



OPERA ANYWHERE HAS BEEN PERFORMING ITS SMALL-SCALE TOURING PRODUCTIONS ALL OVER THE COUNTRY FOR 20 YEARS.

As a registered charity, part of its mission is to present opera to audiences which might otherwise find it hard to get to operas in major theatres. It has taken them to some highly unusual locations and many hidden-away rural places.

Mike Woodward founded the company with his wife Vanessa. "There is something powerful which comes from live performances. It's what has always driven us. And it's what draws audiences too". Like everyone else in the music and entertainment industries, 2020 saw their work grind to a halt during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It was very frustrating to see an entire year cancelled" Mike explains. "Yet it has given us time to plan our future and to develop new ideas."

Meeting a challenge

With uncertainty about the long-term impact of the pandemic on music and performance, Opera Anywhere began developing new ways to reach audiences, focusing more on education, and

delivering online. It was during this time of review and planning for the future, that the charity first approached the OxLEP Business looking for support to realise some innovative ideas.

Help from eScalate, a programme supporting businesses ready to scale up as well as businesses with a purpose beyond profit and social enterprises, enabled the company to develop new concepts, broaden its portfolio of products and position itself to reach new and wider audiences.

"We had planned to engage people more online" Mike explained. "With all live work on hold, we were able to focus on this and put together a really strong suite of digital materials based on opera. With an opportunity to plan this work we have created a solid foundation to grow and diversify into new markets."

This has included singing and performance activities as well as art projects for younger children.



A boost from OxLEP Business

Opera Anywhere had valuable guidance on how to approach their new opportunities and benefitted from match-funding financial support to develop their new direction.

“What we have had from OxLEP Business and the eScalate programme is a real feeling of camaraderie and teamwork...a sharing of objectives which has enabled us to really think outside the parameters we’d set ourselves previously.

Of greatest value, according to Mike Woodward, was some personalised business support during one-to-one business mentoring sessions and some specialised seminars. “The OxLEP eScalate grant has been an absolute God send! During the COVID-19 restrictions of performances we have been able to utilise the services of our creative teams, at least in part replacing some the work they have lost but shaping up our business for the future.”

So far, they have delivered 4 online resource projects, including a Hansel and Gretel opera, along with supporting digital products.

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“Being part of the OxLEP Business programme has been a great source of energy and inspiration so that we can really look forward to the coming years with a range of resources that eScalate has helped us to bring to market.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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