

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of East London (UEL)		
Unit of Assessment: 33 Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies		
Title of case study: Decolonising opera; Restaging BAME heritage		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013 – 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Dominic Hingorani	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of Performing Arts and Co-Director of Brolly Productions	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2007 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 – 2020 (ongoing)		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

Hingorani's practice as Co-Artistic Director of Brolly, a global majority led company, addresses the under-representation of BAME artists and audiences in the Arts and Heritage sector, producing substantial impact in four key areas:

- Revolutionising the Eurocentric opera form by integrating global majority classical traditions.
- Creating BAME characters and new roles in the opera repertoire for BAME artists
- Re-articulating archival research through performances that decolonise British heritage.
- Developing BAME audiences for opera and the heritage sector.

This work is delivered through partnerships with theatres and museums nationally, including The National Maritime Museum, Hackney Empire and Opera North, and supported by Arts Council England.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

Figure 1 Performance of Powder Monkey

Hingorani's work challenges the perception of opera as a culturally elitist art form by placing BAME characters centre stage and integrating 'non-Western' and vernacular musical traditions into the form. By decolonising the Eurocentric heritage of opera, the work purposely confronts what Homi K. Bhabha calls the ways 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities.

Brolly Productions' culturally inclusive performance practice is exemplified in the creation of two new mid-scale national touring opera works: *Clocks 1888: the*

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greener (R3, G1, G3) and *The Powder Monkey* (R5, G2, G3), both of which demonstrate pioneering approaches to decolonising opera, rehearsal methodologies and the use of archives.

Hingorani's previous work documents the contributions of minority community practitioners, both in academic writing and in his staging BAME characters in national touring productions such as *Guantanamo Boy* (R1, R2).

Decolonising opera: The operas place BAME characters centre stage to dramatise the 'hidden' histories of marginalised communities, creating leading roles for BAME artists and musicians in the repertoire and cultivating BAME audiences for opera. Brolly's work revolutionises the Eurocentric classical 'high' art genre by integrating non-Western classical musical traditions with vernacular musical forms to create an accessible hybrid form that destabilises racist notions of cultural 'otherness'.

Decolonising the rehearsal: Hingorani has progressed a rehearsal methodology that is inclusive of 'other' musical traditions and languages facilitating collaboration between artists and musicians from 'Western' and 'Non-Western' classical and vernacular traditions. This practice method empowers non-Eurocentric classically trained musicians, such as South Asian or West African, who typically improvise and play /sing 'by ear' to work collaboratively with 'Western' trained musicians who often 'read' or sight sing music. Further, this enables the composer to create a score that integrates these traditions to culturally democratise the form.

Decolonising the archive: Brolly re-articulates Eurocentric archival materials through performance to stage BAME community histories, contest their marginalisation, insist on their historiographical presence and decolonise the museum space. These collaborative partnerships include the National Maritime Museum's 'Atlantic Gallery', Chatham Historic Dockyard, Hackney Museum and the British Museum that ensure accessibility and engagement for diverse audiences with the performance and the institution. The socio-culturally grounded, historically accurate and authentic BAME characters that are 'performed back' to BAME audiences radically empowers marginalised groups in the creation and consumption of art.

Decolonising praxis: Hingorani's research and creative productions work within the philosophical framework of post-colonial scholars such as Hall, Bharucha, Gilroy, Brah and Bhabha. The operas function as cultural 'counter narratives' that contest racist and discriminatory constructions perpetuated historically through British art and culture. This culturally inclusive praxis is predicated on treating 'white' as an ethnicity in the same way as 'other' ethnicities, to create a musically hybrid and open space. (R4)

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

R1. Hingorani, D. 2010. *British Asian theatre: dramaturgy, process and performance*. Palgrave.

R2. Hingorani, D. 2011-2013. *Guantanamo Boy*. A new play for diverse teenage audiences created and produced by Brolly Productions. National tour in partnership with Half Moon Theatre following an original commission by Stratford Circus Arts Centre, supported by Arts Council England.

R3. Hingorani, D. 2016. *Clocks 1888: the greener*. National tour of a new opera by Brolly in collaboration with composer Martin Ward in partnership with the Hackney Empire and CAST Theatre, Doncaster in association with British, Hackney and Doncaster Museums (G1). <https://repository.uel.ac.uk/item/86qzv>

R4. Hingorani, D. 2017. Performing difference – diversity, representation and the nation. Breed, A. and Prentki (eds.) *Performance and Civic Engagement*. Palgrave, 41-68. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66517-7_4

R5. Hingorani, D. 2019. *The Powder Monkey*. National tour of a new opera work by Brolly Productions in partnership with Opera North, The National Maritime Museum and Chatham Historic Dockyard supported by Arts Council England and Cockayne

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London Community Foundation. Available at ROAR UEL <https://repository.uel.ac.uk/item/87vxx> (G2).

G1. Brolly Productions, for *Clocks 1888: the greener* project, Arts Council England, 2014-2015, GBP95,095

G2. Brolly Productions, for *Powder Monkey* project, Arts Council England, grants for the Arts, 2017-2019, GBP77,302.

