

A New Phase for Aldeburgh

'Many people know Aldeburgh from attending concerts in a magical setting, listening to them on the radio or from recordings. However, concert going has always been just one part of a whole spectrum of activity which, since the first Festival in 1948, has included giving musicians the chance to refresh and stretch themselves. The new investment which focuses on artist development and education will act as a catalyst for an enhanced national and international role for Aldeburgh in music education, professional training and performance; allowing talented musicians at all stages to reach their full potential...'

JONATHAN REEKIE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, ALDEBURGH MUSIC

On Saturday 9 May 2009, Aldeburgh Music unveiled its new rehearsal and performance spaces at Snape, thus completing the first, major phase in the ambitious Aldeburgh Music Development Plan. At the heart of the new development lies the Hoffmann Building, within which is housed the 340-seat Britten Studio, the 75-seat Jerwood Kiln Studio, artist workspaces and social area. These newly-built rehearsal and performance studios form a major part of Aldeburgh's £16 million capital development project, bringing to life Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears' original vision of transforming Snape Maltings into an international creative campus for music and the arts.

Early beginnings...

When Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears founded their own summer festival in a small fishing village off the Suffolk coast in 1948, they had a dream of transforming Aldeburgh into a world-class hub where both professional and amateur musicians would converge and perform. In 1953 Britten told Imogen Holst she must be 'Principal of our new school when we get it' and that it '*must* be residential and *needn't* be in London – in fact, it would be an advantage for it *not* to be'. They were encouraged in their venture by their close friends and fellow musicians - as Peter Pears recalled in his memoirs, "I signed a contract in English, Armenian and Russian. Rostropovich simply demanded that I should start a school! Just like that!"

Having located and converted a redundant maltings at Snape into the grand Concert Hall in 1967, Britten and Pears set about establishing a school for music students. A report written in 1970 by Snape Maltings' architects, Arup Associates, detailed Britten and Pears' grand visions:

"As the use of the Snape Maltings has grown, the Artistic Directors believe that Snape provides an ideal location for a more comprehensive arts centre. In addition to music and opera, they would like to extend facilities for other performing arts, such as dance and drama. Snape should also become a place for the study of music and a workshop for the visual arts. The needs are for rehearsal rooms, a music library, an art gallery, artists' studios, permanent exhibition space and scenery workshops." -- ARUP ASSOCIATES, 1970

'A little master class...'

The first masterclasses for young professional singers were held by Pears and Lucie Manen over a weekend in September in 1972. String courses and a Snape Maltings Training Orchestra followed, and by 1979 permanent buildings for the Britten-Pears School of Advanced Musical Studies – as the young musicians' training courses were then entitled – were opened alongside Snape Maltings Concert Hall. Both Britten and Pears died before their dreams could be fully realised, and it wasn't until 1998, when Jonathan Reekie succeeded as Aldeburgh Music's chief executive, that the plans were revived.

Reviving the vision

Over the next eleven years under Reekie's directorship, Aldeburgh Music expanded from an annual summer festival into a major performance centre, offering a year-round programme of music-making and providing numerous education and professional development initiatives. These included the expanded Britten-Pears Young Artist Programme, Aldeburgh Residencies, Aldeburgh Opera and an extensive education programme. Its far-reaching work led Aldeburgh to being selected in 2003, by Arts Council England, as one of only three major national investments, to develop into an international centre for performance, music education and artist development. With this financial backing in place, Aldeburgh embarked on a mission to fulfil Britten and Pears' original vision: to transform Snape Maltings into a major European creative campus, where established artists could work alongside the future generations of musicians.

The new buildings

In 2007, after securing the 999-year lease on its existing Snape premises, Aldeburgh Music set about converting the adjacent, disused maltings into new, high-quality rehearsal and performance facilities. The immediate plan was to accommodate Aldeburgh's ever-expanding artist development programmes, whilst providing space to generate more performances, new commissions, artistic development and touring opportunities.

