



National  
Open Youth  
Orchestra



2018-22

Key findings  
from pioneering an  
inclusive national  
youth orchestra



In partnership with

barbican

GUILD  
HALL  
SCHOOL

bourne  
mouth  
symphony orchestra



B:Music

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# Foreword: written by NOYO musicians

Everyone who has heard or experienced music would agree that it should be available to everyone. But there's a long way to go to actually make that happen. Reading about the National Open Youth Orchestra (NOYO)'s experience is an important start, but it needs to continue much further.

We challenge you to think about how you can bring learnings from this report into your practice. Talk to others about it, share ideas and make change.

We can't describe what we do as NOYO in words alone. So, we recommend that while you are reading this report, you listen to some of our music as well.

*Ellen O'Brien (French horn), Georgina Spray (French horn), Oliver Cross (Harmonica and Bass Synthesizer) and Torin van Breda (Tenor horn)*



Ellen O'Brien



Georgina Spray



Oliver Cross



Torin van Breda



# Introduction to this report

Every aspect of NOYO, including the major partnerships at its heart, has been shaped in the hope that it could play a part in prompting change.

The development of NOYO was informed by:

- a three-year pilot successfully running the South-West Open Youth Orchestra (the first regional disabled-led youth ensemble)
- a six-month feasibility study by Sound Connections with consultation across the music sector, including young disabled musicians and their families.

Sound Connections have since acted as independent evaluators from 2018 to 2022, evidencing progress against three desired outcomes for NOYO:

1. The exclusion of young disabled people from orchestras is reduced
2. Young disabled people have developed their skills
3. The music sector has increased its support for young disabled people

The evaluation framework set out a thorough plan to evidence these outcomes through surveys, interviews, reflective practice capture, creative workshops, Audience Finder Showstats, and a bespoke system for tracking goals set by musicians, and their musical development.

This report presents the emerging NOYO model, a summary of findings from Sound Connections' evaluation, plus key messages and calls to action from NOYO musicians. It has been co-produced by Abigail D'Amore and Jennifer Raven on behalf of Sound Connections, and the team at Open Up Music - the charity behind NOYO.

## The 2018-2022 NOYO model

- NOYO was launched as a progression route for talented 11-25 year-old disabled musicians who could potentially have a career in music if there were no barriers. For this reason, there has been an application and audition process.
- To promote inclusion, NOYO has also welcomed around 20% non-disabled musicians.
- Because some young disabled people have had limited access to music education, NOYO considers candidates' musical potential, rather than instrument and ensemble skills alone. NOYO musicians don't need to read music or have taken graded exams.
- NOYO had to be driven by artistic identity and high-quality music-making, as well as diversity and inclusion, in order to showcase what talented young disabled musicians could achieve.
- As NOYO promotes musicianship, it only uses expressive instruments on which players can progress to a high standard.
- Membership of NOYO is free for successful applicants.

This report captures the learnings of NOYO through the voices that have shaped it. We hope that NOYO musicians' desire to share their experiences will encourage you to take it further... Because NOYO doesn't hold all the answers. We've known from the start that NOYO could only ever be one piece of the puzzle. These young musicians who bring with them a bounty of talent, creativity, and opportunities for wider audience engagement, are counting on you to lay down the next piece. The findings from this report are already influencing the future evolution of NOYO, and we hope they will also influence wider change.



# Glossary

## Disabled musicians

NOYO aligns itself to the [Social Model of Disability](#). It uses the terminology “Disabled musicians/people” to highlight that it is barriers created by society that disable people; whereas “people with disabilities” would imply that it is the people themselves who are responsible.

## NOYO Centres

NOYO is delivered in partnership with some of the UK’s leading arts and cultural organisations, who together act as regional NOYO Centres.

They develop musicians in small groups at regional rehearsals, where Music Leaders and musicians can get to know each other well.

Once a year, musicians from all NOYO Centres come together for the annual residential where they socialise and rehearse as a national ensemble, to prepare for concerts.

## Clarion, LinnStrument and Seaboard RISE

**NOYO musicians play a wide range of acoustic and electronic instruments. Some of the less familiar electronic instruments played include:**



### Clarion™

Available on iPad and PC, Clarion works seamlessly with hands-free assistive technology such as Eyegaze. It can be played with a mouse or through finger touch, head movement or eye movement. Clarion is highly expressive, as the sound it makes is down to how each individual note is played.



