



# WHAT IF TREES COULD SING

*EDEN Engagement: London  
Root City Curriculum  
Mike Roberts*

**MAY 2022**





## ABOUT

Three-time Grammy Award winning opera superstar Joyce DiDonato has created the global tour of EDEN, her major concert hall performance about environmentalism. Her personal commitment and partnership with ITAC has launched a re-imagining of the impact of a concert experience through teaching artist-led workshops in every city. The International Teaching Artists Collaborative (ITAC) is the world-wide network of artists who work in community and educational settings, who have the skills to bring change to communities. Together ITAC and EDEN Engagement will pilot a new approach to prove that touring can be a legitimate and powerful tool for change in communities.

Cities on the tour are designated either "Root Cities" or "Seed Cities". Root Cities are multiple day events (up to five days) that engage the youth with a specific environmental issue. The teaching artist selects a specific environmental issue they care about, which has a direct relevance for local concerns, and that has a direct link to something in the EDEN performance.

Teaching Artist: Mike Roberts

Duration: Five workshops

Goals: The workshops aim to accomplish two things:

1. To creatively engage community participants in the themes and visions of EDEN with such force that it changes their understandings, behaviors, and sense of agency regarding a significant local environmental issue in ways that can be documented. Workshop activities connect with the EDEN performance to amplify the impact.
2. To document the impact of the workshop series in such a way that its effect is reliably evident to those who were not present. It is the goal of EDEN Engagement to demonstrate to the concert touring industry that producers and artists can reach for more ambitious positive community impact through touring. They can generate a larger social benefit from performances than just the good experiences of the lucky few who could afford tickets. Traditional views of "outreach" have been outgrown; EDEN Engagement pioneers a new and greater value proposition for touring.

## Overview / Common:

This document outlines how the London Root City curriculum has been expanded into a multi-workshop project involving 5 separate workshops and 5 different groups of participants. As such, it draws in the following session 'sections' already detailed in the main London Root City

## Curriculum Document:

- Warm Up Session
- Drum Circle Session
- Melodic Composition Session
- Seeds of Hope
- Plenary

Adapted and developed workshop sections are detailed in this document for the following schedule:

- Workshop 1: 'Bishop Ramsey School'; 22nd April 2022, 10am-2pm.
- Workshop 2: 'Home-Education Group'; 3rd May 2022, 9am-12:30pm.
- Workshop 3: 'Freedom from Torture' Refugee Choir; 12th May 2022, 12:15pm-1:45pm
- Workshop 4: 'Horfield Primary School' PART 1 - Year 6; 24th May 2022, 9am-2pm.
- Workshop 5: 'Horfield Primary School' PART 2 - School Choir; 25th May 2022, 9am-1pm

The key environmental challenge facing the London Root City Participants is the reduction of Emissions. Here, emissions are 25% higher than the UK average and reducing at a 6% slower rate - meaning that unless measures are implemented to address this, we will soon run out of time to act.

The following questions forms the basis of evaluation for most workshops:

- The key creative question remains the same: "What if trees could sing?..."
- Questions to help with structure and evaluation as follows:
  - Do you know what "emissions" are? Yes / No
  - What effects do emissions have on the environment?
  - Do you think that you have the power to change people's minds about climate change? Yes / No
  - 4. What can you do to help solve the emissions problem in your area?



# WORKSHOP 1

Context: Working with 3 groups of 20 students for 60 to 70 mins each group.

Aim: To produce rhythmic and lyrical ideas from each participant, summarising their personal action plan in answer to question 4 of the evaluation questions.

Introduction: Explain the EDEN Project and outline our aims for the session. Ask participants the first 3 evaluation questions. Present the creative question “what if trees could sing” as the main thematic for the session. [5]

Warm-up: Drum Circle Intro. Include the rhythmic motif for the start of “We Will Rock You” as a demonstration of how powerful musical motif can be [15]

Composition: Drum Circle, name-based rhythmic motif composition [10]

Discussion – Themes [10]:

- Exploring the idea of thematic material in songwriting and how questioning our opinions can generate lots of ideas to explore.
- Question the opinion that ‘we DON’T have the power to change someone’s mind about climate change’ (many will have answered NO to question 3). Discuss how powerful music and song can be to convey ideas
- Remind participants of the creative question.
- Discuss and ask participants to consider the fourth evaluation question within the context “what if trees could sing”
- Encourage participants to write a ‘motto’ that summarises any action they intend to take in response to question 4

