



Introduction

This report¹ provides an evaluation of the Open Strings Music (OSM) Sound Mosaics project commissioned by Unlocking Our Sound Heritage (UOSH) October 2020 – March 2021. Sound Mosaics is a workshop programme drawing on OSM's community music expertise to facilitate collective sonic interactions with the UOSH sound archive.

The workshops aimed to:

- Encourage listening to archive sound recordings in a playful way
- Be fun, creative and inclusive
- Be an end in themselves with no expected 'output' from the workshops
- Raise awareness of both UOSH and OSM
- Raise awareness of sound archives as an area of heritage
- Be a response to the Covid19 lockdown and continuing lack of public events at The Keep

Overview

We successfully delivered seven workshops and one knowledge exchange event online, detailed in Table 1:

- Three public workshops covering themes of time, work and leisure, and the environment, which used community music techniques to play foraged sounds to a variety of archive clips
- One experimental public workshop that created a winter soundscape using a new digital instrument (RiTA) uploaded with sampled foraged and archive sounds
- Three targeted community workshops with a) refugees and asylum seekers, b) older people and staff in a residential care setting, and c) people experiencing mental health issues in a recovery setting
- One knowledge exchange workshop with staff at The Keep, Sussex University and the British Library to provide tasters of the activities and share learning from the project
- 75 individual people participated in the project over 6 months
- 42 individual people took part in the public workshops, 24 in the community workshops and 12 in the knowledge exchange
- Attendances at each workshop ranged between 7 and 16 participants, with 3 people attending more than one workshop.

¹ Please see Glossary of terms used at the end of this report.

Table 1: Overview of workshops

	Date	For	Attendance	Theme	Archive Clips
Public Workshop #1	29/10/2020	General public	10	Sound as time decoration	UTK007/387 (speaking clock); UTK006/51 (future towns predictions)
Public Workshop #2	19/11/2020	General public	16	Work & Leisure	UTK007/269-S1 (Racing car); UTK006/TBC (Salvage)
Public Workshop #3	10/12/2020	General public	8	Environment	UTK007/585 (Cars for women); UTK002/122 (Lewes tree planting)
Public Workshop #4	11/02/2021	General public	8	Remix the Archive (RiTA)	Samples taken from: UTK007/269-S1 (Racing car); UTK007/367-S1 (Steam engines); UTK006-21 (West Pier)
Community Workshop #1	26/11/2020	Brighton Voices in Exile	9	Sound as time decoration	UTK007/387 (speaking clock); UTK006/51 (future towns predictions)
Community Workshop #2	30/11/2020	Preston Park Recovery Centre	7	Work & Leisure	UTK007/269-S1 (Racing car); UTK006/TBC (Salvage)
Community Workshop #3	15/01/2021	Oaklands Nursing Home	8	Travelling through the archive	UTK007/367-S1 (Steam engines); UTK0007/356-S1 (Rodeo switchback music); UTK006-21 (West Pier)
Knowledge Exchange Workshop	04/03/2021	Keep, Sussex University & British Library staff	12	Sharing learning	UTK006/TBC (Salvage); UTK007/269-S1 (Racing car)
Total Attendances			78		

Participant Feedback

For the public workshops, participant details were collected through the Eventbrite booking system and show that a range of people engaged in the workshops (see Table 2). The overwhelming majority had not visited The Keep before (72%). The project therefore raised awareness of UOSH and reached new people, helping to replace public engagement events, such as Sound Mosaics pre-cursor Sounds To Keep, that were unable to physically take place at The Keep during the pandemic.

Table 2: Participant data (collected for Eventbrite registrations)

Question	Category	Percentage
Q1: Have you been to an event at The Keep before?	No	72%
	Yes	28%
Q2: What is your gender identity?	Female	76%
	Male	17%
	Non-binary	7%
Q3: What age bracket do you fall into?	18-30 years	14%
	30-45 years	32%
	45-60 years	41%
	60+ years	14%
Q4: What is your ethnic identity?	White British	55%
	White Other	24%
	Mixed Heritage	14%
	Asian	7%

Participants were asked for feedback at the end of every workshop through the Zoom chat function, a google form link and through follow up emails. The questions sought to collect qualitative feedback on experiences of the different listening activities, what participants found enjoyable, learning from the session and any improvements. We gained responses from 22 participants across the workshops, predominantly from the public workshops. Although we gained valuable feedback, a 29% response rate indicates the challenges of evaluating online workshops. The four questions with thematically collated responses are outlined in Table 3.