### LinnStrument

The LinnStrument is an expressive MIDI controller for musical performance. Unlike a standard piano MIDI keyboard's on/off switches, LinnStrument senses a musician's subtle finger movements in five ways. Each row is a series of consecutive semitones, so bends and pitch slides are simple and intuitive.



### Seaboard RISE

This keyboard-style MIDI controller features a continuous sensor-embedded flexible rubber surface for playing the keys, instead of traditional lever-style "moving keys". It features five types of responsiveness to player actions: "strike", "glide" and "press", front to rear movement "slide" sensitivity, and release-velocity "lift".



# Milestones

## 2018

**January - March** First-ever NOYO musicians call-out in partnership with the Barbican, Guildhall School of Music & Drama, Bristol Beacon and Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra (BSO), with ABRSM as founding sponsor

**May - June** First NOYO auditions. 27 musicians are offered places.

**From August** NOYO commissions composers Lucy Hale, Ben Lunn and Liam Taylor-West.

**September** Launch of the world's first disabled-led national youth orchestra. Rehearsals start in London, Bristol and Bournemouth during the Autumn.

## 2019

**February** Launch of new branding co-designed by NOYO musicians. Each creates their own logo icon from the set of shapes seen throughout this report.

**April** First national residential

**Autumn** NOYO and BSO co-commission Alexander Campkin to write music to be premiered by NOYO in Spring 2020.



## 2020

**February** Birmingham NOYO Centre announced, in partnership with Midlands Arts Centre, B:Music and Services For Education

**May** First concerts cancelled due to COVID-19

**Autumn** Start of hybrid model combining online Zoom rehearsals with in-person events where possible

**Winter** In response to COVID-19 and in lieu of concerts, NOYO commissions Justin Edgar to direct a video premiere of 'What Fear We Then?' by Alexander Campkin.

## 2021

**June** 26 NOYO members travel to London, Bristol or Bournemouth to be individually filmed and recorded playing 'What Fear We Then?' live.

**Autumn - Winter** The music video is edited into an ensemble piece by layering separately recorded audio/visual performances. A 'Behind the scenes' video of Holli Pandit (harp), Sally Kidson (LinnStrument), Jamie Moody (saxophone), and an interview with Alexander Campkin are also produced.

## 2022

**February** Online launch of 'What Fear We Then?', co-hosted by Holli and Jamie

**April** Inaugural NOYO concert at Milton Court Concert Hall and live premiere of 'What Fear We Then?'

**May-June** Concerts at St George's Bristol, Lighthouse, Poole and Birmingham Town Hall. The 22 May concert with BSO Resound at Lighthouse, Poole is also livestreamed.

**July** Cardiff NOYO Centre announced, in partnership with BBC National Orchestra of Wales and Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama. Rehearsals will start in Autumn 2023.

**September** NOYO starts the year with 39 musicians across four NOYO Centres.

# 1. You can successfully combine inclusion with high musical expectations

**“We need to be there on time, we need to be ready to start on time. We try to keep everything really, really professional, and often that’s quite a new space for those young people to be in.”**

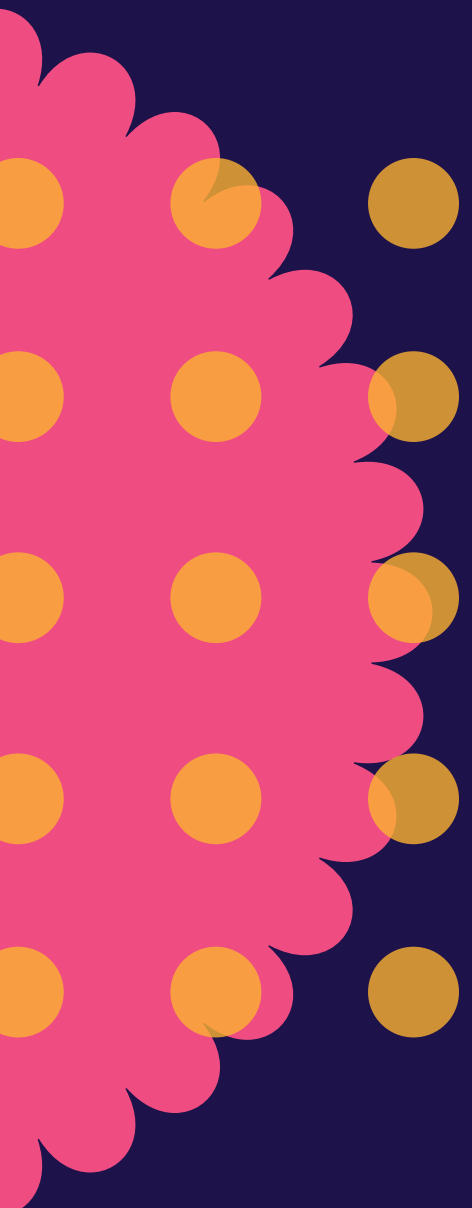
Beatrice Hubble, London Music Leader, on how NOYO has reached its standards of professionalism in just a few years, *Music Teacher* magazine, August 2022

