

Photos: Andrew Billington



APPETITE (STOKE-ON-TRENT)

CREATIVE AND PEOPLE PLACES

ENGAGING COMMUNITIES IN ARTS EVENTS



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



A.N.D



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Avanti Display, Pavement Cafe
NO AUTHOR

ENGAGING COMMUNITIES

IN ARTS EVENTS

CASE STUDY THEMES

- > Events
- > Community engagement

PROJECT SUMMARY

Funded by the Arts Council England's Creative People and Places Programme (CPP), Appetite is a three year programme in Stoke-on-Trent designed to get more people from Stoke-on-Trent experiencing and inspired by the arts. It began delivering its 10 year vision by putting on a Taster Menu in summer 2013 to engage and inspire local communities in an area made up of six disparate towns with generally low levels of engagement with the arts and limited access to high quality art production, though there is an existing arts scene. This is in contrast to other CPP places where the local community (rather than arts organisations) has driven arts programming from the start. Stoke-on-Trent is one of 21 places receiving funding through CPP across England.

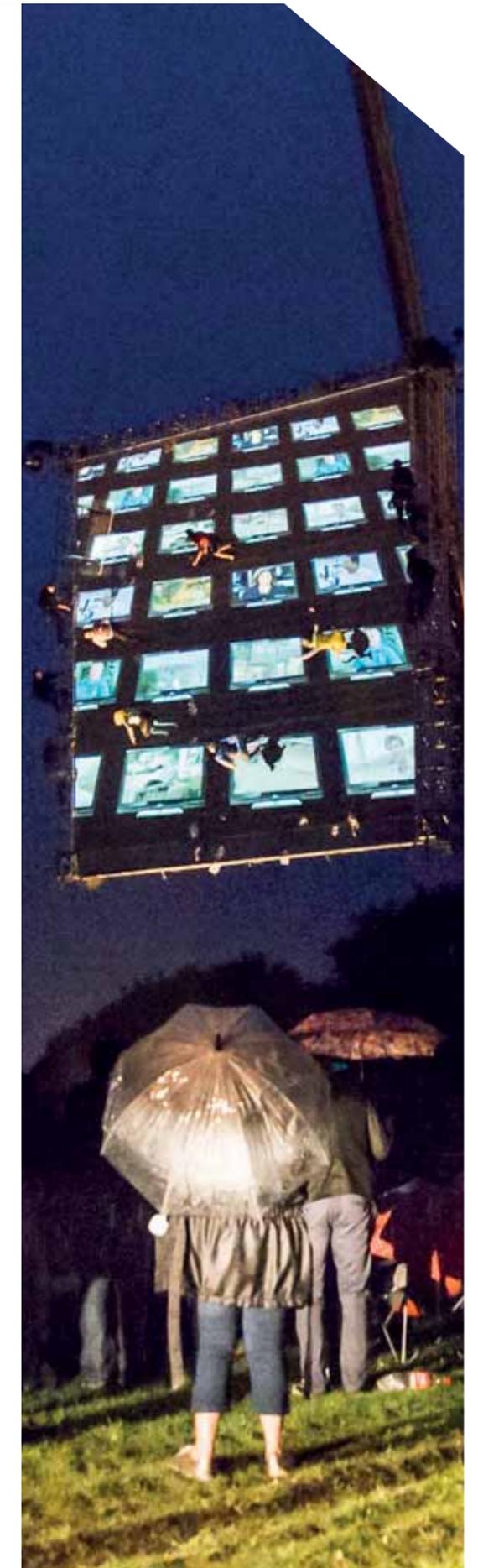
"The Taster Menu was there to make a statement about what art could be". Appetite

By challenging perceptions of what art is and inspiring people to engage with the arts, Appetite aims to inspire people to make things happen and support local communities to deliver arts activities, ultimately beyond the life of the programme.

Drawing on interviews with the Appetite team, the programme's critical friend, event attendees and volunteers, this case study summarises the Taster Menu of arts events and what has been achieved - for individual participants, places and the wider CPP Programme.

