



grime just how an orchestra works and merging the two

# Orchestrating a grime musical collaboration

to show young people who are really into

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IT just goes to show when you want to encourage young people to get into music, a life of grime really does pay off.

That's what Essex Music Services have discovered with their most recent project.

Charly Richardson is the lead officer for Essex Music Services, who are the lead partner in Essex Music Education Hub, a group of organisations which offer a range of musical services, projects and opportunities throughout Essex schools and within the community.

He says: "One of our many aims is to give young people the opportunity to perform, whether that's singing, playing in a band or ensemble, or rapping.

"Over the last few years the service has moved away from that traditional idea of being just concerned with classical instrumentation and while we still

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do that, we've also started to look at other ways of engaging young people in music. We've broadened our scope to include rock and pop as well as supporting new technologies and of course rap, hip hop and grime."

And it's the latter which appears to have really caught the imagination of the youth of today.

Following a successful schools tour last year, Charly is now involved in bringing the country's very first Grime Opera to Colchester as part of the town's Big Sunday event and Essex Music Services' very own Sounds of Essex festival.

He says: "I grew up in south London when grime was just coming out in the early noughties and what I liked about it was its uniquely British style.

"A mix of jungle, garage, dance



■ Grime artist - Stormzy and, inset, the Grime Opera team

hall and ragga but much more than that. "In the last couple of years it's really taken off with acts like Skepta and Stormzy taking it international."

With its rapid, syncopated

breakbeats, and lyrics often concerning gritty depictions of urban life, Essex Music Services have also discovered it's the perfect genre to get new young people into music.

"We've been working with Max Wheeler," Charly adds. "He was the producer in Brighton-based electro-pop duo, Anushka and now is one half of VIP Charanga, an on-line resource for young people who can log into tutorials on anything from dub step to using sequencing software.

"Along with grime rapper Eyez, who is from Derby, they went into schools all over the county showcasing original material and running interactive workshops covering all sorts of things from lyric writing to music production."

Part of Essex County Council, and funded by the Department for Education through Arts Council England, Essex Music Services are now building on the success of that project with the world's first Grime Opera.

"We've done 20 schools so far," he adds, "and only last week we were in Harwich and Dovercourt but I wanted to create something out of all of this and so one day I was chatting with Max and asked whether we could do something like a Grime Opera. A collaboration with our Essex Youth Orchestra that was a piece all on its own, created from scratch.

"What I meant by that was a half hour piece of music that

was authentically grime in its essence, not watered down, but told a story, like an opera, using the orchestra and a choir to do it."

So after 'throwing the idea back and forth for a while', Essex Music Services commissioned Max to compose a piece with Eyez and Max writing the lyrics between them.



■ Working with Essex Music Services - Max Wheeler from electro pop duo Anushka

"It grew from there really," Charly explains. "Once Robin Browning (Essex Youth Orchestra's conductor) got involved, he absolutely loved the idea, especially the chance of showing young people who are really into grime just how an orchestra works and merging those two things together. It's been an incredibly exciting



■ Collaboration - the Essex Youth Orchestra were involved in composing the Grime Opera to be performed at the Sounds of Essex Festival on July 2

project to be involved with."

Now all Charly and his team needed was a suitably 'grimey' place to stage it and they got lucky when they started discussing the idea with Big Sunday organiser, Dorian Kelly. "On the Saturday," Charly says, "we're hosting our own Sounds of Essex Festival in Castle Park, which will be celebrating 60 years since the Essex Youth Orchestra was formed.

"As a part of the day we have lots of things going on including a Stomp world record attempt to get the most body percussionists playing together and a musical

medley of tunes by some of Essex's greatest acts and bands put together by Phil Toms, who is head of digital media, music and performing arts degrees at Colchester Institute, but started off playing in our orchestra. "But I really wanted the Grime Opera to have its own site specific place, where we could make it a visual spectacle as well as an aural one.

"That's when we discovered the old bus depot in Queen Street and immediately we knew it was the perfect place to hold it.

It's creating quite a buzz with people from all over the county and further afield wanting to come and see it

"Already it's creating quite a buzz with people from all over the county and further afield wanting to come and see it. Who knows what might become of it but just the other day the head of Sunderland music hub contacted us saying he's having trouble getting young people to engage with his orchestra and he was thinking our grime project might be just the think to do it."

The Sounds of Essex festival takes place in Colchester's Castle Park on July 1 from 10am to 7pm with free admission. For more information and a full timetable of events go on-line at [www.essexmusicshub.org.uk/site/schools/sounds-of-essex/](http://www.essexmusicshub.org.uk/site/schools/sounds-of-essex/)

Big Sunday takes place the next day, July 2, in and around the St Botolph's area with Grown: A Grime Opera running at 2.30pm and 4pm in the Old Bus Station Depot on Queen Street.

Orchestrated by Peter Riley, who has worked with the likes of Goldie and Squarepusher, as well as rappers and electronic artists from all over Essex, the piece will consist of a youth gospel choir led by Robin Quinn and musicians from the Essex Youth Orchestra conducted by Robin Browning. Entry is also free.

■ Grime opera lyricist - Eyez