## NOYO model

- NOYO takes an equitable approach, working to remove barriers so that any aspect of the ensemble is accessible to all musicians. However there is no compromise on high standards and expectations musically. It is important that the process for getting into NOYO is competitive, and there is a baseline of ability and skill that is aimed for.
- NOYO’s standards are aligned with musicians’ wish for the orchestra to be perceived as ‘professional’<sup>1</sup>. Musicians commit to attending ten group rehearsals and a 3-day residential every year. They also agree to have one-to-one tuition coordinated with support from NOYO Centres.
- NOYO musicians are expected to come to group rehearsals having practised their parts and adhere to a code of conduct they have co-designed.
- NOYO’s annual schedule is shared with prospective musicians and their families as part of the application process. Music Leaders aim to send music and detailed rehearsal plans two weeks in advance, so that musicians know what’s required and can give their best contribution.
- NOYO offers pastoral support to ensure that musicians’ access needs and well-being are prioritised, as well as their musical progression.

## Evaluation findings 2018-2022

- NOYO is considered as ‘inspirational’ and innovative, with musicians sharing overwhelmingly positive experiences of their involvement.
- Musicians and their families appreciated NOYO valuing musicians’ strengths rather than focusing on their impairments.
- NOYO musicians developed a breadth of skills including improvisation. Their mastery of instruments, ensemble and performance skills improved. Their confidence and social skills grew.
- The discipline of practising an instrument is still unfamiliar to some young disabled musicians and finding tutors for new instruments can be a challenge. However, NOYO musicians became more motivated to take personal responsibility for practising their music to a high standard, with rehearsals improving focus and concentration.
- NOYO facilitated a safe environment where parents felt able to let young people become more independent. For some young disabled musicians, their first NOYO residential was a major milestone.
- Most families had a positive experience with the concerts and the filming, though some less so due to the commitment and logistics involved.
- For some musicians the NOYO concerts ignited a passion and enthusiasm for playing professionally, and most musicians could describe future aspirations for music inspired by their NOYO experience.
- Audience feedback suggested that rather than being preoccupied with musicians’ impairments, what caught their attention was the quality of the music, the tightness of the ensemble, the interesting mix of instruments and the musicianship.



“The sound that we create, we work hard at it. It’s definitely not like waving a magic wand. There is this stereotype of disability and having this superpower which is quite unrealistic and adds to the idea of ‘otherness’. It’s important to me that we work for the music. Inclusivity, and making brilliant music, I’d say we’re pretty damn good at.”

**Oliver Cross**

NOYO Harmonica and Bass Synthesizer,  
Composer of ‘Barriers’



## 2. Being more musician-centered can unlock the creative power of diversity

“It has opened up a new world to her. NOYO accepts who she is and there is no having to explain or get embarrassed about who she is. There is a freedom of expression, which she hasn’t had with other orchestras or ensembles.” Parent/guardian

### NOYO model

- Musicians are nurtured in small regional groups. NOYO takes responsibility for creating an inclusive experience, capturing musicians’ communication, social and emotional support needs from the outset, as well as their access requirements so they don’t have to advocate for themselves.
- Auditions are relaxed with an option of going to candidates’ homes if necessary. Rehearsal and residential schedules are shared well in advance including photographs of staff and venues. There is always a dedicated space for time-out whenever musicians need it. NOYO facilitates social activities, with get-togethers during the year and a programme of activities during the annual residential.
- Musical learning resources are produced in a variety of formats in addition to standard notation, including customised scores and audio recordings.
- NOYO musicians have a say in both the programming and playing of the music. Musicians are involved in the process of commissioning composers and can also choose repertoire for the orchestra to play. During rehearsals, musicians are invited to share their views on interpretation, dynamics, phrasing and articulation. There is scope to try different tempos and even change the key if that makes it more enjoyable. As NOYO saxophonist Jamie Moody told delegates at the 2021 Musicians’ Union Education Conference... “The ghost of Mozart isn’t going to haunt you”.