G3. In addition, the two operas were awarded a total of GBP49,350 in funding from the following 11 institutions: Kaye Pemberton Charitable Trust, Stanley Thomas Johnson Foundation, British Museum, UEL, Cockayne – London Community Foundation, National Maritime Museum, Bernarr Rainbow Trust, Unity Theatre Trust, Fidelio Charitable Trust, Ambache Charitable Trust, Opera North.

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

Inclusion of underrepresented audiences

“I believe for many people in the audience it was their first experience of Opera. Lots of people were commenting how accessible the performance was. It would be great to bring the performance back to Newham next year.”

Mohamed Hammoudan, Director of Resident Engagement and Participation, London Borough of Newham (S1).

Brolly’s accessible opera form reached new BAME audiences through the mounting of national tours. In turn, this enhanced public sector understanding of BAME history and disseminated ‘non-Western’ musical traditions. (S2)

Clocks 1888: the greener was part of Alchemy on Tour, the largest celebration of South Asian culture outside of India, performing at the CAST theatre, Doncaster in 2015, and subsequently part of a national tour in 2016, increasing the regional access to contemporary opera featuring BAME characters. Performances at the Hackney Empire and CAST Theatre Doncaster reached 12,000 people digitally, as well as over 1500 live audience members and 900 participants of participation-widening events. (S3)

The Powder Monkey was performed at the National Maritime Museum, Chatham Historic Dockyard, The Albany Empire, Deptford and Newham Town Hall, reaching audiences of 3,880 and including 2,085 participants. (S4)

Other performances were specifically aimed at traditionally inaccessible or excluded audiences; for example, the performance of *Powder Monkey* at Newham Town Hall as part of Black History Month 2019, in one of the most demographically mixed (71% BAME) boroughs of London.

Inclusion of BAME artists

“By working in an operatic form, with a diverse cast, in a black led company, this production is an essential part of redefining opera: whose stories are represented on the opera stage; who creates and tells them.”

Jo Nockels, Head of Projects, Opera North. (S5)

The two new operatic works directly address the lack of leading roles for BAME artists, both singers and musicians, in the repertoire. The two operas created five leading roles for BAME singers and orchestral parts for two musicians specialising in the Kora and Sitar. These creative opportunities have fostered the development of casting networks for BAME artists, bringing them to the attention of major opera companies such as English National Opera, the Royal Opera House and Opera North.

Overall, Brolly created industry standard employment, following Independent Theatre Council (ITC) guidelines, for 40 artists in the development and performance of *The Powder Monkey* and 23 artists for *Clocks 1888: the greener*, as result of successful funding bids from Arts Council England and a range of trusts and foundations (over GBP200,000).

Making museums more inclusive of BAME audiences.

“Thank you so much for giving such a rich and valuable experience to the kids! Inspiring the next generation of opera stars in a London borough where 34% of children live in poverty.”
Emma Winch, Heritage Learning Manager, Hackney Museum (S6).

The company’s research expertise in increasing access to under-represented BAME audiences was underpinned by their partnerships with national and local museums, such as;

Hackney Museum, London: the ‘Opera Audiences of The Future’ symposium at Hackney Museum (19 April 2016) featured a performance of *Clocks 1888: the greener* that gave primary schools in the borough access to BAME archives.

National Maritime Museum, London: In partnership with music education hubs such as Greenwich, Brolly developed school audiences for the National Maritime Museum, contributing to the National Plan for Music, and creating networks with local primary schools (Millennium, Windrush and Bannockburn) with high BAME constituencies, achieving the maximum 450 capacity at all performances of ‘The Powder Monkey’ for these audiences (4-5 November 2019). The development of *The Powder Monkey* was also utilised to engage BAME audiences with the Atlantic Gallery archive at the National Maritime Museum through national events such as International Slavery Remembrance Days for three consecutive years (23 August 2017 - (S7, S8)

British Museum, London: Brolly Productions was invited to perform in the Horology Gallery, and to host a symposium featuring a performance from *Clocks 1888: the greener* entitled ‘Opera Clocks and the Collection’ in 2015 (S9). This established dialogue between the museum’s curatorial staff and public engagement team on how performance can engage with archives and help to develop BAME audiences for the museum.

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

S1. Testimonial letter from Mohamed Hammoudan, Director of Resident, Engagement and Participation, London Borough of Newham.

S2. Webpage for Brolly production with further testimonials and details on the productions described in the impact. www.brollyproductions.com

S3. Final end of grant report Arts Council England, 2015.

S4. Final end of grant report Arts Council England, 2019.

S5. Testimonial letter from Jo Nockels, Projects Producer, Opera North.

S6. Testimonial letter from Emma Winch, Heritage Learning Manager, Hackney Museum.

S7. Testimonial letter from Katherine McAlpine, Public Programmes Producer, National Maritime Museum.

S8. Testimonial letter from Jordan Stevens, Music Leader, Millenium Primary School, London Borough of Greenwich.

S9. Symposium 19 September 2015, British Museum, London for artists, performance makers, academics and arts audiences. <https://www.newasianpost.com/brolly-productions-clocks-opera-the-collection-symposium/>