

Institution: University of Oxford		
Unit of Assessment: 33 - Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies		
Title of case study: 'Vehicles': Inspiring Creativity and Innovative Thinking in Young People		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 1 January 2014–31 December 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Martyn Harry	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of Composition	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: January 2009-Present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 1 June 2014–December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Harry's children's opera <i>Vehicles</i> was performed to school children in March 2020. The opera, together with its accompanying workshops and animated resources, took youngsters on a tour of different types of vehicles throughout the ages, recontextualising science for the young audience and leaving them with the confidence to view scientific subjects as creative and innovative. <i>Vehicles</i> simultaneously encouraged children's interest in opera, the arts and creativity more broadly in parts of the UK traditionally lacking in arts provision. In staging <i>Vehicles</i> in collaboration with Operasonic, a not-for-profit company focused on making opera accessible to young people, Harry's opera inspired new ways of working for the company, informing their future practice and fostering a proactive sense of adaptability during the Covid-19 pandemic.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The primary underpinning research for the project comprises an opera composition, which draws on Harry's experience working on nine previous children's operas in a variety of different community and school settings [R1]; and a development of the research questions of creative collaboration and distributed creativity explored in his previous children's opera <i>My Mother Told Me Not To Stare (MMTMNTS)</i> [R2]. Harry's children's opera <i>Vehicles</i> sought to answer two specific questions: what contribution can <i>Vehicles</i> make in promoting feelings of self-determination in young people living in areas which are traditionally lacking in arts provision; and to what extent can <i>Vehicles</i> address themes of creativity and innovation in such a way as to inspire young people to think differently about scientific careers such as engineering?</p> <p><i>Vehicles</i> was first commissioned by the children's theatre company, Action Transport Theatre (ATT), with R&D funding from Arts Council England to work with children on the creation of a new opera in 2015. Blackbird Leys (Oxfordshire) and Ellesmere Port (Cheshire) were chosen as the locations for the creative devising workshops with children, since these areas are close to two large car factories, BMW Cowley and Vauxhall; they also lie in areas of the UK traditionally lacking in arts provision. The clear brief emerging from the workshops was that each scene should be based on a different vehicle technology (spaceship, Formula 1 car, lorry, balloon, Roman galley, etc.). Harry worked as librettist and composer with Nina Hajianni, director of ATT, to create a narrative that would deliver this remit while building in the dramatic situations upon which opera thrives. The development of transport technologies is explored in reverse order, after an opening crisis moment when the spaceship begins to travel backwards in time. The astronauts thereby encounter four scientific inventors (William Morris, James Sadler, an unnamed caveman and Leonardo da Vinci) and begin to appreciate the creative decisions that led to the development of their spaceship. The crisis is averted when Leonardo helps them build a time machine that will return them to their future time.</p> <p><i>Vehicles</i> was developed further in collaboration with Rhian Hutchings of Operasonic. As part of this new collaboration Harry rewrote the opera for four performers in order to better distinguish</p>		

between the astronauts and the inventors they meet on their journey. Operasonic's two performances of the final version of *Vehicles* at the Riverfront Theatre Newport on 2 March 2020 were attended by audiences of approximately 500 children. Hutchings' interest in STEAM methodologies led to the creation of introductory primary school workshops that explored the notion of innovation in engineering, drawing on the examples of the inventor figures from the opera. Since the lockdown, this workshop content has been disseminated online. (*Vehicles* will also be filmed for online dissemination, in order to replace the UK tour that had to be postponed in March 2020 due to COVID-19.)

Vehicles builds on research questions and practices developed in Harry's previous children's opera *MMTMNTS* [R2]. Harry examined the creative collaboration processes characteristic of large opera houses, small theatre companies and film music recording sessions, before applying these perspectives to the *MMTMNTS* project itself. He analysed the creative partnerships he had formed with directors, librettists and performers in his previous work as composer or orchestrator. The research for *MMTMNTS* was concerned with the way contributing artists negotiate creative time and space. Each creative collaboration was also influenced by its institutional setting and the terms of the original commission, which were sometimes even reflected in the identity of the artwork that emerged. *Vehicles* built on this research by examining the two sets of creative partners that gave rise to the opera/film, as well as the initiating role of the creative workshops with children.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- R1.** Martyn Harry, *Vehicles* (2014-2020), an opera for children, a composition research publication with the libretto and music solely authored by Harry. The world premiere of *Vehicles*, which constitutes its publication as practice-based research, took place at The Riverfront Theatre, Newport, Wales on 4 March 2020. Recording available on request.
- R2.** Martyn Harry, *My Mother Told Me Not To Stare* (2009–12), an opera for children, a composition research publication with music composed by Harry with a libretto by Finegan Kruckemeyer. The first version of *MMTMNTS* was premiered in Dartington Arts Centre on 1 February 2010, before going on a tour of UK theatres in 2010 with funding from Arts Council England. The world premiere of the revised version *MMTMNTS*, which now constitutes its definitive publication as practice-based research, took place at the Dartington Arts Centre on 1 June 2012, leading to a second UK tour. Further details about the work's production can be found at <https://mymothertoldmenottostare.wordpress.com/tag/martyn-harry/> Recording available on request.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Harry's children's opera, *Vehicles* [R1], was composed specifically for audiences of 8 to 10 year-old children and presented through a collaboration with Operasonic, a not-for-profit opera company focused on making opera accessible to young people. A tour of *Vehicles*, intended for three residencies in Newport (Feb-Mar 2020), Didcot (late Mar 2020), and Ellesmere Port (Sep 2020), all of which are areas traditionally lacking in arts provision, was unavoidably scaled back and largely replaced by online performances and engagement due to the impact of COVID-19.

