

Project Proposal Application

To be completed by the lead proposed supervisor,
with input from the non-HE Partner Organisation(s).



Arts and
Humanities
Research Council

SECTION 1: PROJECT SUMMARY AND APPLICANT DETAILS			
Proposed Project Title:	The Carl Rosa Opera Company (1873-1960): Provincial Experiences and Performance Practices of a British Touring Opera Troupe		
Project Summary: <i>(Maximum 100 words)</i>	This project explores touring opera in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Britain, using the Carl Rosa Opera Company (1873-1960) as a case study. Drawing on the vast and critically underexamined Carl Rosa Trust collection at Liverpool Central Library, it will produce the first academic study of the longest-running opera troupe to have toured the UK, contextualising its activities in the broader landscape of touring opera, in Britain and beyond. This CDA offers a unique opportunity to combine cutting-edge historical work on cultural regionalism with bid-writing and engagement activities aimed at reshaping public understandings of opera's use and relevance in UK regions today.		
Host University:	Northumbria University		
Name of Non-HE Partner Organisation(s): <i>(Add more lines if needed)</i>			
1. Carl Rosa Trust Ltd			
2.			
Contact(s) at Non-HE Partner Organisation(s): <i>(Add more lines if needed)</i>			
Name:	Dr Valerie Langfield	Email:	
Name:		Email:	
Primary AHRC Subject Area: <i>Select one subject area from the list here. Please do <u>not</u> add or amend subjects, as there will not be a corresponding Subject Area Review Panel to assess your nomination.</i>	Music		
Does the project include a Creative Practice component?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Do you consider the project to be interdisciplinary?	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

SECTION 2: PROJECT PROPOSAL AND CASE FOR SUPPORT

Please provide full details of the proposal and make your case for support below:

(Maximum 750 words)

Research Context

Studies of opera in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Britain have focused on London's West End and its supply of (primarily) Italian opera for the elites. Rodmell (2013), Wilson (2019) and Oates (2023) have examined selected aspects of operatic life in the provinces, but British itinerant companies and their regional impacts remain critically understudied. In the early 1900s, over 40 touring companies provided opera in English to a large cross-section of the British population; the leading and longest-lived group was the Carl Rosa (1873-1960), about which no in-depth study exists.

Through close examination of the Carl Rosa Trust (CRT) collection at Liverpool Central Library, this project will construct the first-ever academic history of the company, uncovering its repertoire and performance practices during its late-Victorian and Edwardian periods – the heyday of British touring opera – and contextualising its activities in the broader landscape of touring opera, both in Britain and beyond (Preston 1993; Vella 2021; Ellis 2021; Horrocks 2024). The CDA will illuminate systematically overlooked regional networks and regional experiences of opera and theatre, challenging long-dominant centre-periphery frameworks and injecting new knowledge into ongoing discussions about opera's use and relevance in UK regions today.

Research Aims and Questions

The project's primary aim is to construct a critical history of the Carl Rosa (CR) company during its late-Victorian and Edwardian periods, using it as a case study to explore key issues in British regional touring. The CDA will investigate both the company's working practices – its management system, performers' backgrounds and careers, directors' artistic choices, and approaches to staging and performance – and its socio-cultural impacts in the northern British provinces. The student will examine selected materials from the CRT collection (which comprises autograph and manuscript scores, orchestral parts, music editions, production notes, set designs, librettos and business records from the 1820s to the 1960s) in conjunction with press reviews, specific items from other touring companies' collections, and relevant secondary literature.

Underpinning this primary aim are a set of questions about 1) the importance of repertoire and performance practices to perceptions of place/difference, and 2) the affordances and limitations of archival materials:

- How did theatre managers, directors, audiences and critics in the North use opera to shape a regional sense of place and position themselves against other cities?
- How can studying provincial casting, adaptation and performance practices help to challenge traditional genre hierarchies and elite/popular divides?
- What 'hidden' aesthetic and cultural values can performance materials reveal that cannot be recovered through press criticism?
- What is the potential of mobilising 'collection networks' to understand operatic mobilities?

Research Methods

The project combines archival research with close-readings of literary and musical texts, palaeography and source studies, interpretation from socio-cultural perspectives, reception studies, cultural mobility studies, and historical performance studies. As well as analysing performance materials from the CRT collection, the student will use historical newspapers to gain insights into the physical and socio-cultural conditions in which the CR company operated. A research visit to the Moody-Manners Opera Company collection at Glasgow's Mitchell Library will allow them to retrace, and explore key sociological questions emerging from, a number of historical links with the CR collection, since from the 1910s the CR company incorporated and in turn generated other itinerant companies (including the Moody-Manners

one), with consequent crossover of materials between their collections.