## Evaluation findings 2018-2022

- NOYO has attracted a diverse pool of musicians, not just in terms of disability, but also musical background, including classical, folk and rock musicians. Some musicians had never played in public, or with an ensemble before.
- NOYO developed a musical community young disabled musicians feel part of. Moving from feelings of inclusion to belonging has been important for them to thrive musically.
- There has been a mutual and organic exchange of learning between musicians. They are able to understand a breadth of musical and personal backgrounds. For some, NOYO strengthened their social confidence and sense of identity as disabled musicians.
- Musicians valued playing a combination of what was composed and having the opportunity to improvise and add their input. This led to a stronger sense of ownership over the music by the musicians, as well as generating exciting, dynamic repertoire that enriches the youth orchestra landscape.
- Composers and arrangers developed an increased understanding of the musicians' musical and personal needs. They became more flexible and adaptable as a result, for example taking into account the difference between head, eye and finger control when playing Clarion, or sending music to musicians two weeks in advance of workshops.
- The co-created sound unveiled by NOYO was clear proof of young people's central role in the orchestra's creative process. Another sign of this was young musicians introducing their music during performances.

## In progress

NOYO is working to find the most effective balance between creating bespoke music tailored for each musician while ensuring that parts can be picked up by another musician, should they need to pull out of concerts due to unforeseen circumstances.

**“NOYO was the first musical group I’d joined in three years, with previous opportunities being ignored for fear of having to mask my autistic traits, overstimulation, or having my needs downplayed or flat-out ignored. The first rehearsal established rules and boundaries for all musicians. Our Music Leaders were open and receptive to all feedback and suggestions, and they offered support and accessibility before anyone needed to ask for it. NOYO saved me as a musician. It restored my confidence and joy for performing.”**

**Jamie Moody**

NOYO saxophonist





# 3. Diversity and inclusion can fuel the creation of exciting new music

**“It was so exciting coming across all of these new instruments. It’s almost feeling like you’re an artist who’s been given a new palette of colours to explore.”**

Alexander Campkin, composer of ‘What Fear We Then?’, *In Tune*, BBC Radio 3, 12 May 2022

## NOYO model

- NOYO’s repertoire is flexible and dynamic. This music has to represent a diverse group of musicians playing an unconventional blend of instruments. NOYO takes a pioneering approach to the use of accessible instruments, notably the Clarion and the LinnStrument. They are played in an ensemble setting alongside ‘traditional’ orchestral instruments and less traditional instruments, for example accordion, saxophone, harmonica, drum kit and electric guitar.
- NOYO creates bespoke arrangements of well-known pieces not only to broaden access, but also to create fresh interpretations using new musical colours and sounds. It also commissions adaptable scores where parts are not instrument specific. This enables the music to adapt to diverse instrumentation, personnel and skill levels.
- Music is commissioned through a two-stage process. It starts with seed funding for a number of composers to write short ‘musical sketches’, prioritising composers from under-represented backgrounds. NOYO musicians then workshop and experiment with this music. Emerging from this process, one musical sketch is voted for by NOYO musicians and Music Leaders and progressed to a full commission in each subsequent year. Through this process, composers are able to develop music in carefully controlled stages. This invites experimentation and risk-taking, while giving young musicians an important voice.
- NOYO attracts the interest of cutting-edge composers. Liam Taylor-West has continued writing for NOYO following his Ivors Award win for ‘The Umbrella’. NOYO will soon premiere compositions from Benn Lunn and Alexandra Hamilton-Ayres<sup>2</sup>.

## Evaluation findings 2018-2022

- NOYO effectively modelled inclusion. It created an integrated ensemble of disabled and non-disabled musicians, which brought musical, personal and social benefits.
- The unique NOYO sound resulted from this integration, in combination with the co-creation of repertoire and NOYO's blend of traditional, non-traditional, electronic and adaptive musical instruments.
- NOYO has increased awareness of accessible musical instruments and their potential for the concert platform amongst audiences and the music sector. The unique blend of instruments provoked curiosity and interest from the audience as well as challenging the notion of what an orchestra looks and sounds like.
- NOYO repertoire is ambitious - it stretches and challenges NOYO musicians. Its complexity and originality surprised some audience members. Some of the professional musicians in the audience reported feeling excited about what NOYO could bring to the musical landscape.
- Having non-disabled musicians in NOYO demonstrated to disabled musicians that there is a desire from all to change. The non-disabled musicians weren't there to 'bolster' the disabled musicians. Everyone is invited to contribute equally, and as a result, musicians reported that NOYO is more interesting and exciting than a standard orchestra - with greater creativity, musical opportunity and enjoyment.

