and celebrate the arts. The Programme will aim to establish St Mary's as a centre for learning and creative participation, so creating a space where local people and artists can explore and develop the arts together

- providing knowledge and understanding of a diverse range of artistic activity, past and present, western and non-western
- providing knowledge and understanding of theoretical, critical and cultural approaches to the arts
- addressing change and the challenge of new artistic directions and ideas

Activities would seek to meet the needs of local artists and arts groups and include:

- Presenting new and adapted works of theatre, in collaboration with key theatre touring companies, which fit the scale of the building and its stage,
- Opportunities for local writers to present spoken word or live literature events and encourage the development of more writing,
- Visual arts commissions which would be temporary in nature to celebrate and enhance the local environment, bringing the work of high profile contemporary visual artists to the venue and attracting public funding,
- Building strong relationships with the voluntary and community sector, raising standards and aspiration within events such as the Stour Music Festival, Tenterden Folk Festival, and the Ashford Summer Sounds programme
- Networking participants and audiences into advisory and support groups within the Borough.
- Exploring links with local commercial venues such as Oranges Bar in central Ashford (which hosts regular live jazz, blues and folk music evenings), the Woolpack Hotel in Tenterden (which Tenterden Folk Festival uses as a main venue), together with (for example) Wye Church to deliver themed seasons of performances.

## **C. Community Programme**

Ashford celebrates a thriving voluntary cultural sector within the Borough which runs many local events and festivals as well as facilities, clubs and societies. Whilst there exists an increasing array of cultural opportunities and events, facilities for performing and visual arts, music, dance, theatre and comedy are particularly lacking, notably within Ashford's urban area.

The Community Programme will offer the opportunity for local arts and community groups to book St Mary's Church alongside the music and arts development programmes.

A venue for local writers to present spoken word or live literature events and encourage the development of more writing are activities which were highlighted in ACE's *Taking Part* initiative as activities suitable for market towns with a reasonably high demographic of older people, for example.<sup>5</sup>

A visual arts showing space offered as a hiring opportunity as part of the community function would attract hirings from local professional and non-professional artists alike. Use of the venue as a rehearsal space for organisations such as Ashford Youth Theatre and local colleges such as South Kent College would attract footfall into the venue.

The re-ordering of St Mary's offers the real opportunity for the local voluntary cultural sector to programme performances and activities at a town centre venue which will have a growing reputation for quality.

The creation of a new venue within the centre of Ashford is likely to encourage community bookings from new organisations and ventures. Increased footfall by people attending, for example, yoga or exercise classes can quickly spread the word about both community and professional arts activities.

#### Marketing and Promotion

The promoter-led music programme at St Mary's will generate its own marketing via the promoter's website and leafleting around the town. A leaflet and web presence of the overall programme at the venue to run in parallel with the promoter's marketing activities, and including details of the music programme, will add value to the community activities by association and encourage participation in arts development activities by offering an aspirational context. The appearance of a seamless relationship between the three strands of programming will both work to benchmark quality of programming and delivery at the venue and assist in supporting a broad audience base.

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<sup>5</sup> Appendices M and N of *St Mary's Business Planning Research* provide information on national audience data available through the ACE Taking Part initiative and present likely audience demand based on the present and likely future demographics of Ashford. Shea Debnam Associates for Ashford Borough Council, January 2009