

Maria Bota OBE

I collaborate with artists, communities and organisations to create powerful experiences that transform people and places.

30+ years' experience in the arts, in chief executive, creative director and marketing roles. Experienced within development programmes, major events, international arts companies, festivals and venues in subsidised and commercial environments. Convened conversations, and commissioned, programmed and presented work indoors, outdoors, hybrid and online, in contemporary and heritage settings, involving many communities and contrasting spaces.

SELF-EMPLOYMENT - Consultant – Clients in the past nine years:

- **Humanities Cultural Programme at Oxford Universities** – Curator, environmental season Everything is Connected 2023
- **University of Manchester** – Creative support on the Bicentenary Celebrations for 2024
- **Creative Lives/Kinetika** – Setup producer, and seminar and residency curator for Beach of Dreams 2025
- **Greater Manchester Combined Authority** – Mapping and workshops for the Ageing in Place Pathfinder teams in eight Greater Manchester boroughs.
- **Light Up The North** (Strategic Lead 2022) – Growing the network, developing the strategy and helping to secure two-year funding.
- **Wakefield District Council** (Year of Culture 2024 cultural programme scoping) – I created a programme framework to support resource allocation: liaised with cultural, creative, voluntary, community, leisure, sporting and business sectors, professional networks and wider Council services; convened the first intersectional community gatherings to enable conversations about ideas for the Year of Culture; and produced initial plans including themes, a commissioning framework, signature events, strands of programme and engagement activities, headline outcomes, timelines, budgets, and recommendations on fundraising and on marketing.
- **Durham County Council** (creative programming for City of Culture 2025 bid) - Building on ideas gathered from across the County in preceding months, I contributed programmes for opening and closing celebrations, significant railway anniversaries, and a creative climate action strand called *Earth Revolution*, inspired by the Durham Miners' Motto 'The past we inherit, the future we build'. I developed the D2025 commissioning framework in collaboration with three fellow producers.
- **Oxford Road Corridor** (Artistic Director, new Corridor of Light, October 2021) – I led a three-night celebration of Oxford Road' innovation district through music, light and ideas, in collaboration with the Oxford Road Corridor's Cultural Partnership.
- **Robert F Kennedy Human Rights UK** (Director, Artistic Programme, new Ripples of Hope Festival, September 2021) - Celebrating the power of people to make human rights a reality for all, and working under the inspiring leadership of Jude Kelly, I drew together the voices of activists, performers, poets, community organisers and artists, for a hybrid event at HOME, and community feasting across Greater Manchester.
- **Waddesdon Manor** (Creative Consultant for new Feast festival, 2015-2020)
- **NewcastleGateshead Initiative** (bid consultant for The Great Exhibition of the North) - I supported the creative partners on the visioning and bid-writing for the cities' successful pitch to host the Great Exhibition of the North. Drawing on and extending the content of previous workshops, I developed the vision and programme framework statements, and a call out approach which could engage the wider North.
- **Morecambe Bay Partnership** (Artistic Adviser for public art commissions)
- **The Space** (Associate Producer)

- **Milton Keynes International Festival** (Creative Producer 2014-2016) – The festival was seeking events which would disrupt and occupy the town centre, draw people together, increase participation, enable audiences to explore hidden corners and capitalise upon the history of Bletchley and the contemporary development of the ‘smart city’. I initiated and co-delivered projects including Station House Opera’s *Dominoes*, Rimini Protokoll’s *Remote Milton Keynes*, Wes Goatley and Georgina Voss’ *Ground Resistance*, Richard DeDomenici’s *Superman IV Redux*, Artonik’s *The Colour of Time*, and Les Commandos Percu/Deabru Beltzak’s *Danbor Talka*, incorporating CPD for local practitioners.
- **Sage Gateshead** (digital strategy)
- **Birmingham Arts Partnership** (Weekender Festival visioning)
- **Glowlife** and **Ironbridge Museum** (artistic mentoring)

Current and previous employment and development summary:

- Director of Cultural Transformation (2023-current – part-time) **Trafford Council**
- Creative Producer (2017-2018) **Great Exhibition of the North**
- Festival Director (Aug-Dec 2013) **Yorkshire Festival**
- Festival Director (2008-2013) **Ageas Salisbury International Arts Festival**
- Transition Consultant for **The Society for the Promotion of New Music** 2007-2008
- Feasibility study for **Newcastle Gateshead Initiative’s** Children’s Festival (Juice) 2007
- Project start up (Jan-Aug 2007) **Kings Place Music Foundation**
- Fellow (2005-2006) **Clore Leadership Programme**
- Marketing Director/Deputy Chief Executive (1999-2005) **The Bridgewater Hall**
- General Manager (maternity cover, 1999) **Salisbury Arts Festival**
- General Manager (1997-1999) **Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival**
- Head of Marketing, entered as Marketing Assistant (1991-1997) **London Symphony Orchestra**

EMPLOYMENT DETAILS

Creative Producer, Great Exhibition of the North 2017-2018

The 80-day exhibition took place across NewcastleGateshead together with an Inspired By programme across the North. The role led creative content development over an intensive 12-month period between appointment and programme announcement, working with partners at Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums, Sage Gateshead and BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art. The role oversaw programme delivery across the exhibition.

Achievements

- Co-ordinated the creation of a programme from every county in the North of England with over 10,000 contributors including artists, scientists and innovators.
- Directed the opening event featuring Lemn Sissay, Maximo Park, Kate Rusby, Royal Northern Sinfonia and Darkstar, and the UK’s first illuminated drone swarm performance from NEWSUBSTANCE streamed to an audience of tens of thousands through a partnership I negotiated with BBC Live. Curated and produced with our team, major commissions in the public realm and three walking trail programmes celebrating Northern Art, Design and Innovation at 30 locations across the city.
- Contributed to fundraising from arms-length bodies and major sponsors, including the securing of creative content from partners LNER and Cisco.
- Managed the team that welcomed 21,000 schoolchildren to the Exhibition.

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- Created a talent development programme called N18 with BBC R&D to enable emerging Northern artists to develop their practice using digital technology.
- We operated an 80-day Event Control to ensure a consistent, strong offer to visitors.

Vision and programme curation for the Yorkshire Festival, Aug-Dec 2013

The 100-day festival took place across Yorkshire. Commissions included all art forms with investment across a range of £300,000-£10,000 and an artistic budget of £1.1 million.

Achievements

- Developed an ambitious vision, inspired, initiated and shaped proposals, selected from c400 submissions, and nurtured buy in from local authorities across Yorkshire.
- Confirmed 26 commissions, including Thomas Houseago sculptures, NVA/Phoenix Dance's *Ghost Peloton*, Sheffield DocFest's film *Velorama*, 509 Arts' *Bike Story*, Hope and Social's *Tour of Infinite Possibility*, Pennine Prospect's *Fields of Vision*, and further community programmes and linked resources for schools.
- The programme unlocked match funds of c£525,000 from local authorities and c£500,000 match/in kind from other sources, taking the overall value to c£2.25 million.
- We commissioned the Festival brand identity and secured a balanced budget.
- Effective handover of projects to the Executive Producer who led project delivery.

Festival Director (CEO and Artistic Director), Ageas Salisbury International Arts Festival 2008-2013

An annual festival in an historic, rural setting, across 16 days, featuring 150 events, turning over £1.3 million by 2013. The company commissioned artists, presented international, national and local work, and ran a thriving participation programme.