**“[Out of the programme] I especially admired the two energy-radiating world premieres by Oliver Cross and Alexander Campkin, melding the very sonically varied platform-full of instruments with great expertise. Those instruments included items I would love to see and hear more of in new music ensembles. For instance the LinnStrument (Sally Kidson) which is a finger-sensitive midi controller, and the Seaboard RISE (Ben Evans) a quite beautiful finger activated keyboard. A really interesting afternoon of music, and I can't wait to hear them all again.”**

Judith Weir CBE, Composer

**“Lots of the music we play, you wouldn’t really get that in a stereotypical classical music concert. You wouldn’t have the instruments! It brings a different kind of element of programming. I really enjoyed the process of having the workshop with Alexander Campkin, just talking about what he wanted with the piece and how we should transfer that to how we play it. ‘Creative’ is one of the really good words to describe NOYO.”**

**Holli Pandit**

NOYO harpist



## 4. Find a new audience through being more diverse and relaxed

**“Such a big crowd and quite a new crowd for us. They were just so attentive. Even the youngest children in the audience - they were enjoying it and moving around to the music. It’s great they get to see St George’s and will hopefully come back again. If anything isn’t quite right, we hope the orchestra will tell us because we want to be part of this journey now. You should expect venues to do better, because if we’re inviting these groups in, then we need to be prepared and as accessible as possible, but also willing to learn and willing to improve ourselves.”**

Catherine Freda, Head of Learning and Participation, St George’s Bristol

### NOYO model

- NOYO’s artistic outputs are produced for all audiences, so accessibility is considered and costed from the start, including subtitling and BSL interpretation.
- All NOYO concerts have so far been promoted as relaxed performances, with this explained on stage by a NOYO musician. Adjustments include keeping lights on, a relaxed attitude to noise, a quiet space, trained staff, and a choice of seating options such as bean bags, chairs or wheelchair spaces, in accessible venues.
- Concert listings promote venue access information with pictures of the various spaces, which can be useful for neurodivergent audience members.
- NOYO works closely with NOYO partners and venues to address structural and systemic barriers to access before tickets go on sale. This often involves practical conversations around relaxed performance requirements, increasing wheelchair user spaces – which in turn impacts evacuation procedures, and ensuring a wider range of seating options can be booked.

## Evaluation findings 2018-2022

- NOYO sold over a thousand tickets for its first concerts, on par with established youth orchestras. It brought new audiences, an average of 55% first-time bookers across four venues.
- Audience members noticed the benefits of a relaxed environment for some concert-goers. It added to the overall sense of inclusion and belonging within the concert halls. This had a particularly positive impact on disabled audience members, including families with disabled children.
- There is some evidence that the concert positively influenced younger disabled children and showed them possibilities and role models in music.
- There were various suggestions for how to make the creative outputs even better. Audience members would have liked more explanation and information about some of the unusual instruments.
- For some, including the musicians themselves, the relaxed nature of the performance had drawbacks, for example affecting their focus and concentration on stage.
- The concerts were an impressive example of audience development. A different demographic of audiences attended, many of whom hadn't attended an orchestral concert or a concert venue before.

## In progress

NOYO is working on improving how it collects data on disabled audience members, and how it can offer the most effective concert-going experience to young disabled people.

NOYO's first-ever concert was also Milton Court Concert Hall's first-ever relaxed performance. Ahead of NOYO's next concert at the same venue, London NOYO partners are leading the way in trying to further improve the booking and concert experience of disabled customers.

