

Foreword

I first worked with Eugene Skeef in the late 1980s. I was directing the educational programmes of the London Sinfonietta at the time. The Opera Director Stephen Langridge said to me 'I've just worked with this brilliant musician at Oval House in Kennington. You need to get him on the Sinfonietta team'.

At the time, we were taking groups of musicians into prisons and other community settings around the country, creating new music with people, often those who found themselves at the edge of society in some way. We were also leading large-scale creative education projects in schools. Composers such as Nigel Osborne, Mark-Anthony Turnage and John Lunn were involved, as were the virtuoso players of the Sinfonietta.

The starting point of our work was European modern music, but it often took us down paths of jazz and music from around the world. Eugene provided a bridge into a freer kind of music making, but one which was no less rigorous. His brilliant musicianship dovetailed with that of the Sinfonietta musicians immediately, and the mutual respect was palpable. When Eugene was involved, the music making just lifted into the air, and he had us singing and playing rhythms and melodies that we could never have imagined. He also has an almost magical gift of teaching and encouraging others, an acute sensitivity to what's happening in a room full of people, so that one gesture or musical phrase from him can add a whole new level of joy or complexity or pathos into the music.

Eugene is also a very reflective musician and I have continued to learn from him over the years that I've known him. One very important thing that he teaches me is that art, music, dance, poetry are not separate from our everyday lives. They are at the heart of our lives, if we live well.

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