Partner Collaboration

Since 1953, the CRT has been the sole owner of the CR collection, and has sought to promote knowledge of the company's heritage through one-off workshops and exhibitions. However, as a charity and lacking an archivist, it does not have the capacity to undertake sustained research into its holdings, which is indispensable for raising large conservation funds. This CDA will be decisive in boosting the Trust's profile by giving long-overdue scholarly attention to materials of unique importance to British music history; co-writing a conservation grant application; and delivering an exhibition, public lecture-recital or series of school workshops in Newcastle that will challenge the narrow view that British operatic life, both c.1900 and today, was and is centred on socially-exclusive London performances with star singers. As well as enabling an organisation with limited resources to build its capacity and achieve more of its goals, the CDA will offer an outstanding researcher the unique opportunity to develop bid-writing and public engagement experience under the close and continuing guidance of Valerie Langfield, an authority on British music; three other trustees with in-depth knowledge of British touring opera and the non-academic UK funding landscape; and a CRT volunteer with experience of bringing music to children.

Provide details of any resources and facilities, including equipment, fieldwork, training, etc., that will be required to complete the project successfully. NBC has limited Research Training Support Grant funding, which may affect the feasibility of high-cost projects. Please note where you might also secure additional funding, (e.g. partner organisations; department or school). Include estimated costs:

(Maximum 200 words)

Required:

- Archival research, source studies, reception studies: available through Vella and Hambridge;
- Rare-material handling, palaeography: Langfield;
- Bid-writing: supervisors, Langfield, and Northumbria's PGR Researcher Development programme.

Recommended:

- Further historical and archival skills: free training at IHR, SAS and National Archives;
- Teaching skills: Northumbria's PGR 'Introduction to Teaching' and 'Teaching Shadowing' schemes.

Opportunities to audit seminars on 'Musicals', 'Historically Informed Performance' and 'Performing Early Opera' are available at Northumbria and Newcastle. No language training is required since the CR performed opera in English, which is the prevalent language in the collection.

A series of archival trips will be made in Years 1 & 2 to consult the CRT collection in Liverpool and undertake photography; the estimated overall costs are £1,800. In Y2 the student will undertake a visit to the Moody-Manners collection (Glasgow) to examine its connections with the CRT collection; this will require a further £600. These costs will be paid through the CDA stipend enhancement and a NBCDTP Small Grant. Northumbria's Postgraduate Conference Bursary Scheme covers conference presentation costs (£400). The student will be supported to apply for RMA funds to host a Study Day in Y2, and a RMA Small Research Grant (£400) to support any additional research/conference costs.

Outline the arrangements for communication between the non-HE partner organisation and the academic host institution in regard to project management and monitoring academic progress:

(Maximum 200 words)

This CDA builds on 18-month-long discussions between Vella and the four CRT trustees. Communication channels are consequently well established. Vella and Langfield also have strong connections with several cultural partners in and beyond the North East (e.g., Tyne Theatre and Opera House, Newcastle's Lit&Phil, the Samling Institute, Retrospect

Opera). In their roles as primary supervisor and non-HE advisor, they will act as nodes in the larger team/network that will support the student's project throughout.

The student will meet Vella monthly, as per Northumbria's PGR Code of Practice, and Hambridge (second supervisor) and Langfield bimonthly, either in person or online. Full-team meetings, which will include Robinson (third supervisor), will take place quarterly. Trustees Steven Martin, Anthony Phillips and John Ward have agreed to meet the student at the project's outset, to help them navigate the collection, and subsequently as required, to share their opera expertise and private collections with them.

Progress towards the requirements for Project Approval and Annual Progression will be monitored jointly by the university supervisors, Langfield, and Northumbria's Head of Music. The student will share monthly supervision records with all members of the supervisory team, ensuring feedback, goals and targets are clear and communicated promptly to all.

What benefits will there be for the candidate and the non-HE partner organisation as a result of your collaboration?

(Maximum 200 words)

Benefits to student:

- bespoke induction into a critically understudied archival collection;
- access to non-publicly available materials from trustees' private collections;
- knowledge-exchange with four trustees with exceptional knowledge of British touring opera and extensive professional networks;
- internal policy-making experience through participation in hybrid CRT quarterly meetings;
- familiarization with UK funding landscape and hands-on experience in bid-writing (through collaboration on conservation-funds application), with benefits to an academic or creative-sector career;
- networking opportunities with record company Retrospect Opera (co-founded by Langfield);
- development of ambitious public-engagement profile through delivery of outward-facing activities informed by research findings and facilitated by CRT;
- exposure to a range of post-PhD career pathways through all the above.

Benefits to CRT:

- significantly improved understanding of what exactly is in its collection and worth conserving, given Trust has no archivist;
- strong evidence base that will inform a major conservation-funds application to ACE, the NMCT or Radcliffe Trust;
- space (at Northumbria) where academic and public-facing activities can take place at no cost, given Trust lacks physical premises;
- raised public profile and public knowledge of its collection through production of tangible academic and public-engagement outputs, including a cross-institutional academic study day and an exhibition, public lecture-recital or series of school workshops in Newcastle.