Recontextualised science for young children giving them renewed confidence in science as a subject and in the concept of experimentation

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, only the Newport performance was able to take place on 4 March 2020, engaging 393 children from six primary schools from across Newport and one from Caerphilly. Students from four of the primary schools took part in additional activities: a drama workshop at their school; the performance of *Vehicles* at the Riverfront Theatre in Newport; and a post-performance workshop online. Rhian Hutchings, Creative Director of Operasonic explains, 'We started their journey with a drama workshop which introduced them to the characters of Captain Houston and Lieutenant Schmidt and explored the theme of invention. They then experienced the opera. After the opera we put the pupils through a space cadet

training programme via a suite of animated resources which explored forces [C]. Pupils had to watch science explorations and then try out experiments and report back to their teachers' [A].

The students – who were in Year 4 (aged 8/9) for the drama workshop and performance, and then had progressed to Year 5 (aged 9/10) when they took part in the online workshop – filled out questionnaires prior to the programme and again when the project finished. The results (received from only one school due to lockdown disrupting the return of parental consent forms) showed a clear increase in the children's confidence in science with all who answered reporting some improvement and 76% answering that they now felt confident or more confident about science as a subject. The most significant rise in confidence reported by the children was in 'experimentation' with all responses showing an improvement and 88% reporting that they now felt 'more confident' or 'definitely more confident' about experimenting since watching the opera and taking part in the workshops [B].

Encouraged children's interest in opera, the arts and creativity more broadly in areas traditionally lacking in arts provision

Prior to watching *Vehicles*, questionnaires reveal that the children had a limited idea of opera with only one student being able to say that it included both singing and acting, and 76% stating that it concerned either singing or acting. This understanding improved significantly after viewing the opera whereby all of the children who recognised that an opera included singing, also stated that it included acting, revealing that the students now recognised the synthesis of the two. Similarly, the children's interest in opera and confidence in their artistic skills grew. After viewing the opera and attending the first workshop, all of the children (100%) stated that they 'believe[d that they] could become an artist' and 76% agreed that they would like or quite like to see another opera one day [B].

Informed Operasonic's future practice and that of the cast and crew of *Vehicles* while encouraging adaptability during Covid-19

In planning and realising Harry's '*Vehicles*' opera, Rhian Hutchings at Operasonic points to the benefits the company has experienced: 'Collaborating with Martyn enabled Operasonic to... explor[e] the impact of opera on young people. Building an evidence base to prove the value of opera for young people helps to validate our work and create further opportunities to develop further pieces.' She continues, 'It's been a key part of our strategy to build research but we haven't had the contacts before now to put structured academic research around our work' [A].

Of all of the activities offered, the children particularly enjoyed the online training with 88% reporting that they 'really enjoyed' the animated resources created due to the restrictions necessitated by Covid-19 [B]. The YouTube resources which teach children through animation and short films about 'push and pull' forces, gravity and friction have already been viewed 97 times since they were released in September 2020 [C]. Hutchings confirms that the success of these bite-size videos is having a direct effect on how Operasonic will work after the pandemic, 'The pandemic has required that we change our plans and think differently about delivering in person. Moving our work to film is giving us the opportunity to create a package for schools that can be delivered in the classroom with in-person support. This points the way forward to a new way of working for Operasonic' [A].

Members of the creative team working on *Vehicles* (including a Producer, Baritone/Cellist, Designer and a Documentary Audio & Video Recorder) also felt that their involvement with the opera would change the way they work moving forward. Responding to an online questionnaire sent after the Newport performance (and during the lockdown stages of the pandemic), half felt that 'Opera for children is important and needs to be supported and continued' [D]. A couple of responses also indicated that working on *Vehicles* would influence and change their practice, with one answering that the Opera 'Reinforced and confirmed a commitment to [the] participatory arts' and another answering that *Vehicles* had 'Created a commitment to using the arts in a pedagogical manner' [D]. The respondents particularly enjoyed the directness that is made possible by working on an opera for children and one respondent confirmed that they had

'...since looked into how we can work with children in the future on various projects that we feel will be beneficial to the curriculum.' [D].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- A. Reflective Statement from Rhian Hutchings, Creative Director, Operasonic (25 January 2021)
- B. *Vehicles* Students Evaluation Report, January 2021
- C. *Vehicles* YouTube Schools Resources (last video released 17 September 2020):
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?app=desktop&list=PL3qTgBDqumc-6psxdCEMynYqZLKfPrYF>
- D. *Vehicles* Creative Team Evaluation Report January 2021