Composition: Drum Circle, rhythmic motif composition generated from ‘motto lyrics’. Record. [10]

Melodic Composition: If time allows, encourage improvisation of melodies to fit participant’s rhythmic and lyric mottos. Record [10]

Plenary: Summarise key ‘take-aways’ [5]

- Explain the aim of developing the recorded material into a song from the group
- Everyone has the power to create (as demonstrated in session)
- We have more power than we think to change minds
- Action is more powerful than words
- Climate change can be reversed

# WORKSHOP 2

Context: Working with one group of home-educated families. Some children work alone; some work with an adult helper/collaborator; some (children and adults) prefer to observe, or dip 'in and out' of active participation, whilst still engaging in the activity.

Aim: To produce rhythmic, lyrical and melodic ideas from each participant, summarising their personal action plan in answer to question 4 of the evaluation questions.

Introduction: Explain the EDEN Project and outline our aims for the session. Ask participants the first 3 evaluation questions. Present the creative question "what if trees could sing" as the main thematic for the session. [5]

Warm-up: Drum Circle Intro. Include the rhythmic motif for the start of "We Will Rock You" as a demonstration of how powerful musical motif can be [20]

Composition: Drum Circle, name-based rhythmic motif composition [15]

Melodic Composition Session - using the song 'Cuckoo' and encouraging melodic improvisation [30]

BREAK [20]

Discussion - Themes [10]:

- Exploring the idea of thematic material in songwriting and how questioning our opinions can generate lots of ideas to explore.
- Question the opinion that 'we DON'T have the power to change someone's mind about climate change' (many will have answered NO to question 3). Discuss how powerful music and song can be to convey ideas
- Remind participants of the creative question.
- Discuss and ask participants to consider the fourth evaluation question within the context "what if trees could sing"
- Encourage participants to write a 'motto' that summarises any action they intend to take in response to question 4

Composition: Drum Circle, rhythmic composition generated from 'motto lyrics'. Record. [20]

Melodic Composition: Building on 'Cuckoo' improvisatory exercise, encourage improvisation of melodies to fit participants rhythmic and lyric mottos. Record [20]

Plenary: Summarise key 'take-aways' [10]

- Explain the aim of developing the recorded material into a song from the group
- Everyone has the power to create (as demonstrated in session)
- We have more power than we think to change minds
- Action is more powerful than words
- Climate change can be reversed





# WORKSHOP 3

Context: Working with the adult choir, 'Sing for Freedom', set up to support Refugee Asylum Grantees as they integrate successfully into London and UK society. As the only adult group in these set of workshops, the evaluation questions are 'implied', not asked directly, and the indirect responses gathered from participant contributions.

Aim: To produce melodic and lyrical ideas from each participant, summarising their personal action plan in answer to question 4 of the evaluation questions; OR what they imagine 'trees would sing'.

Introduction: Explain the EDEN Project and outline our aims for the session. Present the creative question "what if trees could sing" as the main thematic for the session. [5]

Warm-up: Drum Circle Intro. [20]

Composition: Drum Circle, name-based rhythmic motif composition [15]

Discussion – Themes [10]:

- Exploring the idea of thematic material in songwriting and how questioning our opinions can generate lots of ideas to explore.
- Remind participants of the creative question.
- Encourage participants to write either a 'motto' that summarises any action they intend to take in response to climate change OR an imagined phrase that a 'tree would sing'.

Melodic Composition [20]:

- Using appropriately tuned 'Boom-Whacker' pipes, encourage participants to rhythmically articulate their lyric ideas.
- Once the rhythmic groove is free-flowing, encourage participants to vocally introduce pitch to turn their rhythmic grooves into melodic grooves. Record.

Plenary: Summarise key 'take-aways' [5]

- Explain the process of taking the material forward to produce a song from the workshop o Encourage submission of additional material from Zoom attendees

*"We need to take better care of our trees and we have a voice that can help."*

# WORKSHOP 4

Context: Working with two classes of year 6 pupils (ages 10/11) for two hours each.

Aim: To produce rhythmic, lyrical and melodic ideas from each participant, summarising their personal action plan in answer to question 4 of the evaluation questions.