Overwhelmingly the feedback was positive and shows the range of benefits gained from taking part in these workshops, which corresponds with the original aims of the project. A clear theme was the innovative, experimental and unique nature of the workshops in bringing together community music techniques with the archive. As expressed by a participant in the first public workshop:

“Very very interesting and enjoyable. Never experienced anything like it before in terms of both the content and the techniques used.”

Table 3: Participant Feedback: content analysis

Q1. How did you find the experience of listening today?									
Enjoyment	Something new/different with listening	Fun	Different/unique experience	Interesting	Wellbeing benefits	Specific sounds	Well-organised		
8	9	7	6	6	3	3	2		
Q2. What did you find most enjoyable?									
Sound foraging	Playing	Listening to clips	Positive group experience	Listening as group	Deep listening exercise	Doing something new	Learning technical knowledge	Digital instrument	Using body and emotions
10	10	4	3	3	3	2	1	1	1
Q3. What will you take away with you?									
More attention to listening	Importance of group sharing	Continue to create/ forage	Specific sound(s)	Improved meditation	Knowledge of archive	Interest in further workshops	Digital instrument		
7	5	4	4	2	2	2	1		
Q4. Is there anything that could improve the session?									
No/ all positive	Instrument ideas	Technical zoom improvements	Sound foraging preparation	Longer session	More info on clips	Timings: not tea-time	More time to speak	Listen to output afterwards	
5	4	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	

Participants enjoyed the foraging and listening, and reported wellbeing-related benefits, as described in the below quotations. This included helping with mindfulness, being more aware of their acoustic environment, and encouraging playfulness. The group dynamic was also important for many, including listening to people's different responses to the archive clips.

"I loved it. It really opened my "ears" to active listening. I've not done anything like that before. I have huge problems with concentration and I think this will help me as a meditation."

"Discovered I like the sounds of a race track!! Would never have imagined."

"I will pay much more attention to sounds in my everyday life."

"I enjoyed making noises with different items in my home and trying to see if I could get a variety of sounds and joining in! It was a friendly, encouraging group."

It was harder to ask community workshop participants to provide written feedback; we therefore sought correspondence from staff afterwards:

"I would like to say a massive thank you from all of us at Oaklands for providing our residents with a sense of community as part of the Sound Mosaic sessions. It has brought happiness, laughter, and joy as well as expanding their horizons to come together with people that would have never otherwise shared a space together (pre-covid)! The ability for our residents to be in a virtual room with people of all ages and environments has made their current world feel less isolated in many ways. It has also interested them in the aspect that they're so astounded by the technology to be together with you 'live' from different places as this is very new and exciting to many of our residents."

Lifestyle Co-ordinator - Oaklands Nursing Home

"My thoughts are - It exceeded my expectations and was a lot of fun. I found the historical clip of the boat running aground fascinating. Coming up with accompanying sounds tuned into our imagination from the most ordinary objects. I made a triangle noise from my lighter and ramekin dish for example. I was surprised at how effective using everyday items sound alone and when played in a group. I have no thoughts on how the session could be improved, save to say - I'd love to do another, developing on what we tried today."

Team Manager - Preston Park Recovery Centre

Key Achievements and Challenges

Engaging with the archive

Sound Mosaics has been a truly innovative and unique set of workshops that grew out of a particular set of circumstances. The Sounds to Keep project had cemented creative and collaborative working relations between UOSH and OSM team members. The knowledge, techniques and practices were therefore readily adaptable for online provision to enable continued public engagement with the sound archive during the pandemic.

There were challenges in finding connecting themes between the diverse sound collections available. However, continuing from Sounds to Keep, listening was a foundational theme that made the activities coherent and cohesive. By applying different models of listening with community music techniques, we developed two main ways of organising our engagement activities with the archive material:

- Listening for sound qualities (e.g. rhythms, dynamics, tones and sampling)
- Listening to content (e.g. historical significance, narratives, emotional responses)

Fully engaging with the archive materials and the activities requires a degree of English language skills, which we found was a barrier for some participants in the Brighton Voices In Exile community workshop. Furthermore, attentive listening can create powerful experiences, which are not always positive and can trigger unwanted or uncomfortable experiences. For example, in one workshop a participant found the clip of a racing car traumatic and we had to quickly adapt the activity to meet group's needs.

Delivering online

Sound foraging and listening were easily transferable activities for individuals to do at home through online facilitation. For the public workshops, using Zoom allowed further geographical reach with participants joining from other parts of the UK and internationally. It increased the possibilities for a more diverse group - for example, staff from Brighton care home Oaklands supported residents to join the public workshops (see above boxed quotation), which also included parents and children.