**“I liked playing at my hometown concert hall because I sat in the audience before, and now say to myself, I play on that stage. Being part of this journey, it makes me feel proud, honoured, buzzing! I liked it all - the experience of working as a team with friends, and showing what we can do, playing with BSO Resound, the fact we sounded different in different places. An idea for future concerts? Joining with other orchestras.”**

**Torin van Breda**  
NOYO Tenor horn player





# 5. Radical empathy is critical for change

“As a person with some sensory impairments and other long-term health issues myself, who is also an amateur musician, the concert made me feel like I was not alone and I found the music particularly moving and inspiring.” Audience member

**NOYO has encouraged radical empathy from other musicians, composers, Music Leaders, audience members, NOYO and partner staff. Radical empathy in this context has meant not only empathising, but also actively considering the perspectives of disabled musicians in order to create change.**

## NOYO model

- NOYO musicians often comment on how they feel part of a team. The same musician-centered approach and expectations are placed on disabled and non-disabled musicians alike, with Music Leaders invested in ensuring everyone’s voices are heard equally.
- The tight-knit community and sense of togetherness they experience through NOYO has led disabled and non-disabled musicians within the group to become ambassadors for diversity and inclusion.
- Musicians also co-own the voice of NOYO and are public speakers for the orchestra. NOYO doesn’t talk about it without them.
- NOYO works alongside young musicians. The way music is composed is a collaboration between composers, young people and the music team.
- The choice of NOYO repertoire carefully balances the need to stretch individual musicians with what will work for the ensemble.
- NOYO’s creative outputs demonstrate the orchestra’s values of inclusivity, quality, access, equity and nurture. They are introduced by the young musicians themselves, creating the opportunity to share what it means to them.

## Evaluation findings 2018-2022

- Young people's opinions and ideas have been a critical part of advocacy. NOYO musicians have had opportunities to influence others, sharing deep thoughts about inclusive music-making and social justice.
- Some musicians felt that NOYO being a 'first' revealed systemic issues in the music education sector, and social injustice.
- Audiences had a positive and often emotional response to NOYO's creative outputs. There is evidence that NOYO is changing perceptions of what an orchestra could and should be.
- During the concerts, some of the music specifically addressed the theme of disability. Audiences reported that musicians' personal introductions were a powerful way to share their lived experience and passion for the music.
- There are some indicators of radical empathy among audience members. Through the concerts and films, they not only increased their understanding of the barriers faced by disabled musicians, but also actively engaged with musicians' perspectives, listening and responding.
- There is emerging evidence that NOYO and its partners are positively influencing other organisations. They are proactively raising awareness of the NOYO model of inclusion and diversity.

**“I’m currently learning a Mozart concerto and trying to practice it as Mozart would have intended it to be played, but I’m playing on a modern double B flat/F horn, which didn’t exist when he wrote the concerto. So, if it’s okay to perform like that, then why isn’t it okay to perform similar works on adapted and inclusive instruments like the Clarion or LinnStrument?! I’ve learned so much about adapted instruments. NOYO has helped me to explore improvising and learning by ear – it is proving that there is room to include other instruments as well as traditional classical instruments.”**

**Georgina Spray**

NOYO French horn player



## 6. We've got to learn from each other, and fast track inclusion

**“It has significantly influenced how we think, and made us think about different definitions of excellence. The principle of working alongside is also important, and being disabled-led. How we can work ‘alongside’ better and consider complementarity in our work - so not instead of, but alongside.”** Anonymised interviewee from the orchestral sector

### NOYO model

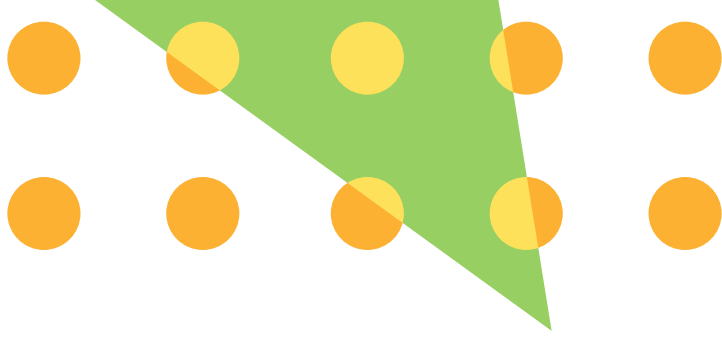
- The NOYO partnership model is multilayered. It involves a consortium of organisations working together in each region to co-deliver the various elements of the NOYO programme - each with its own culture and ways of working.
- NOYO requires involvement in a variety of areas, from promoting NOYO recruitment and concerts, to nurturing young musicians, to coordinating one-to-one lessons and supporting Music Leaders and tutors.
- NOYO has developed from a collaborative effort, based on the premise that sharing learning between partners and Music Leaders should help to grow and evolve the practice, vision, values and advocacy.
- Within the consortium, it is acknowledged that partners are at different stages of development in terms of working with disabled musicians. A shared vision and the willingness to pool resources has driven the work forward.

