

## Report on The Telling's June 2024 South East Tour of 'I, Spie'

**Thank you!** All of us involved with **The Telling** (registered charity no 1181802) would like to thank **Annabel** and the other Trustees of **Angel Early Music** for your vital grant in March 2024 of £2000 + £1000 Guarantee Against Losses towards our June 2024 southeast tour of three performances of 'I, Spie' within a wider UK tour from 9 – 23 June 2024.

We were pleased to welcome Annabel to the performance in Colchester and also are extremely grateful for the way in which Annabel truly lived up to the name of “angel” in supporting us with accommodation for 4 of our performers after the Colchester performance and championed the performance there, which encouraged more people to attend. Thank you so much for supporting us in all those different ways.

*I, Spie* is a fusion of early music and theatre about Renaissance composer/lutenist John Dowland and his grisly dealings with the Elizabethan Secret Service as he manages to foil an Italian plot on the life of Queen Elizabeth I. Think *Spooks* meets *Blackadder* with music by Dowland, his contemporaries and Elizabethan tavern, street and courtly masque music. Ultimately, John's fate is in the audience's hands as they vote on how the show should end.

The performances you supported were:

- **11 June 2024 – St Augustine's Arts Centre, Brighton**
- **19 June 2024 – Quarterhouse, Folkestone**
- **20 June 2024 – Wimpole Road Church Hall, Colchester**

With help from a grant from **Angel Early Music** and other funders and donors, we were able to rehearse and tour *I, Spie* in June 2024, taking 13 performances across England, Scotland and Wales from 9 – 23 June 2024. **This included 3 performances within your priority areas of Essex, Kent and Sussex, in places that rarely receive early music performances and where we have established an audience base, thanks to your previous grants in 2022 and 2023. This 2024 grant enabled us to build upon and maintain connections in these three places.**

The southeast tour saw us **taking early music to 132 people in Colchester and Folkestone, both of which receive fewer live early music performances than many other places, and Brighton.**

The audience number is lower than we cited in the budget that we wrote at the start of the year which, after speaking with colleagues, we believe is due to multiple contributing factors:

We have a loyal following in Sussex and reached 90+ audiences in Hove in October 2023 and 100+ in Lewes in November 2023 so we had strong grounds to assume similar numbers on this tour. We have heard from multiple colleagues that audiences are now choosing one performance to attend (as opposed to multiple in the past) due to a

shortage of spare cash. So, we believe we suffered from closely following the high-profile Brighton Festival that ended on 26 May which our audience likely attended and therefore didn't have the cash to come to our performance as well. This was also the case for our show in Ulverston, Cumbria which closely followed the Ulverston International Music Festival.

Quarterhouse, the venue in Folkestone refused to list our event on their website which we believe massively impacted on our sales.

Sales were lower than expected for the whole tour. We have heard from multiple colleagues across different sectors that ticket sales are currently lower than average across the board. This is likely due to the economic uncertainty but also the time of year as we enter the summer holiday season. Although it's a troubling time for the arts world as a whole, we're reassured that other organisations, including bigger, more high-profile organisations, are experiencing the same issues as The Telling.

We were pleased with the numbers we achieved in Colchester considering it was our first performance in the city, although we have performed in Marks Tey, Mistley and Manningtree and did have some audiences from those places too. We weren't able to agree terms with Colchester Arts Centre, where we originally planned to book, and it's interesting we achieved a better audience at Wimpole Road Church Hall than at some of the more high-profile venues in the other locations.

We also received wonderful feedback from audiences at all three performances including from a person in Folkestone who is eager for The Telling to return to the town and has suggested other, better venues for us:

*"I came to the terrific performance of I, Spie in Folkestone and we spoke briefly. I just wanted to affirm that I'd love to help you with other [venue] suggestions. It's wonderful work you're doing - do put me on a mailing list!!"*

*"My partner and I came to see the performance of I, Spie last night in Folkestone. What a thrilling and special performance it was - great script, consummate acting and some wonderful renaissance music to embellish and inform the story."*

*"Beautiful music, exquisite singing, clever plot and acting excellent"*

*"Exquisite musical performance brought to life brought to life with its ingenious dramatisation, clever dialogue and a spontaneous nature"*

*"Perfect combination of early music, drama and harmony"*

Not funded by you, but an audience member at the performance of I, Spie in Stranraer said it was the best £16 they'd ever spent on a performance!