Introduction: Explain the EDEN Project and outline our aims for the session. Ask participants the first 3 evaluation questions. Present the creative question “what if trees could sing” as the main thematic for the session. [5]

Warm-up: Drum Circle Intro. Include the rhythmic motif for the start of “We Will Rock You” as a demonstration of how powerful musical motif can be [20]

Composition: Drum Circle, name-based rhythmic composition [15]

Melodic Composition Session – using the song ‘Cuckoo’ and encouraging melodic improvisation [20]

BREAK [20]

Discussion – Themes [10]:

- Exploring the idea of thematic material in songwriting and how questioning our opinions can generate lots of ideas to explore.
- Question the opinion that ‘we DON’T have the power to change someone’s mind about climate change’ (many will have answered NO to question 3). Discuss how powerful music and song can be to convey ideas
- Remind participants of the creative question.
- Discuss and ask participants to consider the fourth evaluation question within the context “what if trees could sing”
- Encourage participants to write a ‘motto’ that summarises any action they intend to take in response to question 4

Composition: Drum Circle, rhythmic composition generated from ‘motto lyrics’. Record. [20]

Melodic Composition: Building on ‘Cuckoo’ improvisatory exercise, encourage improvisation of melodies to fit participants rhythmic and lyric mottos. Record [20]

Plenary: Summarise key ‘take-aways’ [10]

- Explain the aim of developing the recorded material into a song for the choir to learn o Everyone has the power to create (as demonstrated in session)
- We have more power that we think to change minds
- Action is more powerful that words
- Climate change can be reversed

*Post workshop, material will be ‘curated’ into a new song ready for learning in PART 2*



# WORKSHOP 5

Context: Working with the School Choir to learn, refine and record the song created from PART 1 of the Horfield workshops. There will be some cross-over between choir members and year 6 pupils – with new participants representing the majority.

Aim: To learn new song; to refine new song; to record new song.

Introduction: After brief intro (and reminder for those who were present yesterday, diving participants into smaller groups lead by a year 6 pupil. Ask the year 6 pupils to explain the previous day's workshop [15]

Warm-up: Drum Circle [25]

Start to teach the **New Song** [30]

BREAK [20]

Continue teaching **New Song** [60]

Record **New Song**, phrase by phrase [30]

LUNCH [60]

Warm-up: Drum Circle [20]

Composition: encourage and enable participants to produce new verse lyrics and material for improvisatory sections. [20]

BREAK [20]

Rehearse additions to **New Song** [30]

Record additions to **New Song** [20]

Plenary: Summarise key 'take-aways' [10]

- Explain the aim of incorporating **New Song** into wider resources
- Everyone has the power to create (as demonstrated in session)
- We have more power than we think to change minds
- Action is more powerful than words
- Climate change can be reversed

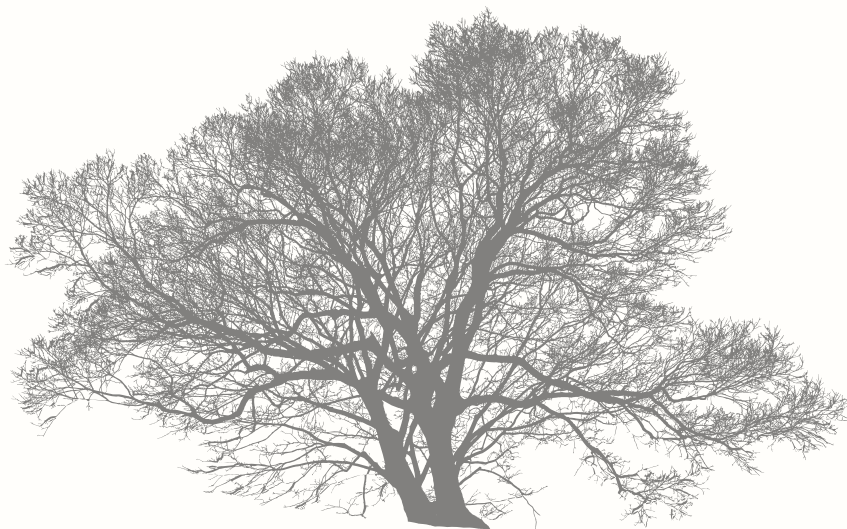
## Post Workshop Songs

As with the initial pilot workshop – which resulted in the song, ‘Seeds of Hope’ – my hope is to produce some new songs from the material of each workshop. Given the number of participants and the amount of material produced, my expectation is that there will be at least seven new songs produced – possibly even as many as 10 or 11.