The heart of the new development is the Hoffmann Building, within which is housed several performance and rehearsal spaces – the main one being the 340-seat Britten Studio for rehearsal and performance. Bigger than the stage of the main Concert Hall, the Britten Studio was designed to accommodate large orchestras, and its excellent acoustics and high levels of sound insulation offer an ideal space for recording. The adjacent Jerwood Kiln Studio was built out of an old kiln, retaining the double height space and clad internally with many of the kiln's original blackened timbers, salvaged during the dismantling process. Smaller than its sister studio, the Jerwood Kiln was designed to house groups of instrumentalists, chamber and music theatre rehearsals; it has also been equipped for video/electro-acoustic installations, and can accommodate a 75-seat audience. Complementing the Britten and Jerwood Kiln Studios are two smaller, fully sound-proofed rehearsal studios, a new foyer, several artist workspaces grouped around a communal internal courtyard, replete with roof light and the Dame Janet Baker social mezzanine area.

These buildings represent the first of two phases in Aldeburgh's development project. Plans are already underfoot to complete the final stage of the building work, which will deliver a landscaped pedestrian area in front of the Britten-Pears Building, renovate the dilapidated dovecote into a multi-arts studio suitable for musicians, writers and visual artists, create an artist café, and provide an information centre, which will also double as a box office and music shop. This second and final stage of the development is scheduled for completion in 2011.

The architects

In Britten's biography, John Culshaw remembered how it was the unique landscape of the Maltings that first inspired Britten and Pears to establish their festival there: *"There was a feeling about the place, about its setting by the river with the view of Iken church through the reeds and across the marshes that made it right..."* From the start, Aldeburgh Music have been keen to preserve the historic fabric of the 19th-century maltings buildings, whilst retaining their natural relationship with the beauty of the surrounding marshes.

As one of the country's leading designers of arts and performances buildings, Haworth Tompkins were the natural choice when it came to finding architects to complete Britten's vision. Their widely-acclaimed work with the Royal Court, Almeida, Liverpool Playhouse, Battersea Arts Centre and Young Vic theatres demonstrated their strength in creating intelligently-designed artistic spaces that worked in harmony with their in-house creatives, whilst retaining the salient features of the original buildings. At the start of the project, the architects made the unique landscape of the maltings and the marshes a primary focus, stating their aim to *'intervene as lightly as possible to make a series of simple, austere and beautiful spaces that exploited the inherent qualities of the old Maltings buildings, complement the extraordinary landscape and provide a creative working environment for artists'*. This approach of preserving the harmonious relationship between the industrial architecture and the powerful landscape of the coast, won them praise from English Heritage, who last year declared Snape Maltings one of England's 20 Best Heritage-led Development Schemes.

Future plans

The new spaces will provide a springboard for more creative work as well as performances, touring and educational work. They will also allow Aldeburgh to expand the capability of several of its artist development initiatives, which currently include the Britten-Pears Young Artist Programme, Aldeburgh Residencies, Aldeburgh Education and Aldeburgh Opera. One example of a project that has been made possible through the expansion is *Faster Than Sound* – Aldeburgh's unique sonic experiment which links classical and electronica musical genres together with digital art forms. With the increased space and enhanced multimedia technology facilities, Aldeburgh Music will be able to develop *Faster Than Sound* into the UK's first dedicated programme for mixing classical and electronic music, and training the next generation of crossover artists.

"...there were a lot of familiar faces, and a sense of being not exactly part of a family, but music-making in the joyous sense, like the summer festivals in America – relaxed, with people wandering about the streets and

shopping with the kids. You saw your colleagues in a different dimension, and there was an air of tremendous friendliness, and normal life going on. It was different from anything else I'd come across at the time."

DAME JANET BAKER

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

MACBETH MEDIA RELATIONS: Ginny Macbeth or Philipp Carl 0207 700 5959

philipp@macbethmediarelations.co.uk

Suite 3, Mountfort House, 15-16 Barnsbury Square, London N1 1JL, United Kingdom

Telephone: +44 (0)20 7700 5959 Fax: +44 (0)20 7700 1329 e-mail: enquiries@macbethmediarelations.co.uk

VAT No.: 524 8113 63