KEY FINDINGS

- > Based on the case study interviews and the local evaluation findings, the Taster Menu was a success, exceeding the target audience figures (see Table 1) and showing that Appetite's approach to community programming (that is arts led rather than community led as in other CPP areas) can engage, inspire and motivate local communities to increase their engagement in the arts, although it is not yet clear the extent to which wider public engagement has been sustained.
- > Case study interviewees reported that their expectations were met or surpassed.
- > Different types of art provided by the Taster Menu stimulated conversations and helped to build relationships between Appetite, local communities, arts and other organisations in Stoke-on-Trent.
- > Having successfully engaged and inspired large numbers of people to participate in the arts, Appetite and participants interviewed for the case study are keen to move towards more co-production and commissioning. Appetite's approach was very effective in opening the doors for community participation but this will take time and a carefully balanced mix of individual and collective agency, support and guidance from the arts sector – both Appetite and outside.
- > To sustain the impact and outcomes of the programme, Appetite must continue to address the opportunities and challenges of operating in the local context. These include the geography of Stoke-on-Trent which has six quite disparate towns, "poor" transport links, "a lot of poverty" and an existing arts infrastructure.
- > 18 months into programme delivery and Appetite has developed links with partners outside the sector and is exploring connections to other funding around health, skills development and employability for example



As the World Tipped © Andrew Billington Photography.



INTRODUCTION

When designing the Taster Menu the Appetite team wanted people to be inspired by the arts. Their vision was that people would begin to think differently about art and that the Taster Menu would generate an emotional response that would help people to believe that this range and quality of art is possible in Stoke-on-Trent. Appetite set out to listen to what art people wanted and to address gaps that were evident in the existing arts' scene. Armed with this information and the enthusiasm the Taster Menu generated, the team would then be able to respond effectively to unmet needs when designing the future programme.

In April 2013 the core team of Project Director, Creative Producer, Programme Manager, Appetite Builders and a Get Talking Researcher was established and had three months to prepare for the programme launch and delivery of the Taster Menu. Appetite Builders were responsible for engaging with and inspiring local communities to get involved and community researchers were well placed to explore the

views of their fellow members of the community to inform future programming. At that time a majority of the content for the Taster Menu had already been programmed but there was a lot of work to do to develop the Appetite brand and communications, the approach to community engagement, and monitoring and evaluation strategies, as well as internal project management systems. Tasks included setting up the Get Talking Network; based on a model of participatory action research used to engage people in conversations and involve them in decision-making about local issues. Members of the community were invited to sign up for training in the model to support the evaluation of Appetite and had the opportunity of working towards accreditation from Staffordshire University. Through the training, participants learned new action research skills and some gained accreditation whilst the Appetite team was able to benefit from the group's input during the analysis and reporting stages.

THE TASTER MENU

THE TASTER MENU WAS DELIVERED OVER THE SUMMER 2013, AS PLANNED. IT INCLUDED A WIDE RANGE OF ARTS EXPERIENCES

- › Bianco by NoFit State Circus – a large-scale contemporary circus performance in Hanley Park;
- › Pavement Cafe – four weekends of art in public spaces designed for people to stumble across in the city centre in August 2013;
- › As the World Tipped by Wired Aerial Theatre – an outdoor theatre experience of bungee assisted dance on a tipping stage in Central Forest Park;
- › Jelly and Ice Cream – a storytelling theatre performance put on by New Vic Education for children and their parents; and
- › Picnics by B-Arts – where communities and local artists were invited to contribute to the development of art installations and performances in parks across Stoke-on-Trent.

WHAT WORKED WELL?

- > The team's drive and determination made things happen within a short timescale, strengthening belief in the team's capabilities. This was really important for a new team starting out.
- > The **Appetite Builders** (translators and brokers with community groups) were instrumental in reaching out and engaging local communities. They told "as many people as possible" via both existing and new contacts and worked hard to build relationships and trust in the communities they served and engage people who might not be engaged.
- > Free events proved a pull factor.

"A selling point was free tickets – "it was a teaser, a taster, and a good way of engaging people". Appetite Builder

- > Engaging and high quality artistic content in The Taster Menu succeeded in attracting audiences.

"It helped to set a level of aspiration for the programme" - "a catalyst, launchpad for what would follow". Appetite

- > The action research process helped the team to reflect with the support of community researchers and proved popular with participants.