State what financial (if any) or in-kind contribution the non-HE partner organisation will be making over the duration of the award:

*(Maximum 200 words. A financial contribution is **not** a requirement. However, the AHRC expect that **non-HE partners based overseas** will make a financial contribution to the costs of the student's return travel and accommodation when visiting.)*

The Trust will make the following in-kind contributions:

- 12-14 hours of advisory time each year (Langfield);
- free training in rare-material handling and palaeography (Langfield);

- guidance on navigating the CRT collection, offered by experts in the history of British touring opera (trustees Martin, Phillips, Ward);
- sharing of historical letters, reviews and programmes from the trustees' private collections;
- sharing of non-publicly accessible interviews and ephemera from relatives of the late CR troupe;
- access to hybrid CRT quarterly meetings and policy documents;
- complimentary Liverpool-to-Newcastle transportation of items for exhibition;
- sharing of professional networks to support set up of new collaborations (e.g., with Retrospect Opera and Scottish Opera) and identification of post-PhD careers.

Describe the nature of the collaborative arrangement and the activities the candidate will be undertaking with the non-HE partner organisation:

(Maximum 200 words)

The student's research at Liverpool Central Library will be supported by library staff and, particularly in Y1, the non-HE advisor (Langfield). Trustees Phillips, Martin and Ward will induct him/her to the CRT collection. The student will receive access to the existing inventory; be able to photograph material; be trained by Langfield in rare-material handling and palaeography; attend quarterly board meetings; and help the Trust write a conservation-funds application, being fully supported by the supervisors and Northumbria's PGR Researcher Development programme.

Crucially, the CDA will involve ongoing conversations with trustees Langfield, Phillips, Martin and Ward about their knowledge of the British touring opera landscape. The student will benefit from discussing his/her findings with them, and in turn his/her exposure to the significant network of NBC researchers working on operatic mobilities (see research environment below) will provide a vital contextualisation to the CRT's investigations into British itinerant companies.

Under the guidance of the full supervisory team, in Y2 the student will organise a cross-institutional academic study day at Northumbria, followed in Y3 by a public-facing event in Newcastle: e.g., an exhibition of collection materials leading to a co-curated volume; a lecture-recital presenting repertoire the CR performed; or a series of school workshops.

SECTION 3: SUPERVISION AND EXTERNAL ADVISORS

Primary (or Co-) Supervisor:	Dr Francesca Vella
School or Department:	Northumbria University, Department of Humanities
Email Address:	
Secondary (or Co-) Supervisor:	Dr Katherine Hambridge
School or Department:	Durham University, Department of Music
Email Address:	
Advisor based at the Non-HE Partner Organisation:	Dr Valerie Langfield
Organisation/Institution:	Carl Rosa Trust Ltd
Email Address:	
Advisor based at the Non-HE Partner Organisation:	
Organisation/Institution:	

Email Address:	
Additional Internal or External Advisors or Academic Supervisors, if any:	
Name:	Prof Jo Robinson
Organisation/Institution:	Newcastle University, School of English Literature, Language & Linguistics
Email Address:	

Explain how the expertise of the supervisory team and external advisor(s) will allow them to support the proposed project and the selected candidate:

(Maximum 500 words)

The supervisory team brings together a uniquely qualified group with significant experience of researching operatic/theatrical mobilities in nineteenth-century Britain, Italy, France and Germany.

Vella is a leading expert on nineteenth-century Italian opera and its dissemination across local and national borders. She has researched this topic in relation to transportation technologies, singers' circuits, voices and careers, and 'popular' adaptations. Her monograph *Networking Operatic Italy* (Chicago 2021) and her article on Jenny Lind in 1840s London (*Music&Letters* 2017) won prestigious prizes. Vella's current projects include a monograph on staging practices c.1900 and a critical edition of Donizetti's *Otto mesi in due ore* for Ricordi. She is therefore exceptionally well-placed to support doctoral work on touring opera and opera performance practices, and to provide training in archival research, source studies and reception studies. Vella regularly collaborates with Opera Rara, ROH, Glyndebourne and *Opera* magazine. She has examined a PhD thesis for the University of Birmingham.

<https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/about-us/our-staff/v/francesca-vella/>

Hambridge's extensive and prize-winning work on nineteenth-century music theatre, song and singers, particularly issues of cultural value, genre and performance practice, make her an ideal second supervisor. Her expertise in French and German musical life will help the student to contextualize their work on British touring opera. As well as curating an online exhibition, in exploring the transfer of music theatre between different European stages, Hambridge has led performance practice workshops on French and British melodrama and vaudeville, thus being well-placed to support performance-oriented research and events. She has supervised 10 PhD students, including five to completion (the last one on French touring opera), and has mentored a post-doc.

