

Mr Chancellor,

Across the centuries, many writers have mused on the importance of music to the human soul.

It has been variously described as “the food of love”, and “the greatest good that mortals know”. It can charm, soothe, invigorate and inspire. In the hands of a musician, even the most everyday items – pots, pans, brushes and spoons are transformed into amazingly effective instruments. Take a walk down nearby Northumberland Street and you’ll see exactly what I mean.

In preparing my citation for Anthony Sargent, a man who clearly has music in his heart and soul; I fleetingly wondered whether I should sing my citation. But alas, not even the glorious acoustics of Sage Gateshead, where Anthony was until recently Director, could make my voice a fitting instrument for song. Thus my music, such as it is, must come from the natural rhythms of the spoken word. Whilst this may lack the wondrous range and power of song, in my case, I can assure you it will be so much gentler on your ears.

In the preface to his penultimate performance programme for the Sage, Anthony urges the audience to “*seek out unfamiliar things that intrigue you or excite your curiosity.*” Here we have a man who practices what he preaches. Following studies at Oxford, where he read Politics, Philosophy and Economics whilst holding successive choral scholarships at Magdalen and Christ Church Colleges, he could easily have pursued a career as an academic musician. However, the wider world soon came calling. He worked initially at the BBC, where over a twelve year period he fulfilled a

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variety of roles in radio and television, working in both production and presentation. One of his last posts was the newly created role of Concerts Planning Manager where he was responsible not only for the BBC Proms, but for the artistic management of the BBC Symphony Orchestra's work throughout the year.

This affinity with and attraction to innovative new posts has continued throughout his career. In 1986, Anthony moved from the BBC on to a new role as Artistic Projects Director at the South Bank Centre in London. Reflecting on his time there, Anthony highlighted the range and diversity of a role where he had to create policy and programmes that balanced classical and vernacular culture, harmonised local and international perspectives whilst also juggling potentially conflicting interests and egos – all in the relentless glare of the media spotlight. In 1990, he moved on to another new role, as Head of Arts for Birmingham City Council where he was responsible for creating and implementing an arts strategy for the entire city. He was on a two year secondment from this post, heading up the BBC's Millennium Music project, when he was approached about setting up a new Music Centre in Gateshead. Whilst he had anticipated returning to his role at Birmingham when the millennium project ended; the vision of what Sage Gateshead could become excited his curiosity and interest. Another new challenge beckoned.

Reflecting on fifteen glorious and highly successful years creating and leading the Sage, it is typical of Anthony's generous management style that he describes his profound pride in the achievements of all the staff, musicians and board members who have worked to make Sage Gateshead what it is today – a nationally and internationally acclaimed venue with world class acoustics and a distinctive, egalitarian style. He is passionately

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committed to a vision of music as a bridge between cultures, which can help bring greater inclusivity and understanding. His personal leadership style is said to be very relaxed – as is his dress sense. Anthony is known for his signature garb of collarless shirts, which feature on most public photographs. Indeed there was some speculation amongst his friends as to whether one would feature in his attire for today.

Anthony has championed North East Folk Music at the Sage and has deliberately given educational activity parity of importance with performance. The resulting statistics are impressive. In the last ten years, Sage Gateshead has presented over 4,000 concerts, engaged with one and a half million education contacts, welcomed six million visitors and contributed over £300 million pounds to the regional economy. It has more than exceeded initial expectations and it is the inspired and dedicated leadership of Anthony Sargent which made these achievements possible.

Despite the many pressures associated with running such a high profile organisation, Anthony has always found time to engage with other cultural organisations, both large and small. He was instrumental in setting up Newcastle Gateshead Cultural Venues, which brings together the top ten cultural agencies in the North East and chaired the group for three years. His work has been recognised by numerous awards; Anthony is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, and an Honorary Fellow of the Birmingham Conservatoire of Music. In March of this year he was awarded the Freedom of the Borough of Gateshead. He chairs the New York-based International Society for the Performing Arts and in 2013, was created a CBE for services to the Arts.

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Anthony will soon take up a new role as Chief Executive Officer of the Luminato Festival in Toronto. Commenting on his appointment, Lucille Joseph, the acting CEO, told me that she and her colleagues were immediately impressed by Anthony's energy, curiosity and optimism. They also admired his positive take on life, seeing him as someone who viewed obstacles as interesting challenges and opposition as an invitation to find a third way. There is little doubt he will soon weave his particular brand of magic on the Luminato festival, engaging with audiences and stakeholders whilst building successful and lasting local collaborative partnerships, just as he has done at Sage Gateshead.

It is a fitting testament to Anthony's capacity to immerse himself completely in the community he serves, that his new Canadian colleagues are already saying that, apart from his BBC accent, "it seems to us, that within a year, people in Toronto will have forgotten that Anthony comes from anywhere other than the Queen West neighbourhood of Toronto." In concluding my citation, I would like to refer to the words of Lee Hall, the distinguished playwright, screenwriter and Newcastle University honorary graduate, who says of Anthony, "The North East owes a huge debt to Anthony. His catholic taste, his erudition and cultural ambition have been important for the whole artistic community, not simply in the field of music. ...but mostly because he has left a legacy of excellence and inclusivity, creating and curating a place open to everyone, a place of genuine excitement."

We're back to that word excitement again. Remember Anthony's earlier call for us to "*seek out unfamiliar things that intrigue you or excite your curiosity*". This is most apt advice, (or dare I risk a very obvious pun and say it is most "sage" advice?), not only for those seeking to extend their

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taste in music, but for anyone graduating today who is about to embark on further studies or venture forth into world of work.

Mr Chancellor, in recognition of all that he has done to enhance and celebrate the arts, I present to you Donald Anthony Sargent, CBE as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Music, *honoris causa*.

*Citation by Jill Taylor-Roe, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2015*