Despite lower ticket sales, The Telling is going from strength to strength artistically:

- In March, BBC Radio 3's Early Music Show presented an hour-long feature dedicated to The Telling's 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and our work about extraordinary women
- In June, The Telling won Audience Project of the Year at the REMA Early Music Awards in Stockholm for our outreach project inspired by our show, *Into the Melting Pot*. Thank you again for supporting the southeast performance element of this project without which this outreach project may not have happened.
- Shortly afterwards, we were invited back onto BBC Radio 3's Early Music Show to talk about winning the REMA award
- We have four more promotions coming up later this year: *Medieval Lullabies* at Stoke Newington Festival on 5<sup>th</sup> July, *The Telling Unchained* (thanks to your support of its development last year) at Walthamstow Music in the Village on 24<sup>th</sup> July and Brighton Early Music Festival on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, and our latest show about Charles Dickens at Silsden Town Hall on 8<sup>th</sup> December
- We also have our first ever week-long theatre run lined up in November where we are taking our Charles Dickens show 'What the Dickens?' to OSO Arts Centre, Barnes from 25-30 November.
- This will be followed by a second week-long run at OSO Arts Centre from 17-22 February 2025 of a collaboration project between The Telling and trio CarmenCo

### **Legacy**

Your grant enabled us to bring live early music performances to places that rarely receive them and to continue building audiences where we began residencies in 2022 thanks to your previous grants. We are now already planning further performances:

- in Sussex, we are planning to take 'What the Dickens?' to All Saints, Lewes in December. Our last performance in Lewes in November 2023 (supported by you) received an audience over 100 so we hope we can achieve these numbers again and hopefully re-engage those in Brighton & Hove who didn't come to *I, Spie*
- in Folkestone, we have had great audiences in the past and we believe we were let down by the venue this time. We had a captivated audience of 70 for *Vision* in November despite it being one of the coldest nights of the year and the church boiler being broken, so we have good reason to believe we can achieve these numbers again at a different venue. Therefore, we're planning to take 'What the Dickens?' hopefully to The Green Room at The Grand Hotel (the new place to be for early/classical music ensembles) in December. Plus, Jim-Jam Arts have shown interest in having us back for their Folkestone Living Advent Calendar this Christmas.
- in Colchester, we have made an approach to Mercury Theatre proposing they take 'What the Dickens?' in December 2025. We're pleased with the numbers we received at our first performance in the city and we have a loyal following in Mistley/Manningtree which we would like to preserve.

We have also been approached by the producer of Roman River Festival who was recommended us by friends who attended the Colchester performance of *I, Spie* and wants to book us last-minute at their festival in September 2024. Discussions are ongoing, and if we can't make it happen this year, they have indicated they would like to book us for 2025 instead: probably our Hildegard *Vision* show. This wouldn't have

happened without your support which enabled us to perform in Colchester which was an important step for us to become known in the town. Thank you for enabling that to happen.

Plus, off the back of this tour, we are planning ahead to 2026 which will be the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of John Dowland's death and we have some promising leads for promotions including with the Lute Society.

In each location, we developed partnerships that helped us reach local audiences - for example in Folkestone we again worked with Jim-Jam Arts who shared details of our Folkestone concerts with their following, and Folkestone's resident ensemble, Sacconi Quartet who listed the concerts to the Sounds Folkestone website. We also set up reciprocal marketing partnerships with local arts organisations at each of our tour locations, asking for their help in spreading the word and offering to return the favour.

We also continued to use our learning from hiring marketing consultant Stephanie Brown last year which informed our Facebook ad campaigns. This was particularly useful in Colchester where 32% of our audience claimed to find out about the show via Facebook. This in combination with reciprocal marketing with partners and a flyer distribution plan on the ground worked strongly together.

We also worked hard to secure local press coverage for the whole tour which was more difficult than it had been in previous years, but we secured an interview with our actor Niall Ashdown on BBC Radio Essex ahead of the Colchester performance. Our feature on BBC Radio 3's Early Music Show was also helpfully times ahead of the Colchester and Folkestone performances and many of the audience members claimed to have discovered us through the programme.

**The future:** we have plans to continue to build upon our work in the southeast and to not only take our 'What the Dickens?' to each area in the Autumn, but to take further early music shows there in 2025. That is not an early music show but we also planning further early music performances from late summer/early autumn 2025 and are in talks with The Mancunium Consort about reviving Clare Norburn's Gesualdo concertplay (which was originally performed by The Marian Consort in 2016) and touring to our residencies so, if possible, we would love to apply again: as your grant would allow us to continue to bring early music to places that miss out, like Folkestone and Colchester.

Meanwhile, we are so grateful for Angel Early Music's support at such a vital time when your grant was needed the most. Thank you!

Clare Norburn, The Telling, June 2024