

The European Music Archaeology Project

In 2010, a group of music archaeologists from seven countries within the European Union gathered together in order to apply for funding from the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) of the EU to enable playable replicas of ancient European musical instruments to be made. The aim is to establish a travelling exhibition, along with a series of performances and workshops, all designed to showcase the diversity of past European music cultures and their mutual relationships.

The proposal was completed in 2012 and delivered to Brussels. It sought funding for the sum of around 4million Euros, funded 50:50 between Brussels and 10 co-organising institutions in the UK, Germany, Austria, Sweden, Italy, Spain and Cyprus.

After the obligatory agonising wait, we were told that the project had received 99/100 points and that it was the most-highly rated project of the funding round, therefore selected to receive a grant in the framework of Strand 1.1 – Multiannual Cooperation Projects. The amount awarded was of nearly 2 million Euros, which corresponds to a co-financing rate of 50%.

Then, by June 2013, the realisation dawned: now the real job began. Two phases were to be completed, the first being three years of research and construction, to provide the necessary instruments and iconography, create multimedia stations, an exhibition audio tour, a film documentary, a children book and the exhibition catalogue and the second, to tour an exhibition through six European countries (June 2016 to May 2018) while putting on performances and workshops.

Venues had to be found for the exhibition as, while some of the co-organisers were able to provide suitable space, others were not. In the UK, the co-organisers are the Royal Conservatoire in Glasgow and Huddersfield University, neither of which could provide the requisite space. After trawling through a mass of venues of all kinds, we met the talented and enthusiastic team from the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff who will host the exhibition in 2018, its final location.

Next, we had to refine the list of instruments which would be created. This had to represent fairly the range of instruments which had been utilised in ancient Europe, provide scope for representative, informative and entertaining performances and, above all, to bring the sights and sounds of ancient Europe to the eyes and ears of a modern audience.

Two years down the line, we have achieved some goals, abandoned a few, replacing them with new ones and now we're heading towards our deadline for the delivery of instruments to the exhibition designer.

Highlights along the road have been the sight and sound of the magnificent Tintignac Carnyx (ref), brought to life only a few years after it was recovered from the soil of southern France and the haunting, interlocking melodic lines of the Roman tibia from Pompeii which have blessed human ears for the first time in 2000 years.

Much remains to be done before the first exhibition opens in June 2016 in Ystad, Sweden, but we trust that the undimmed enthusiasm and our experience over the past years will carry us to our goal of demonstrating how rich was the musical culture of our ancestors and how it can still excite the modern eye and please the modern ear.