These songs will be intended as a resource for others to use – ideally becoming adopted as part of the official EDEN Engagement offering if deemed appropriate by the team. They will certainly be distributed across the participating organisations of the London Root City workshops so that each can benefit from the wider resource. Benjamin Britten’s “Friday Afternoons” suite of 12 songs is a useful model in terms of there being multiple levels of difficulty and not being afraid to tackle difficult subjects such as mental-health and

My personal hope is that these songs (together with ‘Seeds of Hope’) could represent a ‘pilot’ that forms the start of a digital EDEN Songbook ‘documenting’ all the EDEN Engagement Workshops across the world with a resulting song or two. These may already have been produced from the workshops and only need ‘editing’ or they could be curated/written from whatever workshop outcomes were produced (poems, images, lyrics, improvisations, recordings etc.).

My plan is to produce a detailed proposal for the EDEN Engagement Team to consider once I’ve completed the songs from the London Root City Workshops.









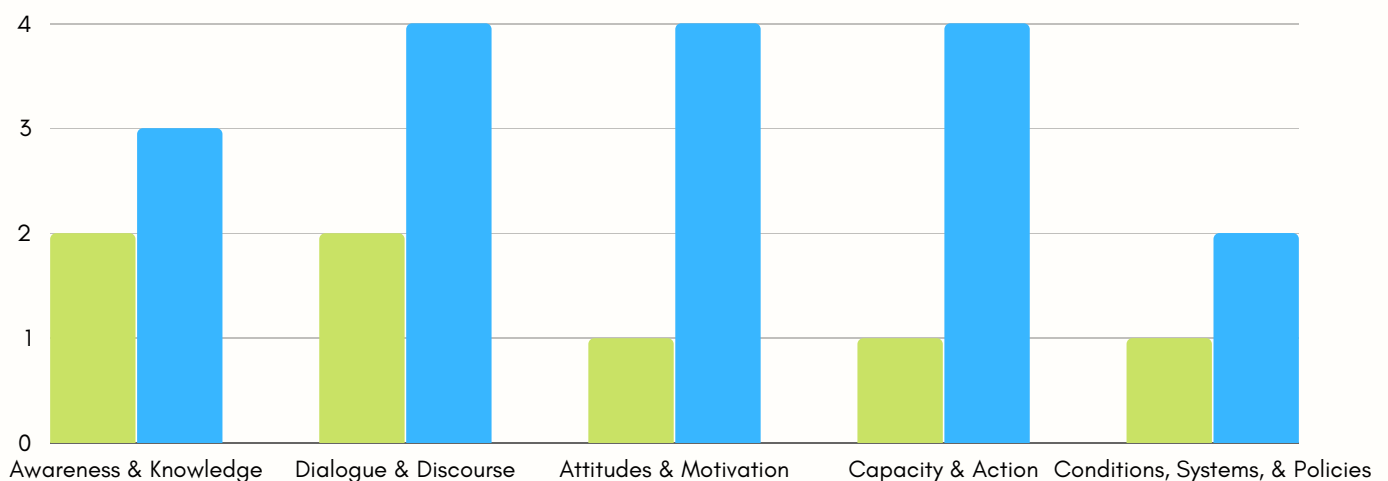
# IMPACT & EVALUATION



The goal of this effort is to learn about the impact that the activities have on participants. It is not gathered to impress funders, but to advance our own effectiveness in generating objective information about the power of our work. We are especially curious to learn if there is any evidence that they have the impulse to take action and/or feel they can make a difference—this is the high goal of the arts-for-climate field, and we believe teaching artists have a particularly strong contribution to the field. Teaching artists were encouraged to use the Continuum of Impact Guide as a model when thinking about impact and assessment in their workshops. We asked: Did participants demonstrate greater personal connection to this environmental issue and deepen their understanding of it? Did participants demonstrate a personal motivation to do something about this issue and show a sense that they could make a difference if they did? Did they actually take some action?

