

Music for Life comes to Wigmore Hall

Wigmore Hall has taken over the management and development of Music for Life, the pioneering programme of creative music workshops for people living with dementia. The new commitment, officially launched at Wigmore Hall on Thursday 14 May, follows naturally from a three-year collaboration between the venue's Community and Education programme and Music for Life. Its announcement comes at a time of growing public awareness about dementia and of future challenges facing mental health services for older people. The project takes place in partnership with health, social care and dementia specialist organisations **for dementia**, Jewish Care, NHS Westminster and Westminster Adult Services.

As well as the core workshop programme, Music for Life has worked since its foundation in 1993 to build the skills required for professional musicians to interact with frail older people and those who care for them in residential and day care settings. The project will continue to develop and grow at Wigmore Hall, reaching out to people with advanced dementia through music, and improving connections, conversations and communities. It will extend the base of professional musicians able to lead workshops and together with key project partner *for dementia* will also expand the programme's highly valued development projects with care staff.

John Gilhooly, Director of Wigmore Hall, is certain that Music for Life's work is of prime importance and that its focus on communicating through music offers enduring rewards to musicians, people living with dementia and their carers. The venue, he adds, can also meet the training needs of the growing number of musicians attracted to the Music for Life ethos and serve as a beacon for best practice.

"I firmly believe that we are among the best-placed organisation to take Music for Life forward over many years to come, and ensure its national and international impact," observes John Gilhooly. "Of course, we are a concert hall above all, but I feel we have a responsibility to pursue relevant projects where we can actually make a difference to lives beyond Wigmore Hall. Music for Life musicians can pass on their experience to others, and I'm sure other institutions will learn from what we are doing in this area. My vision is to see this work copied around the world."

Gilhooly pays full tribute to Linda Rose and her defining work as founder and project director of Music for Life. "The project will continue to evolve under the care of Wigmore Hall's Community and Education programme," he notes. "We are also delighted that HRH Princess Alexandra has agreed to become Royal Patron of Music for Life."

Wigmore Hall's Education Director, Ursula Crickmay, recalls how the venue's commitment to training programmes for professional musicians shared common ground with Music for Life. "It became clear that we could build a partnership and our initial three-year programme arose from that," she explains. "We saw Music for Life as a unique programme of the highest quality, something that would make an ideal fit with the way we work."

In taking over the project's management and development, she adds, Wigmore Hall offers sustainability and a strong new infrastructure to Music for Life. "At the same time, Music for Life brings so many rewards to all of us at Wigmore Hall. We see all those involved opening up over the course of a project. Music for Life is very special."

Violist David Hirschman, an experienced Music for Life practitioner, speaks eloquently of the relationship established in workshop sessions between musicians, people living with dementia and care staff. "For me, Music for Life sessions always reinforce music's power to move people, to enable them to communicate and get in touch with feelings," he says. "Working with people with dementia, you see how isolating it can be when verbal communication is diminished. And you also see how music can reach them in a way that nothing else can. It's a great leveller for us as musicians."

Music for Life will continue to work with key partners, among them Jewish Care, NHS Westminster and Westminster Adult Services, and **for dementia**. The programme is set to nurture and celebrate new partnerships as it enters the next phase in its development at Wigmore Hall.

John Suchet, who is the keynote speaker at the project launch, said "I am absolutely delighted to be involved with Music for Life at Wigmore Hall. The charity that I now represent, **for dementia**, will be working closely with Wigmore Hall to develop this exciting work, and I look forward to being part of it." **ENDS/**

Notes for Editors:

The mission of **for dementia** is to improve the quality of life of people with dementia by promoting and developing Admiral Nursing, providing high quality training and promoting best practice for professionals working with older people, carers and people with dementia, and supporting the carers network **Uniting Carers for dementia**. For more information on **for dementia**, log on to www.fordementia.org.uk.

Admiral Nursing DIRECT (AND) is a telephone, email and web-based information line developed to support professionals, family carers and people with dementia. Carers can access information by emailing direct@fordementia.org.uk or by telephoning 0845 257 9406.

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