## Evaluation findings 2018-2022

- There are still barriers facing NOYO musicians within and beyond NOYO, despite the equity and equality NOYO and its partners have modelled. There are not enough opportunities for young disabled musicians to progress beyond NOYO. While some NOYO musicians have gone on to further education and other opportunities in music, much more needs to be done to ensure there is a universal offer available.
- There is evidence that the team of Music Leaders involved in NOYO have developed skills, confidence, knowledge and understanding as well as a new pedagogy around instruments such as the Clarion. There is less evidence of this translating to the wider music education workforce. Training opportunities to work in an inclusive context remain limited.
- There has been an increased understanding of effective partnership working. What is needed to foster a creative and supportive environment for the musicians includes: shared ethos, whole-organisation buy-in, shared learning and practice, nurturing positive relationships, good communications, clarity of expectation and an understanding of organisations' differing capacities.
- NOYO has increased its capacity and refined its systems and processes over the four year period. Young people's ideas and opinions are embedded in NOYO's musical and advocacy work, but more needs to be done in terms of their participation at management and governance level.
- Racial diversity within the NOYO staff and delivery team is not yet representative.

## In progress

NOYO and some of its partners have started to put in place pathways within their organisations to support young disabled musicians. The coming years will be critical in widening the impact of what we've collectively learned to open up more opportunities to them.



**“I couldn’t have begun my extraordinary journey if I hadn’t been a member of NOYO. NOYO were always understanding, giving the opportunity for a Neurodivergent musician to learn music to a high standard. NOYO’s experience certainly helped me to deliver great acting. Also, I was able to master four new songs for the movie [Netflix’s *I Used to be Famous*] in a very short time! Please never give up your dream.”**

**Leo Long**

NOYO percussionist





# Insights from NOYO partners

“Seeing the transformation that had taken place between the very first performance from the South-West pilot group in 2014 to NOYO’s inaugural tour performance in Bristol in 2022 was a genuine career-high, and a profoundly emotional experience. The amount of work going on behind the scenes over the past years is nothing short of breath-taking. But the result was incredible!

There are so many things we have learned from this work: how to approach repertoire in an inclusive way; how to balance artistic expectations with pastoral support; how to deliver an effective national programme in genuine partnership; how to get the best out of every single young musician without compromising on meeting people’s individual needs...

It is important that we distil everything that all the partners, practitioners, and participants have learned into a format that is accessible for organisations at all stages of the inclusion journey - and that the right support is provided for organisations who wish to begin to embed NOYO learning into their work.”

**Louise Mitchell CBE**

Chief Executive, Bristol Beacon

**“The National Open Youth Orchestra is the living embodiment of twenty-first century music-making and has already succeeded in setting a new paradigm for inclusive creativity and performance. It is a genuine ‘ensemble of possibilities’, reimagining established repertoire and generating innovative new music through improvisation, collaborative composition, and pioneering integration of technology.**

**The inaugural concert performance at Milton Court Concert Hall in April 2022 more than represented this and consequently strengthened our resolve to be associated with this extraordinary community of musicians, as well as helping to trailblaze the future of NOYO itself.**

**It has not always been easy, particularly with the interruption of the pandemic, but the ‘can do’ attitude of all those involved with NOYO was inspiring to work with. We continue to learn so much from this extraordinary partnership and the next phase of the journey for us will be to further incorporate the inclusive excellence of NOYO into the culture and everyday life of the Guildhall School.”**

## **Sean Gregory**

**Vice-Principal and Director of Innovation & Engagement,  
Guildhall School of Music & Drama**

**“Working with NOYO is always a hugely positive experience, which each time fills us with hope for the next generation—it’s why we at the BSO do what we do, and this glimpse of the future is both inspiring and rewarding. Our partnership with NOYO is a fundamental value for BSO as societal change doesn’t happen in isolation, it requires collaboration and participation. We want you to read NOYO’s report and question how you can implement change so that no one is excluded from the empowering impact of live music-making.”**

## **Dougie Scarfe**

Chief Executive, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra

**“As a partner organisation of NOYO, MAC is delighted to have seen the impact of providing accessible music opportunities for talented young musicians in Birmingham and beyond. At the heart of MAC Makes Music is a commitment to delivering an inclusive music-making programme. We are thrilled to be part of this pioneering, inclusive national youth orchestra. MAC will continue to champion the talent of young disabled musicians, encourage change within the sector, and work with NOYO organisations on a musician-centred model.”**

