

Smoke machines, backflips and baroque drums: how a north London school and an orchestra are reimagining 1700s ballet for the modern GCSE syllabus

The first of its kind in the UK, the unique residency agreement between the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment (OAE) and Acland Burghley School (ABS), London is already producing promising creative collaborations.

In the professionally edited music video, year 10 students can be seen performing an original dance that they choreographed for their GCSE exam, accompanied by the Orchestra performing Rameau's 'Danse des Sauvages' from *Les Indes Galantes*. The collaboration is an important step in demonstrating how working together can enrich an appreciation of the arts and reinforce the positives when joining forces creatively.

The group of GCSE students worked in partnership with the Orchestra to choreograph, direct and record the music video. The collaboration underpins the OAE's core enlightenment mission of challenging traditions and exploring great music with a fresh perspective and breaking down barriers to access.

Crispin Woodhead, OAE Chief Executive, played an instrumental part in both the move to ABS and the conception of the Rameau project. He says:

‘Young hearts and minds can connect instantly with music if you don’t erect barriers. The OAE had only moved into the school at the beginning of September, and just three weeks later we had a room full of extremely talented students dancing to Rameau!'

To make this a reciprocated creative experience, the students were given their own agency in carving out the framework of the project. Taking inspiration from baroque dances on YouTube, the ABS students were drawn to Rameau's 'Danse des Sauvages'. This particular dance, with a strong and distinctive rhythmic pulse, sparked enthusiastic discussion and allowed the music and choreography to evolve hand in hand.

With drums the heartbeat of Rameau dance, Adrian Bending, OAE Principal Timpani, began the collaboration by overseeing the marriage of music to dance and later directed the Orchestra's recording. He says:

‘This project wasn’t a case of us telling the students what to do. After our initial introductions, the students were increasingly willing to healthily disagree, taking from us only what sat well with them. Every voice was heard. We are eager and excited for these collaborations to become a regular fixture of a long, happy and most rewarding partnership between Acland Burghley School and OAE.’

While the Rameau dance project marks the first of many video collaboration projects between the OAE and ABS, there has been a bustle of activity in ongoing private classroom education work since the Orchestra took up permanent residence at Acland Burghley School in September 2020. The OAE has delivered numerous interactive workshops for all students in Years 7, 8 and 9. These workshops have ranged from exploring the instruments of the orchestra, illustrated sessions on blues and jazz compositional techniques as part of curriculum studies and a study day for all GCSE music students on Bach’s Brandenburg Concerto No. 4.

After a challenging two months of lockdown restrictions in schools, the OAE are looking forward to tackling more live projects with the students. The Rameau dance project marks just one of many

forward-thinking collaborations between the OAE and the school and demonstrates an encouraging development in the future creativity of both parties.

Sir Nicholas Serota, Chair of Arts Council England, comments:

'This pioneering initiative by ABS and the OAE places music at the heart of the school, giving every child an opportunity to discover and express their own creativity in their daily lives. It also gives the Orchestra an excellent rehearsal space and a deeper root in the Camden community with which it has already built a strong relationship. This imaginative partnership takes collaboration between professional artists and the public education system into new and exciting territory in which creativity has a part to play in all aspects of the curriculum.'

This project and the move to Acland Burghley School has been made possible with a leadership grant of £120,000 from the Linbury Trust – one of the Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts. Their support has facilitated the move to the school and is underwriting the first 3 years of education work. Additional support has been given by Adrian Frost, Selina and David Marks, The Merrill Foundation and Sir Martin and Lady Smith, as well as the ongoing support of Arts Council England.

To watch the video, [please follow this link](#).

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Notes to Editors

[Read more about the OAE's partnership with Acland Burghley School.](#)

Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment (OAE) More than three decades ago, a group of London musicians took a good look at that curious institution we call the Orchestra, and decided to start again from scratch. They began by throwing out the rulebook. Put a single conductor in charge? No way. Specialise in repertoire of a particular era? Too restricting. Perfect a work and then move on? Too lazy. The Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment was born. Since then, the OAE has shocked, changed and mesmerised the music world. Residencies at the Southbank Centre and Glyndebourne haven't numbed its experimentalist bent. Record deals haven't ironed out its quirks. Period-specific instruments have become just one element of its quest for authenticity. Today the OAE is cherished more than ever. It still pushes for change, and still stands for excellence, diversity and exploration. Thirty years on, there's still no orchestra in the world quite like it.

Acland Burghley Comprehensive School in Camden: The school provides a rich and stimulating education for boys and girls aged 11 to 19. High quality learning is at the heart of the school, prioritising high academic standards, as well as encouraging our learners to be independent thinkers with a broad world view. Its emphasis on creativity is about developing the thinkers and innovators of the future, and its curriculum offers a wide variety of opportunities for students to participate in the arts and sports, and play a part in community life.

<https://www.aclandburghley.camden.sch.uk/Support-us/Donate---a-theatre-for-all/>

The Linbury Trust is an independent grant-making Trust established in 1973 by Lord Sainsbury of Preston Candover, and his wife Anya, Lady Sainsbury CBE. The Trust has awarded almost £200m in grant funding across the world, supporting a wide variety of compelling and exciting projects in the fields of arts, heritage and culture; the environment; and social and medical welfare.