The following graph results come from the teaching artist's observations of the students before and after the workshop series. They were asked to give their sense of the impact they saw in their students on a scale of 1 (No Knowledge) to 4 (Extremely Knowledgeable).

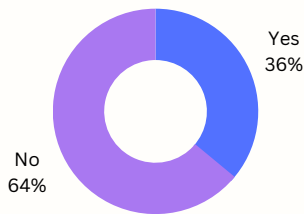
Before the Workshop  
After the Workshop



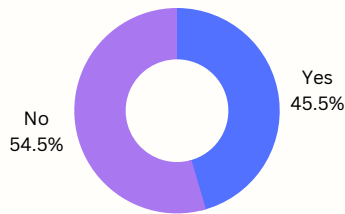
# London Pre-Surveys

## Do you know what 'emissions' are?

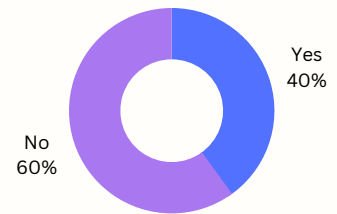
*Horfield Primary School  
Ages 10-11*



*Bishop Ramsey School  
Ages 11-13*



*Home Ed Families  
Ages 7-12*



## What effect do 'emissions' have on our environment?

*"I think it just comes out of a tube"*

*"Makes the air dirty"*

*"They are going into the ground and floating into the air"*

*"They go up into the air which is bad for the birds. They cause pollution"*

*"Emissions from cars can be a contributing factor to climate change"*

*"They are killing the planet"*

*"They create a thicker atmosphere so heat stays trapped in the earth, creating weird weather"*

*"They are things which come from burning fossil fuels (e.g. Carbon emissions). They can cause climate change"*

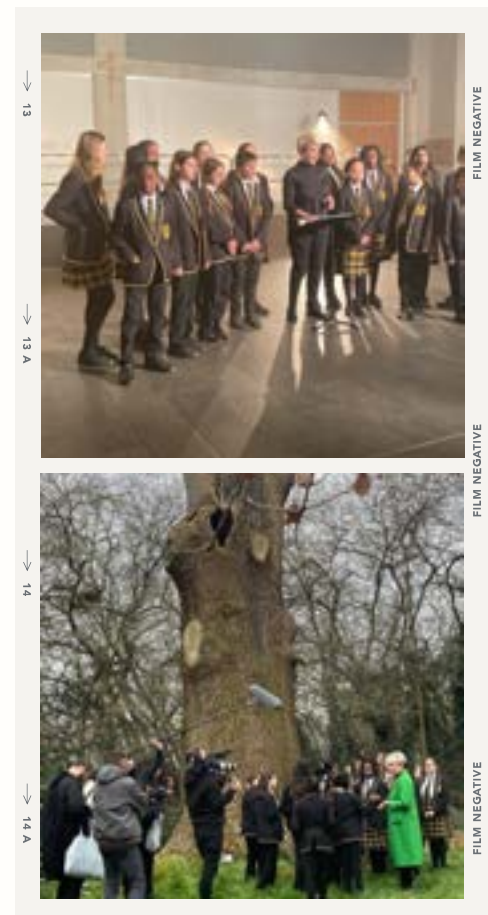
*"They are leaving a carbon footprint"*

*"They are releasing bad gases"*

*"Hurts wildlife and plants"*

*"Poisons our countryside"*

*"Emissions get trapped in the atmosphere and the climate changes, like the weather."*

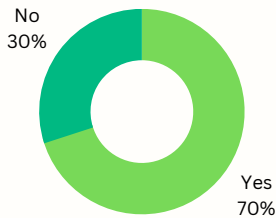


# London Post-Surveys

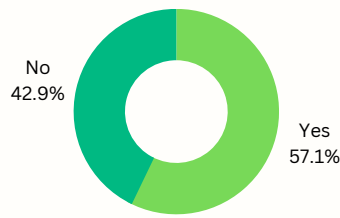
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**Do you have the power to change people's minds about climate change?**