"There was a lot of free tea, which gave people a common ground – do you want a brew? Informal conversation put people at ease and made it more personable". Appetite Builder

"It wasn't just questionnaires – tablecloths, a menu where you could answer questions". Participant

"It was anonymous so people could criticise". Participant

- > Adopting a bespoke approach to event marketing facilitated delivery and helped to maintain the integrity of the arts experience. The spectacle events were widely promoted. Flyers were distributed to the Bianco audience advertising the next big event - As The World Tipped. In contrast, Appetite wanted people to stumble across the Pavement Cafes so focussed on promotion of these via word of mouth.



Bianco, NoFit State Circus, Stoke-on-Trent, 2013 © Andrew Billington



Avanti Display, Pavement CafePhotography: NO AUTHOR

LESSONS LEARNT:

- › There was a very short time frame between the core team being in place and the launch of the programme and the Taster Menu, which meant there was a lot to do and little time to plan together. Challenges resulted for staff, both personally and professionally. There was a short marketing timeframe, work to do to embed programme evaluation as activities were about to be delivered, and health and safety procedures (among other things) to operationalise quickly.

“If I could go back, I would want more time to form better relationships with people. More people could have seen the Taster Menu if we’d had more time”.
Appetite Builder

- › After the Taster Menu there was a gap in programming, which from participants’ perspectives was disappointing especially for people who missed the initial flurry of activity. This highlights **the importance of programming, communications and managing expectations when delivering events.**
- › In some areas the decision to run with an arts-led programme as a way to engage with local communities created tensions. Appetite Builders helped to overcome any tensions by “taking the approach that **they were not the experts**”, emphasising the community interest, bringing evidence of what potential audiences would experience, and highlighting that people could take part in the Taster Menu for free.

“It was easier to talk about something concrete”. Appetite Builder

“People want to know what they’re committing to”. Appetite Builder

- › The qualitative community development approach to evaluation was considered to be bold and was popular, but it was resource intensive and not without challenge as evaluators were present at each event for the Taster Menu. Going forwards, there will be a more pragmatic approach to **bring more consistency and regularity to the feedback loop.**

TOP TIPS:

“Don’t do too much without thinking and don’t think too much without doing”.
Appetite

- › **Allocate sufficient time to plan**, individually and as a team, both at the outset and when new staff join to create and maintain a shared understanding.
- › **Scope out and define all aspects of project management, delivery and evaluation early on**, building in time for reflection and refinement over time.
- › People need to see the value in the arts so **make the art familiar, accessible and new.**



OUTCOMES

- More people experienced and were inspired by the arts. Attitudes towards art changed through individuals' experiences of the Taster Menu.

"Lots of different types of people have a stake; there is no separation in terms of class and intelligence". Participant

"It was completely the right approach and got people excited". Appetite

"Personally, blown away, magical, left me feeling I want some more, like I'd had my mind opened". Participant

"As art it definitely hit expectations, pretty proud to be working on this". Appetite Builder

- The Taster Menu raised some individual's aspirations and expectations for art in Stoke-on-Trent at the point of taking part in the programme.

"(Now) I expect quite a lot". Participant

"(Now) I expect more from the city". Participant

"It Having the experience, in Stoke, you don't get that". Participant

- People have engaged more with their local communities and said there was positivity around Stoke-on-Trent, some of which they thought was a result of Appetite's work which started with The Taster Menu.

"Bit of a buzz in Stoke around culture and art". Appetite

"Helped Stoke sit up and think what's possible". Appetite

- For some individuals, taking part in the Taster Menu has had a more profound impact:

"I was very optimistic after that summer; I've changed so much and am now thinking of a different career path...I'm now involved in community art and my life has completely flipped [from 18 months ago] and Appetite has played a part". Participant

- New opportunities and partnerships have begun to form, as have links with wider agendas such as health and urban regeneration.

Table 1 (source local evaluation data)

	BIANCO	PAVEMENT CAFES	AS THE WORLD TIPPED	JELLY AND ICE CREAM	PICNICS	TOTAL
Target	2000	8000	5000	300	750	16,500
Actual	1827 (over 3 days)	8727	4492	345	775	Up to 16,166

CPP	Appetite
Lead organisation	New Vic Theatre
Organisation type	Not for profit arts organisation
Partners	Partners in Creative Learning, B-Arts, Brighter Futures and Staffordshire University
Location	Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire

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