Achievements

- We re-visioned and re-imagined the Festival, with a focus on the transformation of people and places through inspirational work outdoors and extensive participation work.
- I directed and programmed five multi-arts festivals with an international focus (India, Russia, China, Brazil, Catalonia), each performing better than budget. We increased audiences by over 100% and grew turnover by 50%.
- Introduced a learning and participation function, raising major funds from Natural England, the Paul Hamlyn Foundation others to sustain work for and with children and young people, particularly young carers and excluded young people.
- Commissioned and produced world premieres, including Jonathan Dove's opera *The Walk from the Garden* in Salisbury Cathedral, Kuljit Bhamra's *Dusk at Stonehenge*, Vikram Seth/Alec Roth song cycles, new exhibitions of Chinese calligraphy and Brazilian street art, poetry from Carol Ann Duffy and outdoor arts.
- Developed a programme of outdoor work including Carabosse's *Fire Garden* at Stonehenge, and secured membership of the Without Walls consortium.
- International visiting companies included Nederlands Dans Theater, Beijing Modern Dance Company, Abhinava Dance Company (India), Jordi Savall (Spain), the Russian Patriarchate Choir, and Mikhail Rudy.
- Brought sculpture, installations and performances into Salisbury Cathedral that resonated with the place: Stan's Cafe's *Of all the People in all the World*; IOU's *Long Division*; Ana Maria Pacheco's *The Longest Journey*, Circa's *How Like An Angel*.
- We secured a new principal sponsor, Ageas, media partner, The Telegraph Media Group, and increased funds from trusts, foundations and individuals by over 300%.

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- Worked with arts partners to ensure sustained local authority support through transition to a unitary council. Retained ACE grants, and secured Catalyst funds (£120,000).
- We launched a legacy campaign and a 'Festival at Fifty' scheme to unlock long-term philanthropic giving towards three strands of the Festival's work over the next decade: 'Art to Live On', 'Transforming People and Places', and 'Global Connections'.

Project start up for Kings Place Music Foundation Jan-Aug 2007

The role reported to the Chair and the Trustees. I articulated an artistic mission, opening up local, national and international partnerships; created a business and operational strategy including financial, scenario, project and recruitment plans; drew together the music, sculpture and media partners onsite in a collaborative approach to outreach; developed links with local communities; and instigated market and pricing research.

Clore Leadership Fellow 2005-2006

My secondments focused on creative production and programming: I worked with Artangel on the C4 film and live event in Margate, *Exodus*. I was Associate Producer with Artichoke on Royal de Luxe's *The Sultan's Elephant*. I supported the culture¹⁰ team on the cultural programme for the World Arts Summit in NewcastleGateshead.

Marketing Director/Deputy Chief Executive, The Bridgewater Hall 1999-2005

We diversified the programme from classical music to embrace rock and pop, world and jazz. The role was across the operation of the international concert and conference venue, operated by Hallogen Limited, with a turnover of £7 million, and 70 full time and 110 part time employees. Line managed Marketing, Box Office and IT, achieving 365,000 attendances a year. Led the programming team from 2004. Devised 'Manchester Welcomes' campaigns to leverage sponsorship and profile for international artists. Launched a collaborative marketing approach with orchestras which lifted retention of new attenders by 17%, and secured Council investment for a new ticketing system, to enable us to capitalise upon online opportunities.

General Manager, Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival 1997-1999

I managed two festivals featuring many world premieres, increased box office income by 40% and attendances by 19%, and we secured £140,000 of Arts for Every One funds to commission and develop audiences. The role reported to the Artistic Director and Board.

Head of Marketing (entered as Marketing Assistant, promoted four times) London Symphony Orchestra 1991-1997

Reporting to the Managing Director, Clive Gillinson. Responsible for selling 85 concerts a year, an average attendance of 86% and income of £1.5 million. Introduced Discovery Days, enabling audiences to explore the music, meet the players and hear their stories.

EDUCATION AND QUALIFICATIONS National Arts Fundraising School, Carbon Literacy, Prince2 Practitioner and Foundation; Participatory Strategic Planning and Group Facilitation Methods, Foundation in Dynamics of Leadership Coaching, Chartered Institute of Marketing Diploma; BMus (Hons) 2:1.

BOARD MEMBERSHIP The Sunday Boys (2022-2024); HOME (2015-2019); Without Walls (2012-2013); Quest Ltd (2011-2013); HCMF (2005-2007); Arts About Manchester (2003-2005).

Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. Awarded an OBE in 2019 for Services to the Arts and the Institute Ramon Llull prize in 2013 for the promotion of Catalan culture.