



NOYO performing at Bristol Beacon; Barry with the Clarion; NOYO's Clarion section with Alessandro (far right)



A NEW INSTRUMENT

Among star soloists and local heroes, the RPS Awards recognise organisations changing lives through music. **Open Up Music** won the 2017 RPS Impact Award with the South-West Open Youth Orchestra – then the UK's only disabled-led youth orchestra. RPS General Manager Harriet Wybor spoke with Barry Farrimond-Chuong, Chief Executive of Open Up Music, and musician Alessandro Vazzana about the Clarion: an innovative, electronic, accessible instrument that can be played expressively with any part of the body, including head and eye movement.

Now developed into the National Open Youth Orchestra (NOYO), the ensemble has just finished a tour of London's Milton Court, Bristol Beacon, Lighthouse Poole and Birmingham Town Hall, including music from Vivaldi to Anna Meredith. The Open Up Music team also works with partners across the country to run Open Orchestras in 60 special schools. Developing the Clarion has been truly collaborative, involving expertise and insights from hundreds of disabled musicians, teachers and orchestra

leaders, Barry says. 'Through co-design with a broad community, we spent a long time understanding what musicians wanted, and how they could access it in a way that was most musical and beneficial to them.'

The Clarion comes as an app with a range of different instrument sounds. Barry says 'A unique feature is that players can change how it's laid out on screen. You can remove notes you don't need, which is important because having fewer notes means you can have more accuracy when you are playing with your eyes or your head.' Each layout is called a 'pattern', which is a musical score represented by shapes. Starting from one note, players can build up to an elaborate arrangement of dozens of patterns, enabling them to move between different notes and chords. 'Each musical shape is expressive and responds to how the player interacts with it. If you enter a shape quickly it will sound differently from entering it slowly, and you can overlay shapes to create chords. It's

different to a conventional instrument because there is flexibility to change the layout, but it's still an instrument designed to be played live. You can make mistakes and play wrong notes! Playing an intricate musical instrument like a keyboard with your eyes is unfeasible, so we've made something with a reasonable adjustment that musicians still have to work really hard at to become accomplished.'

Like any digital instrument, the Clarion has the ability to produce familiar sounds of the orchestra, but there's potential to develop a unique sound, to appeal to composers and orchestras, and create employment opportunities for disabled musicians. Alessandro Vazzana is a leading Clarion player who, on tour with NOYO, gave the world premiere of *Soaring through Sparks*, a concerto written for the Clarion by composer Michael Betteridge. Alessandro says: 'It's fun to play and shows off what the Clarion can do. I enjoy the fast tempo – in the first part the notes are sparky, while the second part is slow and free like a bird soaring over the orchestra. It has allowed me to show my musical ability, and I want

others to have that opportunity too.' Alessandro has played a key role in demonstrating the instrument and its possibilities to composers like Michael who are creating new repertoire for the instrument. The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) has been working closely with Open Up Music as the Clarion becomes the first electronic musical instrument to be assessed by ABRSM through its Open Music Assessment. Clarion players have been taking part in pilot exam visits over the last year, and over the next 12 months the instrument will become more widely available in the UK.

Looking ahead, Alessandro says 'Clarion has given me opportunities I would never have had to meet and play with so many different people in the music world. I took part in Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra's *Symphony from Scratch* and a concert with the Winchester A Capella choir where I played a solo. When I leave NOYO this summer, I will be joining the Alton Concert Orchestra which is exciting. I would love to play at the Royal Albert Hall or at one of my favourite events: the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo.'