

Building a Jazz audience in Nottinghamshire Libraries - Summary at half-way stage of a 24-gig programme

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Prominent and experienced regional jazz music promoters JazzSteps¹ were invited by the local County Council to bid for funding to assist with development of jazz provisions across Nottinghamshire using three Libraries that happened to have new premises. This is a summary of the positive outcomes to date and some of the lessons learned.



During 2011, JazzSteps had run three successful gigs featuring Finnish pianist Jonas Haavisto's trio at these venues, so had some track record. The library buildings at Mansfield, Southwell and Worksop are welcoming environments that seemed to be designed to function as community hubs with versatile space provisions that could be used to stage performances with coffee bar and lounge seating areas.

During the autumn of 2012 four different artists performed, each doing a mini-tour of each of the three libraries. There was a deliberate programming of variety of jazz styles. Naturally, each group contributed a unique style and artistic quality.

They spanned a range of formats and styles of jazz. The Tommy Saville Organisation play *bebop and standards* and are organ-led; Corey Mwamba led a *vibraphone* trio playing an *eclectic mix of improvised jazz*; Nicola Farnon's is both a *vocalist and bass player* leading a trio whose set included jazz standards and song classics in a jazz style; and the Nottingham Youth Jazz Orchestra² (NYJO) played one gig as a 18-piece big band with vocalist and two sets



¹ www.jazzsteps.co.uk JazzSteps aims to promote and provide a varied and high quality programme of jazz and contemporary musical performances, enabling the people of Nottinghamshire to enjoy the finest musicians in these musical genres drawing on local, national and international artists. Additionally, this not-for-profit organisation that is staffed entirely by volunteers, actively assists with jazz education in Nottinghamshire and has support from the Arts Council England through East Midlands Jazz (EMJAZZ).

² JazzSteps has a policy of mentoring young musicians in jazz and was keen to engage NYJO alumni in these gigs for their career development and to be role models for the current band players. They added to the musical quality and enjoyment all-round.

as an 8-piece combo, both playing unique arrangements. All were all highly professional in delivery of their musical and artistic services backed up by a provision of a professional sound system and lighting rig.



The sessions included ‘family friendly’ programming with Sunday afternoon concerts at Mansfield Library. By definition, bringing jazz to local communities makes the music more readily accessible by being in close proximity to audiences in the catchment areas.

The bands all engaged well with local audiences and had good stage rapport and were mindful of the audience context. For example, Corey Mwamba recognised that his instrument - vibraphone - may be unfamiliar to some in the audience and he took trouble to describe and demonstrate it separate to playing with the band. He also explained that, *as an ex-librarian*, he had a particular affinity with performing creatively in the jazz genre in a library.

We assessed audience feedback using ‘vox pop’ interviews carried out by JazzSteps representatives during intervals and just after the gigs. Feedback included comments such as “Great to have quality live music in our area”, “Nice to see the libraries being used for this kind of thing” and “Such an intimate atmosphere - we are so close to the music”.



Each band provided some direct marketing via its own websites and /or social media (e.g. Facebook) to promote its gigs in this series. It is likely that they also ‘marketed’ them by mentions at other performances as to where they were playing in future.



The *Spring 2013 Live in the Libraries* series of 12 gigs starts on 3rd February. The exciting gig programming once again celebrates variety of jazz genres, has more-than-the-average representation of female jazz instrumentalists (and role models) as well as featuring largely home-grown jazz talent from within Nottinghamshire.

The artists range from a Gypsy Jazz quartet, a community-based Big Band with female star vocalist, a trio led by a dynamic 21 year-old drummer and a female-led quartet. Again, the gigs are promoted through the JazzSteps brochure and website, arts websites (e.g. South Yorkshire Arts for the Worksop-based gigs), social media (e.g. You Tube and Facebook) and blogs used by Jazzsteps and the artists themselves, bookmarks and posters in the libraries and local stores etc. These growing and coordinated marketing and publicity efforts are paying dividends and both the libraries and JazzSteps are learning from experience about what seems to work best.

“Life is a lot like jazz - it’s best when you improvise”

JazzSteps is keen to engage with audiences in local communities, as well as in Nottingham city, to entertain them and grow their interest for jazz, one of the great art forms to emerge in the 20th century and one that has been hugely influential in popular music and film/TV soundtracks. Through these Live in the Libraries gigs, JazzSteps seeks to develop a mixed-age audience and to encourage gig attendance by local youth musicians through contacts with local schools and colleges.



Bookmarks commissioned for these gigs



For the 24 Live in the Libraries gigs, JazzSteps has helped promote bands based in and around the region, assisting them to co-promote these gigs via the internet and social media as well as word-of-mouth recommendations; has created performances to inspire and educate local audiences about jazz as an art form and to convey the passion they feel in this music art form. JazzSteps has decades of experience in working with jazz musicians and audiences for the wider promotion of a really great music and entertainment.

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JazzSteps is keen to hear from staff in libraries interested to exchange ideas and may want to do similar gigs

Please contact via www.jazzsteps.co.uk