## **Deborah Kermode**

CEO & Artistic Director, MAC

**“We are honoured to partner and collaborate with the National Open Youth Orchestra. This ensemble of incredible young people and the team around them are quite extraordinary, and I know that all of my Barbican colleagues would, without hesitation, say the same. NOYO’s first-ever concert at the Barbican, at Milton Court Concert Hall in April 2022, will live very long in the memories of all of us who attended. It felt like a pivotal and momentous occasion and it was a real privilege to be there. For its joyfulness, its inclusivity and for its creativity, we are proud to support the inspiring work championed by this orchestra and its talented young members.”**

## **Will Gompertz**

Artistic Director, Barbican

### **We hope that as a sector, you can build on NOYO’s work:**

- **As a selective progression route, NOYO isn’t suitable for every young disabled musician. NOYO is also limited in the number of young people it can work with every year.**
- **What happens after and beyond NOYO is becoming as important to the orchestra as what happens during and within. There continues to be a lack of clear progression pathways for young disabled musicians. NOYO musicians are full of aspiration about their musical futures, but this is tainted by the knowledge of the barriers they are likely to face to realise them, if they can at all.**



# Final words: things **NOYO** musicians would like you to do now

NOYO musicians would like you to be part of the change. They have put together these suggested actions for you:

## If you're a music teacher or music leader

- Don't underestimate your disabled students.
- Don't be afraid to ask them what adjustments they might need. Don't try to guess – everyone is different.
- Also ask what they want to get out of their lessons. Not everyone will want stressful exams and reaching targets. It could be that they just enjoy performing music as a means of expressing what they can't put into words.
- Don't force a student to learn to read sheet music – this can be extremely challenging for some disabled people, and put them off music altogether.
- Work with musicians at their own pace. You may have to offer more processing time.

## If you lead an ensemble or orchestra

- Be patient. Ensemble settings can be quite overwhelming for some musicians.
- Support musicians on a personal as well as musical level: talk to members on a one-to-one basis to create a friendly, caring relationship with them. Some might be fine with the musical side but struggle socially. Help them if you spot this.
- Offer a quiet space for people who need a break.
- Send out a plan of the rehearsal two weeks in advance with the pieces, breaks and timings.

# Final words: questions **NOYO musicians** would like you to ask yourself.. And act upon

**1)** What needs to change for you to allow more disabled musicians to access your ensemble/ programme/organisation?

**2)** How many disabled musicians do you know of? If fewer than 5, how might you change this?

**3)** Are your rehearsal or concert spaces accessible to wheelchair users on stage and in the audience? If not, what can be done?

**4)** What is your approach to repertoire/ musical content within your organisation/ music leadership? How have you changed your approach to make it more accessible in the last 5 or 10 years?

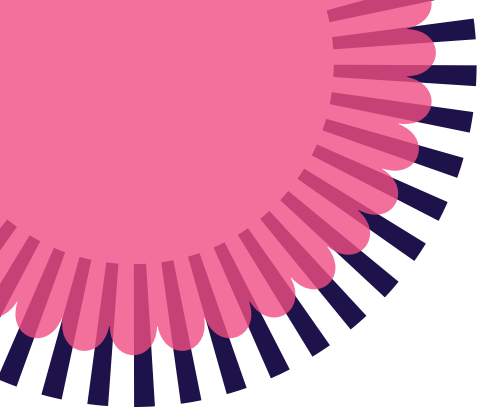
**5)** How many times have you played, or hosted a performance welcoming of neurodivergent audience members and wheelchair users?

**6)** How many musicians in your ensembles/ programmes/teaching play an adapted instrument, like the Clarion, LinnStrument or bespoke accessible instruments? How many could benefit from one?

**7)** Could any young musician you know benefit from an adaptation to their current instrument?

**8)** How many times in your career have you played alongside disabled musicians? If this number is low, why is that?





# Find out more, watch and follow

## Further insights from NOYO musicians

[National Open Youth Orchestra podcast episode](#)

[ABRSM blog post](#)

[Youth Music Reshape Music report](#)

[Music Teacher magazine article, August 2022](#)

## Connect

[Openupmusic.org](#) (NOYO, Open Orchestras, Clarion)

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