Certain adaptations were required for online delivery. We found that there was a shorter lead-in time required for publicity and promotions with most online bookings happening in the week preceding and often right up to the workshop time. Due to online screen fatigue, we did not run workshops longer than 60 minutes, but this meant it was often challenging to fit in the range of activities. Administrative and technical support was therefore valuable alongside facilitation, with a dedicated team member carrying out these important behind-the-scenes tasks.

Clearly only those with their own equipment (laptop/mobile phone), internet connection and a degree of digital literacy were able to take part in the workshops. Through working with OSM existing partners, the community workshops went some way to addressing these digital exclusions. For example, Oaklands care home staff set up the equipment and acted as intermediaries with residents to support their participation.

Playing with and remixing the archive

Another key successful aim of the project was encouraging playfulness and curiosity through community music techniques and use of the archive clips. As fed-back by one participant, “you can always make music wherever you are”.

In the majority of workshops, we ended with the group creating an underscore for one of the clips. Due to latency of playing online together, these were one-off pieces that focused on the process of playing together rather than creating a recorded output or repeatable performance.

The final experimental workshop, Remix the Archive (RiTA), created a new way of playing together that overcame these technical limitations. Working with Maxgate Digital opened up a new set of possibilities for inviting people to engage and play with the sound archive collections. We sampled 2-3 second clips from digitised archive material as well as participants’ pre-recorded foraged sounds to create a digital instrument, which we could then play in real-time together.

This final workshop and online tool (RiTA) generated a lot of interest and exciting ideas for future uses and applications. Although it was an unexpected outcome of the project, it creates a fitting legacy for the UOSH-OSM collaboration, which we will be further exploring and developing in Summer 2021.

Future Learning

“There are definitely things that I will take away from the session to inform our work at Norwich Record Office. We have been using Sound Mapping activities for deep listening, but I liked the way that Open Strings built up to the deep listening with question prompts, as well as the initial warm up which I thought was a brilliant way to inject some energy into a remote zoom session. We have done some work using everyday objects to make sound effects previously, but not in a live online session, or in an adult engagement session, so it was great to see how these sorts of activities work for all ages.”

Unlocking Our Sound Heritage Project – East of England Hub

(Knowledge exchange workshop participant)

At the end of the project, we carried out a knowledge exchange event with UOSH, British Library and Sussex University staff to share our learning. This brought together key learning from the project:

- Listening practices create powerful, simple activities that structure engagement with the sound archive
- Sound archive clips have a wide appeal and can be used for work in a range of public and community settings e.g. care homes and residential settings for reminiscence and creative sessions
- Listening and community music techniques and activities create effective and accessible ways of engaging with sound archival collections
- Online delivery requires specific adaptations for publicity, bookings and collecting participant feedback
- Working with existing community organisations creates a way of reaching groups that might otherwise be excluded from online/public engagement events; however this requires bespoke activities and specialist staff support.

More widely, OSM practitioners have been able to:

- Further develop tools and techniques to be embedded in their future work, both for the organisation and their academic practice
- Successfully realise an idea, that was formed early at the planning stage, of a participatory tool for creating and playing sounds together online in real time
- Appreciate the power of listening techniques on people's wellbeing at first hand.

Thanks to:

- OSM community partners (staff and service users): Preston Park Recovery Centre, Brighton Voices in Exile and Oaklands Care Home
- OSM delivery partner: Maxgate Digital (RiTA)
- UOSH funders: National Lottery Heritage Fund

Report written by Bethan Prosser (08/04/2021).

From 9th April 2021 Open Strings Music became Brighton & Hove Music for Connection (BHMC) www.musicforconnection.co.uk.

Glossary

Sound forage: to explore and organise an object from its sound/s, rather than its looks or function.

Foraged sound: sounds intentionally played from everyday objects

Soundscape: any portion of the sonic environment e.g. a musical composition, our surrounding acoustic environment

Community music: using sounds in an accessible and inclusive way to create together

Archived sound: recorded audio materials preserved and housed in a collections e.g. local broadcast material, oral history recordings

Sampling: taking a snippet of an audio recording

Underscore: a soundscape/musical composition created to accompany another audio recording

Latency: a time delay, causing online workshop participants to hear sounds at different times

Sounds To Keep: previous OSM-UOSH project that used listening walks and sound foraging activities to engage local residents in the South East Hub sound archive (see digital story here: <https://vimeo.com/411741360>)

