



### **Case Study 3**

## **GLOUCESTER MUSIC SOCIETY**

### **Audience Development**

#### **by involving the local community**

When I took over as chairman of Gloucester Music Society in 2001, the once thriving society had a dwindling and aging membership, funding sources had dried up and there were few people to turn to for help. Founded in 1929, GMS had been a thriving music club in its time, and to me it seemed that the only way forward was to aim for a really big programme which would draw the Society to public notice in Gloucester and beyond, and which would be of sufficient importance to attract lottery funding.

First we needed a really good series of concerts with top class artists and we decided on a Russian theme which included Russian musicians performing music from their native land. The themed programmes have since become a feature of our seasons and have proved fascinating. We persuaded Gloucester's Folk Museum to host an exhibition about Russia, the City Council to screen some historic Russian films to link with the series and the local library to put up a display. A Russian pianist came to perform a Rachmaninov programme at a local school, also giving a special concert to the students there. We also commissioned a Piano Trio from Graham Whettam, the distinguished composer now living in Gloucestershire. A combination of all these enabled us to get lottery funding to relaunch the Society and the Mayor of Gloucester at that time became very interested in our work and attended many events.

Subsequent seasons have also included arranging exhibitions and linking in with films. In one special exhibition for our 75th anniversary, which featured music and musicians with Gloucestershire connections, two local artists put on a major exhibition of paintings of the county at the Museum and Art Gallery, who also exhibited many of their own collection of historic Gloucestershire paintings.

We have also featured music and musicians from Eastern Europe. Like many other counties, Gloucestershire has its fair share of immigrants from Eastern Europe and we hoped to provide a touch of home for them. Our first concert of the season should have been an 80th birthday tribute to Graham Whettam, but sadly he died just three weeks before his birthday, so this was a celebration of his life instead, and the concert included a performance of Dvořák's "New World" Symphony as arranged by the composer for piano duet. We have linked with the Czech Dreams Festival for our second concert of the season which featured the wonderful Škampa Quartet playing Janáček's "Intimate Letters" Quartet and will also include the beautiful but rarely performed Double Bass Quintet by Dvořák.

Future concerts will include music from Hungary, Poland and Russia – much of it not the well-known favourites but new and challenging repertoire. When attending Making Music meetings, I find that some other music societies are envious of our adventurous programmes, but we find that our members enjoy the challenge.

Close to our venue is the historic St Mary de Lode Church, a respite care facility for adults with learning difficulties. This is something in which I have long had an interest and we have a standing invitation to the clients there to attend our concerts free of charge. In recent years this has sometimes proved difficult due to lack of staff. We also undertook several concerts each season at the Eastbrook Road day centre for adults with learning difficulties. These have both been very worthwhile ventures.

Funding is still a major problem, but we have received a number of generous donations from our members that have enabled us to continue.

Audiences are increasing slowly but surely. We do find that most people prefer to come along on a concert by concert basis rather than taking advantage of the season ticket. We aim to play a part of the regeneration that is taking place in the city, and we continue to reach out to residents of Gloucestershire whilst at the same time exploring music from far and wide. I hope that we can continue to grow and to inspire, and will be here to celebrate our 80th birthday in 2009!

Christine Talbot Cooper  
Chairman, Gloucester Music Society

Contact your Regional Development Officer for more information:  
01453 751096  
[rachel@makingmusic.org.uk](mailto:rachel@makingmusic.org.uk)

Or contact Gloucester Music Society Direct  
Christine Talbot-Cooper  
[talbotcooper@onetel.com](mailto:talbotcooper@onetel.com)

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