<https://www.durham.ac.uk/staff/katherine-hambridge/>

Langfield is an independent scholar and freelance musician, composer and teacher. An authority on British opera and song of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Langfield studied at the University of Cambridge and the GSMD, before becoming an instrumental tutor at the University of Manchester. She has contributed book chapters on Cyril Scott and Edward Loder, and her doctoral thesis on Roger Quilter was complemented by her definitive biography of him (Boydell and Brewer 2002). A co-founder and trustee of Retrospect Opera, Langfield is deeply involved in restoring and recording British operas, and has collaborated with various record labels and opera companies. Under her guidance, the student will develop skills in palaeography and will be introduced to a range of possible career pathways. Langfield chairs the Carl Rosa Trust Ltd and is well acquainted with the CR collection.

<http://www.valerielangfield.co.uk/>

Robinson's research focuses on the histories and practice of regional theatre and performance, filling in the gaps where existing histories neglect the importance of local and regional practices. She has extensive experience of interdisciplinary collaborations with external partners (e.g., Red Earth Theatre Company, Theatre Royal Nottingham). She has supervised 12 PhD students to successful completion, including four AHRC CDA/CDP students in collaboration with Nottingham Playhouse Roundabout, New Perspectives Theatre Company, the British Library (on 'Provincial Shakespeares') and Oxford Lieder. She is currently supervising two NBC CDA students, one working with Open Clasp and one with Opera

North.

<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/elli/people/profile/jorobinson2.html>

SECTION 4: RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

Please provide details about the research environment the selected candidate will be joining and its suitability:

(Maximum 500 words)

In contrast to NWCDTP universities, Northumbria, Durham and Newcastle are home to a formidable cluster of opera and theatre scholars specialising in the study of nineteenth-century networks and mobilities. This CDA will be hosted by Northumbria. Its Humanities Department comprises Music, History and English, constituting the ideal interdisciplinary environment for a PhD on British touring opera. The department has significant expertise in Victorian and Edwardian literatures/cultures (Goodwin, Kelly); cultural mobilities (Laqua, Anderson, Alston); nineteenth-century opera (Vella); musicals (O'Brien); early modern theatre (Frazer, van Hensbergen); historical performance (Smith); organology (Durkin); critical editing of music (Smith, Vella); manuscript studies (Smith, Butler); heritage research and practice (Williams, van Hensbergen). These specialisms, which come together during the weekly Humanities seminars, will support the CDA's research aims, as will the 'Music' and 'Scholarly Editing and Print Culture' research groups. Music has established links with Newcastle's Lit&Phil, an ideal partner for an exhibition, while further Northumbria staff (Mackinnon) has an ongoing collaboration with Tyne Theatre and Opera House.

At Durham, Hambridge has recently supervised a PhD (Horrocks) on nineteenth-century French touring opera, while Hsieh researches global histories of opera/music c.1900. Valladares specialises in Romantic theatre/performance, Robertson in Romantic British and American literature, and Nash in Edwardian literature/culture. As an Advisory Board member for Durham's Centre for Nineteenth-Century Studies, Vella herself will introduce the student to other nineteenth-centuryists based at Northeast universities.

Newcastle hosts thriving research (particularly among ECRs and PhDs) in several key areas of the CDA. In Music, Bentley works on transatlantic operatic networks, Cox-Jensen on British popular song, Lockwood on Handel performances, and Childe on the Paris Opéra's nineteenth-century revival culture. Zazzo combines work as a countertenor with teaching and research on opera performance practices. In Modern Languages, Scott researches nineteenth-century French performance culture, while Robinson, the lead supervisor on a NBC-funded CDA with Opera North, explores regional ecologies of theatre/performance.

The CRT constitutes a research-rich environment. Langfield, Martin, Ward and Phillips, who see themselves as a local/regional opera history group, have all conducted research on British opera (e.g., Cyril Scott, Edward Loder and John McCormack). Their extensive knowledge of the socio-cultural contexts in which touring companies operated, and of other surviving collections beyond the CR, will be vital to the CDA, and it is in the close and ongoing professional relationships the student will cultivate with the trustees that lies the added value of the collaboration. Phillips, whose family managed the CR company for c.30 years, will share his private collection and reminiscences with the student.

Finally, building on their shared interests in operatic mobilities, Vella, Hambridge, Bentley and Horrocks, in addition to Cowgill (York) and Palidda (Manchester), have recently launched a cross-institutional Northern Opera Research Network to catalyse academic exchanges on opera in Northern England, as well as engagement initiatives with companies such as Opera North, ETO and ENO. The student will be encouraged to participate and also to connect with York's National Centre for Early Music, where from 2025 Horrocks will co-supervise a WRoCAH-funded CDA on nineteenth-century performance practices.