

## ON YOUR MARKS, GET SET, SING!



**CAPACITY** SOCIAL **LOCAL** PARTICIPATION  
WELL-BEING **ARTS** EDUCATION **CULTURAL**  
**INTERGENERATIONAL** SKILLS

### 1. Background

With a population of 279,284, the city is the eighth-largest in France, and is located within a greater metropolitan area of some 500,000. Strasbourg is also the European capital of democracy and human rights, hosts many European and international institutions (Council of Europe, European Court of Human Rights, European Parliament), and is an esteemed hub for university education and renowned cultural institutions (National Theatre, Rhine Opera). Its two-thousand-year history, unique geography, location in the heart of the European Rhine area, and its culture, which is at the confluence between Germanic and Latin societies, have all shaped its urban landscape, as well as its identity as a crossroads city rooted in humanism.

Strasbourg is a city of heritage, creation, and innovation, but it is also both socially heterogeneous and culturally diverse, inhabited by people from a variety of social backgrounds, perspectives, opinions, cultures, and both old and recent migrations.

Today, sustainable urban development and urban renewal projects are being carried out in key neighbourhoods to ensure greater urban equality between the territories. Simultaneously, public policies aim to improve their consideration of democratic and citizen initiatives, while lending more support to the most vulnerable groups.

## 2. Strasbourg and Culture

The city places culture at the top of its priorities. It considers culture a "democratic necessity", a factor for empowerment, individual fulfilment, and growth, as well as for the improvement of coexistence. By spending **25% of its budget**, the city aims to promote **access to and participation in all forms of art and culture**.

THE CITY IS FOCUSED ON MAKING CULTURE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL, EMPOWERING EVERYONE TO FIND PERSONAL FULFILMENT REGARDLESS OF DIFFERENCES IN AGE, GENDER, SOCIAL CONDITIONS, AND ETHNIC OR RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION, THEREBY BUILDING COMMUNITIES AND A BETTER SOCIETY.

Cultural life in Strasbourg is defined by an **extensive network of cultural facilities throughout the region**: media libraries, museums, music schools, theatres, performance spaces, arts companies and associations that offer a large number of cultural and educational facilities. The city also has:

- An exceptional heritage programme called "City of Art and History" and "European Heritage"
- Renowned regional, national, and international cultural actors
- A remarkably vibrant live performance culture
- Education in arts and culture from an early age, as well as support for amateur practices

However, part of the population has little to no access to cultural life or artistic practices due to psychological barriers, financial barriers, a lack of a sense of belonging, or even simply just physical distance.

This is why Strasbourg, through the creation of the Public Development Mission within the Ministry of Culture, has taken steps to develop and support innovative cultural projects by putting inhabitants at the heart of proposed actions. The levers of action consist of revisiting formats, access conditions, communication, and open-air spaces, as well as better meeting demands for participatory projects, amateur productions, digital culture, shared artistic residencies, and more.

ON YOUR MARKS, GET SET, SING! is a project by the Young Strasbourg Singers, supported by the City, overseen by the Rhine National Opera (Opéra National du Rhin), and under the musical and artistic direction of Mr. Luciano BIBILONI.

## 3. Objectives and Project Implementation

### 3.1 Primary and Specific Objectives



The goal of the project is to create and reinforce the sense of belonging within a community of values, and to consolidate social cohesion by training citizens at monthly participatory vocal workshops and organising a final public concert.

#### **Artistic Objectives**

- To stimulate or encourage individual and collective participation in the choir through innovative education methodologies
- To move beyond an "elitist" perspective of classical music, and make it accessible based on its artistic excellence

#### **Social and Educational Objectives**

- To enable everyone to take part in this project and to be recognised for skills useful in cultural public life
- To value the importance of the collective artistic activity
- To promote social and cultural decompartmentalisation and rejuvenate attendance at classical music concert halls

#### **Objectives for Structuring the Organisation**

- To support structuring for the primary organisation

### **3.2 Project Development**

#### **Main Actions Carried Out**

"ON YOUR MARKS, GET SET, SING!" is a citizen music project that helps residents perform major classical music pieces.

Before each concert, choir workshops are offered at regular intervals. They are intergenerational, free, and turn a community choir into a professional public performance.

These workshops are organised in different districts of Strasbourg, allowing participants to discover exclusive parts of the city centre or the surrounding areas including the Rhine Opera, the Hautepierre Theatre, the Marceau cultural centre, the Aubette space, and more unusual places like the Rhénus Sport centre to establish connections between sport and culture.

Some 300 students between 7 and 10 years of age, from 8 schools in the city's priority neighbourhoods, all participated in workshops during both school time and extracurricular time. Thanks to a joint effort the National Education programme, teachers were trained to pursue choir training outside of the Rhine Opera's hours.