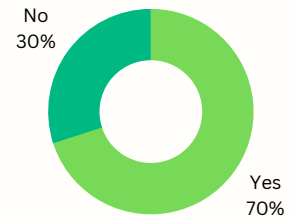
*Horfield Primary School  
Ages 10-11*



*Bishop Ramsey School  
Ages 11-13*



*Home Ed Families  
Ages 7-12*



*"Writing this song and singing it has definitely showed me to have hope. It's not the end and there is more we can do for this planet to save it. Watching Joyce perform has given me a giant boost of confidence and motivation to use my voice to make a difference."*

*—Sophia, Bishop Ramsey School*

**What can you do to help solve the emissions problem in your area?**  
***The children were encouraged to 'frame' their response as a potential 'motto'***

*"Little things can have a big effect. Use your feet, don't drive"*

*"If we all take part, we can change our world. Electric cars are more healthy for our world."*

*"Use more things that use electricity to power. Fumes are bad"*

*"Let other people know about climate change so they can help tooo"*

*"Travel by bus, not car. "Walk to school, don't be a fool!"*

*"Campaign, protest, support climate charities. Stopping drive will make our community thrive"*

*"Every day you do something different it will eventually change. Use your legs."*

*"Pick up rubbish and put it in the bin."*

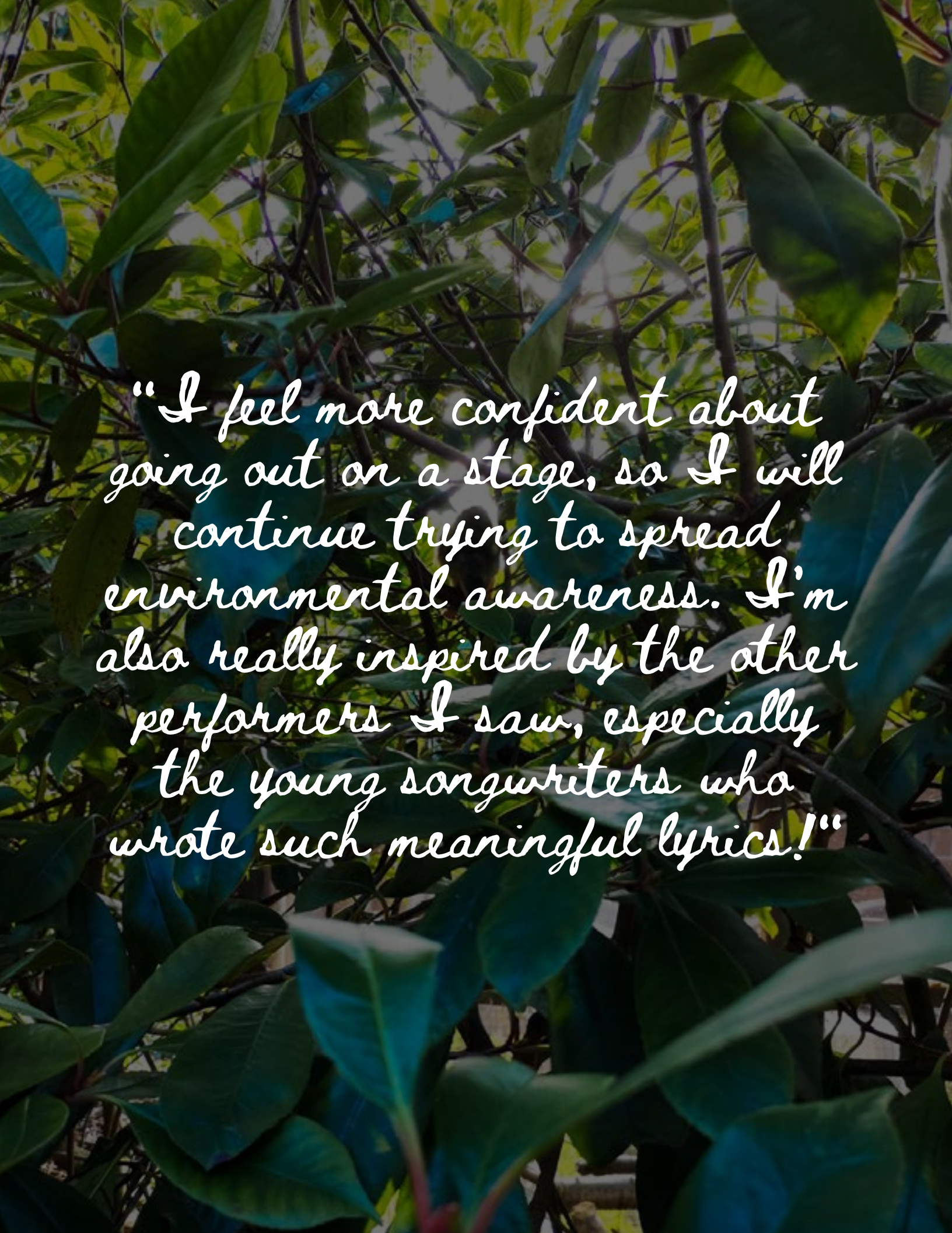
*"Talk to people about the problem and solutions"*