## **AS PLACES FOR MEETINGS BETWEEN CREATORS, WORKSHOPS OFFER PARTICIPANTS OF ALL SKILL LEVELS THE ABILITY TO MEET REGULARLY TO LEARN AND PRACTICE THE PIECES.**

In the first year, 10 workshops were scheduled between September 2016 and January 2017, which was the date of the concert for Handel's Messiah at the Strasbourg Convention Centre. Of the 800 singers gathered there, made up of 1/3 had never sung publicly before, among whom were a hundred students and 4 amateur choirs. They were accompanied by four professional soloists, the Rhine Orchestra, and the director of the Rhine Opera. The concert was broadcast live on the Facebook page for the City of Strasbourg, receiving 15,000 views.

For the second year, 10 workshops were spread out between September 2017 and June 2018. Georges Bizet's final concert of Carmen took place in June 2018 at the Zenith of Strasbourg in front of 4000 spectators. It brought together 9 soloists, 50 singers, 65 instrumentalists, 300 students, 200 amateur singers, music schools, and more than 700 people involved. The concert was broadcast live on the internet and on the radio.

## **4. Impact**

### **4.1 Direct Impacts**

#### **Impact on Local Government**

The scope of the project made it possible to consolidate community services, particularly the agents of the Ministry of Health and Solidarity who took part in a genuine social project.

Municipal services have also been strengthened to mobilise stakeholders around strong values of solidarity and openness, and to anchor project support outside of mere financial support by adopting a consulting and facilitating role.

#### **Impact on Culture and Cultural Stakeholders in the City**

The first year was supported by the City of Strasbourg, the Grand Est Regional Directorate of Cultural Affairs under the Ministry of Culture, the Orange Foundation, the SNCF Foundation, and the Alsace Passions Foundation.

By relying on a network of "cultural benchmarks" within social and medical centres, about fifteen stakeholders took part in the second year. Specific support was organised jointly with the Public Mission to ensure group cohesion through regular meetings, public transport, and cultural excursions on the fringes of the project.





### Greater Impact on the City or Territory and its Population

The project has allowed people who have rarely or never practiced opera to learn to sing this demanding art, which was often considered elitist and inaccessible. After two years, there was a notable level of dedication from former participants, as well as an openness to a broader audience.

The project created a way to entertain the entire region, thanks to the workshops and concerts organised in the city centre and in surrounding areas. The project has also helped establish a welcoming image for territory where all projects are possible, provided that the following are respected:

- A human-sized project with values and meaning
- Citizen mobilization and participation
- Support and guidance for local institutions

### 4.2 Assessment

The results demonstrate participants' satisfaction, who returned for the second year alongside good regional and national media coverage, and the surprise appearance of President MACRON during a rehearsal at the Rhine Opera. Partners and volunteers also renewed their support for the second year.

The evaluation was built on both the observation of group dynamics and exchanges with randomly sampled participants. It was based on the following indicators:

- Satisfaction of amateur singers
- Attendance of workshops and the final concert
- Media impact
- Involvement and feedback from amateur and professional partners
- Volunteer involvement

### 4.3 Assessment

Several key factors of the project were identified:

- Goodwill and proper education from the artistic and musical director

- Artistic demands which helped develop the participants' senses of confidence and value
- Agility and flexibility in operational organisation
- Commitment by partners to the project's values for strong, longer-term involvement

**THE PROJECT HAD A THREE-FOLD POSITIVE EFFECT DUE TO ITS COOPERATIVE APPROACH. FROM ITS VERY BEGINNINGS, THE PROJECT WORKED BEYOND THE SIMPLE PROCESS OF ARTS EDUCATION BY ADDRESSING THE IMPORTANCE OF COOPERATION BETWEEN CULTURAL, SOCIAL, AND EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS, AS WELL AS CITIZENS IN THE CITY OF STRASBOURG.**

#### 4.4 Ongoing Work

The project is designed to be implemented over 3 years. Following 2016/2017 and 2017/2018, a 3<sup>rd</sup> year was planned for 2018/2019. Any selected works were to be popular or known to the general public, and include singing parts for all ranges.

The scope of the project remains unchanged in that it does not seek greater numbers, but more diversity, including those who may be socially disadvantaged or persons with disabilities, as well as support for quality participants.

The 2018/2019 year will see the consolidation of the project's structure, in order to make it self-sustaining from an organisational and logistical perspectives. Strasbourg will thereafter remain a strong city for mobilising citizens.

Discussions are already underway to decide on the place for the next concert. With respect to budget, current projections are similar to those of 2017/2018, some €249,000, aside from major changes.

## 5. Further Information

The City of Strasbourg was a candidate for the third "UCLG Mexico City – Culture 21 International Award" (November 2017 - May 2018). The jury for the award drew up its final report in June of 2016, and requested that the Committee on Culture promote this project as one of the good practices to be implemented through Agenda 21 for culture, and as a special mention for the third awarding of the Prize.

This article was written by Aymée ROGE, Director of Culture, and Brigitte GADOULEAU, Head of the Public Development Mission for the City and Eurometropolis of Strasbourg, France.

Contact: [Aymee.roge@strasbourg.eu](mailto:Aymee.roge@strasbourg.eu) and [Brigitte.gadouleau@strasbourg.eu](mailto:Brigitte.gadouleau@strasbourg.eu)

Reference website: <http://www.chantez.eu/>