*"We can make the world a better places - save the world with me!"*

*"Use less fuel (walk more). Protest against railways and housing areas. Reduce food waster.*

*Don't litter. Don't leave lights on"*





"I feel more confident about going out on a stage, so I will continue trying to spread environmental awareness. I'm also really inspired by the other performers I saw, especially the young songwriters who wrote such meaningful lyrics!"

# REFLECTIONS FROM THE TEACHING ARTIST

**In what ways did you observe change in your participants understanding and engagement of the environmental issue you chose?**

*"The evaluation questions supplied were really effective in structuring the participant journey and in allowing a measurable assessments of understanding and engagement. Comparing awareness of what 'emissions' are at the start of the sessions, with the creative outputs produced in response to the "what can you do..." question, revealed a genuine growth of understanding through the workshops. The visible realisation, displayed by the majority, that they really do have some 'power' to change people's minds was also evident in the content of their creative outputs. My approach to the workshops was to funnel understanding and commitment to change through creation (i.e. the creation of phrases, mottos, lyrics and melody) and it is the content of these creative gems/germs that allowed us to observe change in participant understanding."*

**What challenges did you face in creating and facilitating your workshop?**

*"The numbers involved in some of the workshops presented a challenge in allowing space for each participant to genuinely respond on a personal creative level to the challenge of the workshop. There was the possibility that, working in groups, some participants would simply assimilate the ideas of more dominant participants – not necessarily a bad thing if it's effective in change, but personal ownership of creative responses can translate more seamlessly into ownership of the solutions expressed. To mitigate this, several opportunities were given for each participant to improvise their own responses whilst being subtly (yet knowingly) recorded. Not all participants chose to take this opportunity, but as a rough estimate this approach released around 80% of participants to engage in a personally expressive way."*

**Did your EDEN experience expand your work or skills as a teaching artist in any specific ways?**

*"Yes: 1) It expanded my technique for encouraging individual creative expression 2) it developed my repertoire of musical games to disperse creative inhibition 3) It focussed my awareness further on the power inherent in simple creativity to inspire action – initiating an 'internal evaluation' of how much more socially engaged the direction of my workshops can be directed."*





Each workshop had it's own highlight:

1) Bishop Ramsey: that so many children wrote complete 2 structure songs of their own in response to being asked to simply write a 'phrase'.

2) Home-Ed Group: that those on the edge of the circle became engaged from afar and, by the end of the session, were fully engaged in the inner circle of activity.

3) Migrant Choir: The range of alternative time structures in the rhythmic improvisation and the extreme A/B response expressed in their usual rehearsal evaluation (i.e. feeling OK to ecstatically happy).

4 & 5) That across the two workshops and completely new song emerged that expressed new ideas and incorporated the shared views of 90% of the participants.



## No Matter What!

An Evaluation of our song writing project May - July 2022

Horfield CEVC Primary School – Bristol, UK



*"We wrote a song and made a difference" Child in Year 6*

Music has that ability to touch everyone, to be fully inclusive and to encourage children to reach beyond their horizons and experience something both technically challenging and emotionally moving. This was certainly the case for the children in Year 6 in the summer of 2022. An opportunity to work with a composer is certainly never one to let go – but this was something very special. As a school we had just embarked on a whole school Science project funded by the Royal Society that was engaging the whole school in investigations as to how we could power our new Reading Cabin in our school grounds with renewable energy. Across the school children were learning about the challenges of climate change and about how they as individuals could make a positive change – every little action adds up to a significant change. When we were invited to join the Eden project, Year 6 had already visited the Explorer Dome and learnt not only about challenges facing the world but the journey that has begun to reverse environmental disaster – the journey that they as young people can play a crucial role.

Composer Mike Roberts joined us and worked with the whole class to collect musical soundbites which quickly evolved into the song 'No Matter what, we can make a difference.' Using Djembes and a sound recorder he very soon had all 60 students seeing themselves as composers themselves – confident to sing suggested lines and



play with words to begin to form lyrics. The buy in from the students was immense. Everyone had a valid and valuable part to play, and the students felt listened to – their creativity was captured in snapshots and song.

I was astonished by the number of students who requested that they sang their individual ideas to Mike, and were willing to offer their thoughts and opinions. It was powerful how he quickly established a positive atmosphere - promoting and valuing everyone's opinion. In a curriculum where it is easy to find that creativity a victim of formal learning I was overwhelmed by the power of idea and the freedom of thought that the children were willing to share.

*"When you do a science experiment you can prove something but it's hard to make everyone hear you - when you sing a song with a message you can spread your word so far and so quickly, that is what we want to do." Year 6 child*

The workshops were particularly effective because the children were part of the whole process – from the blank sheet to the recorded song and they involved everyone – not just a chosen few. In the initial workshops, Mike opened doors for ideas and children responded and made music – through percussion and rhythm with a powerful focus on call and response, conversation and communication providing a perfect platform for creativity.

The immediacy for the children was also amazing. Mike worked with us on one day collecting snippets and snapshots of group and individual ideas, as well as getting a feeling for the class. This, for the children, was important and they felt empowered. All these musical fragments left with Mike in the evening and returned the next day – as a draft of a song.



The process continued to involve all children. Every child joined in the recording and even this was full of learning – we recorded bar by bar, listening and pitching - trying to echo each line with as much accuracy as possible. Children developed their musical technical ability to control and improve pitch, rhythm, dynamic and tempo change and understood how the song was structured in the way it was. The repetition and focus on these techniques needed helped the classes to learn 'how' they were trying to get the best possible recording. Meanwhile edits as we went along also helped them to see that a song is always evolving – a living thing that they were creating.



Two of the benefits for me, as a teacher and onlooker, were the shared and individual sense of pride that the children showed in their work. I am aware that not every child (prior to the project) perceived themselves to be a singer, but the ownership of the song gave them credibility, belief and confidence to join in with their peers. I loved that there was a challenge of singing in two parts and that they could so closely follow the journey from



scribbled ideas to stage performance.

The children requested that we filmed the finished song on location at school and also in our local woods – again including every child. There was a clear sense of rehearsal discipline and a desire from the children to polish and perfect the song – adding actions, movement and a sense of sparkle!

As a school leader, having the opportunity to be part of a project

like this is invaluable. It makes learning meaning and memorable. It champions the Arts and values music and performance as a subject on the same level as any other curricular subject. Working with musicians and artists brings a reality to creativity and allows every child to perceive themselves as a musician – a singer – a composer – a performer. It challenges children to be the best they can be and gives them power to share a message through social media, the local school community and appreciate that "No matter what, they can make a difference"

Kirsten Cunningham Assistant Head Teacher September 2022





# ABOUT THE TEACHING ARTIST



## ***MIKE ROBERTS***

Mike Roberts is an award-winning, composer, sound artist and professor with specialisms in electronic, choral and community music. His artistic practice involves sound, music and multidisciplinary art forms, working in collaboration with local communities, to inspire wonder, creative responses, learning and engagement. He is also Founder and Head of the Electronic & Produced Music Department at the internationally renowned Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London.

Whilst Mike's credits as a composer include commissions for numerous high-profile organisations such as The Jim Henson Organisation, BBC, Barbican and Wigmore Hall, he considers his most important work to be in social engagement – where he specialises in collaborating with diverse groups, enabling them to produce unique songs that focus on the core themes of their communities. Much of this work is with community choirs where he has curated the composition of hundreds of unique musical themes and songs that emerge from the environment he creates to release and enable participant creativity. Most recently, Mike was awarded two separate commissions with the UK National Trust to attract new audiences to the themes of multiple sites through sonic and musical engagement.

Mike lives in South Cambridgeshire with his wife, Sarah, two young children and a dog.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Bishop Ramsey

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Concert Venue  
Barbican

